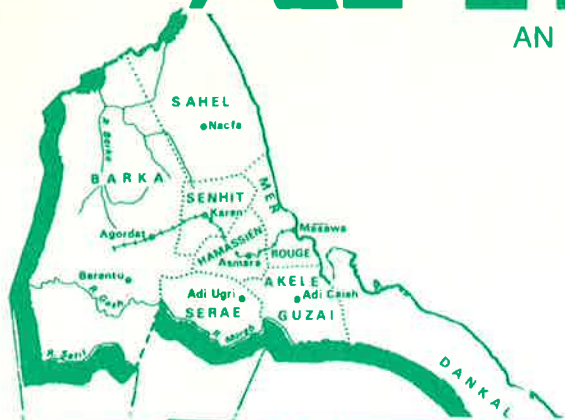


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ERITREA



The Roots of War

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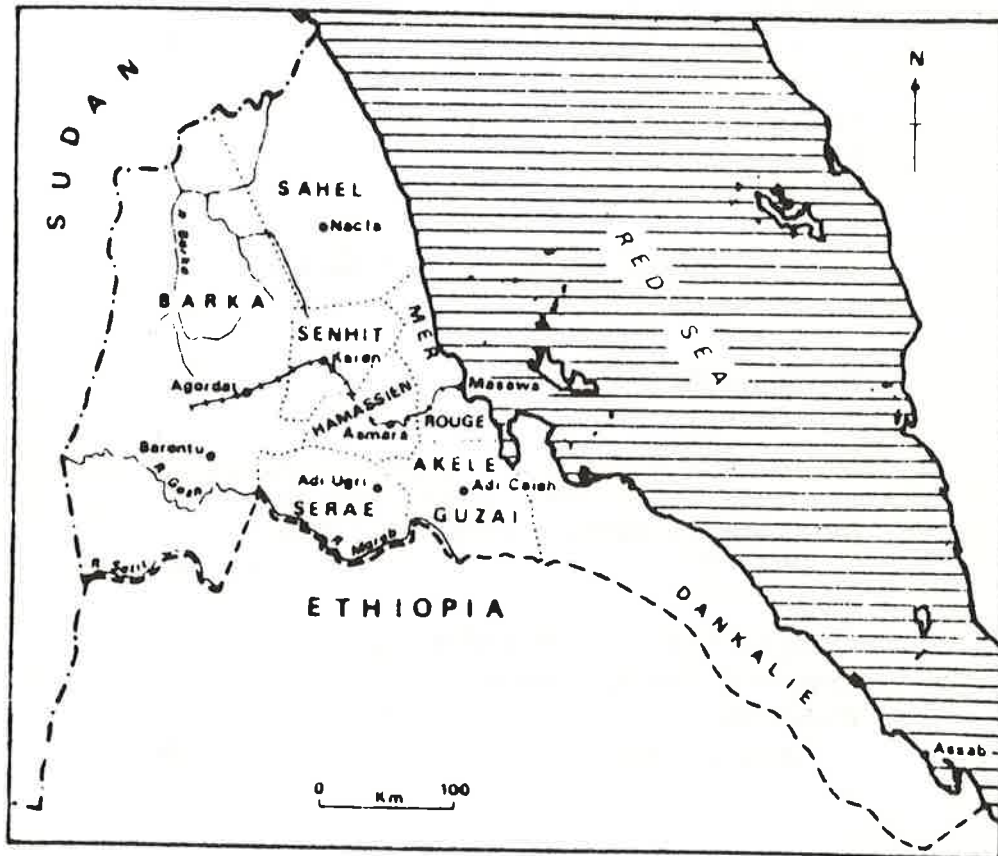
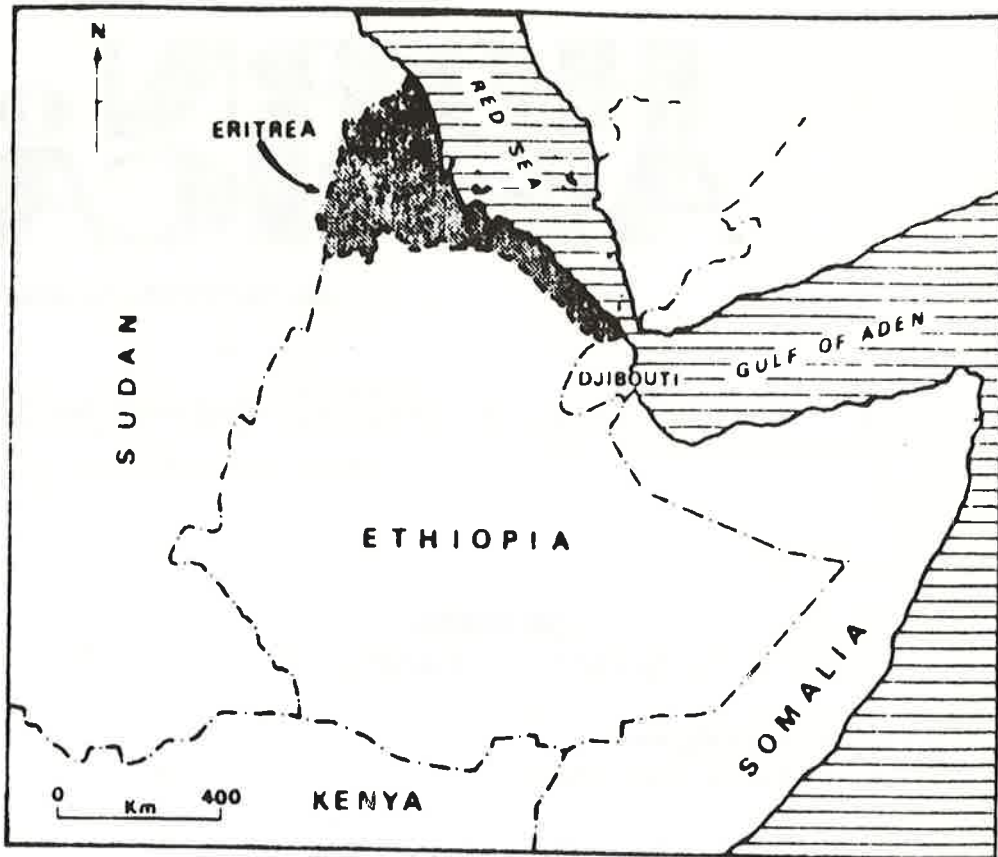
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and created a modern infrastructure which undermined traditional rule by replacing it with the rudiments of modern national politics. The Shoan expansion, on the other hand, tried to consolidate anachronistic feudal relationships. In both cases, national politics developed quite distinctly. With the defeat of Italy in 1941, the balance of power shifted in the region. Italian Eritrea came under British rule from 1941 to 1952; and then was nominally federated with Ethiopia by a United Nations resolution from 1952 to 1962. Finally, Ethiopia annexed and reduced it to a province in 1962. Under the impact of Italian and British colonialism a distinct type of Eritrean national politics, transcending regional and tribal differences, emerged. But the Ethiopian rule halted this democratic experience. The logical outcome was the continuation of political struggle by other means. Thus, the armed struggle for independence was born in 1961.

Until 1974 the bulk of the scholarly interest in the Horn of Africa focused on Ethiopia and ignored the impact of European and Shoan rule on Eritrea. Specifically, the annexation of Eritrea by Ethiopia in 1962 was seen as a natural reunion of a lost territory with its Ethiopian motherland. However, by the 1970s, powerful resistance against the Ethiopian Empire state was evident not only in Eritrea, but also in Tigre, the Oromo area, and Ogaden. Because of these developments, a revised assessment of the region became essential.

The purpose of the Rutgers Seminar was, therefore, to use Eritrea as a focal point in analyzing the incorporation of the Horn of Africa into the world capitalist system.

It is perhaps not an exaggeration to claim that the peace and prosperity of the entire region depends upon a just solution to the Eritrean problem. The argument that Eritrea has always been part of Ethiopia only begs the issue. The same socio-economic forces that created nation-states in the Horn of Africa also created the Ethiopian empire state. Unable to deal with the "burden of an empire" it created, the Ethiopian state has, since its birth, been consumed by anarchy, rebellion and repression. The incorporation of Eritrea into the empire in 1962 exemplified the accelerated erosion of confidence and strength of the monarchy. By 1974

the cumulative effect of this "burden of an empire" resulted in the fall of the Ethiopian monarchy. To this end, the important role played by the Eritrean armed struggle must be appreciated. At present the inheritors of the empire state, the Ethiopian Derg, are faced (in addition to the Eritrean armed struggle) with formidable armed opposition throughout the country.

It is important to understand the basis of Eritrean national consciousness. The contribution by Jordan Gebre-Medhin is a modest theoretical attempt to understand and locate the key socio-economic factors that gave rise to the national liberation war in Eritrea. With the traditional rural population of the country continuously being dispossessed, and exploited, a common experience of production and production relations developed in Eritrea.

Italy conducted two major wars using Eritrea as a base. Araia Tseggai has analyzed the economic effects of these wars on Eritrean political economy in a well researched forthcoming work. The present essay entitled "Independent Eritrea: Economically Viable?" summarizes the main arguments against the independence of Eritrea: that the country is poor and not self-sufficient. He then surveys the actual and potential wealth of the country and shows that, with capable political leadership, independent Eritrea could be economically viable and contribute modestly to the development of the region.

The author of "The Eritrean Question in International Law" is a well-known Africanist scholar, presently doing research on the Horn of Africa as well as on human rights in Africa as a whole, including the human right to basic needs. His two books, *Conflict and Intervention in the Horn of Africa* and *Behind the War in Eritrea* (co-authored) are mandatory reading for those who want to familiarize themselves with these complex issues. Dr. Bereket H. Selassie is one of the most important authorities on imperial Ethiopia as he has held various positions in Haile-Selassie's government including the post of Attorney General and mayor of Harar. Banished by Haile Selassie's government for his radical views, Dr. Bereket H. Selassie has achieved what every Eritrean intellectual cherishes: he is now considered public enemy number 1 by the Ethiopian military government.

With enemies like that, he is bound to have many friends. His analyses have helped expose the jugular vein of imperial Ethiopia. He is an inspiration to young scholars and we are happy to include his article in this paper. The legal arguments in the Eritrean case are summarized and their importance underlined in this article.

The fourth and final essay begins with the 1940s. After World War II the balance of world power shifted from Western Europe to the United States and the Soviet Union. The temporary united front of the West and the East to fight fascism was replaced by the cold politics and proxy military confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union in the Third World. The power vacuum created by the decolonization of the Horn of Africa and the Middle East generated the conditions for superpower confrontations. The creation

of Israel exacerbated the situation and helped the active alignment and realignment of regimes in the region from one superpower to another.

Although the role of the United States has been widely studied, the Soviet Union's has been inadequately dealt with. In this original article, Tekie Fessehazion has written a well-documented diplomatic history of Eritrea. East/West rivalries over Eritrea, the alignment and realignment of Ethiopia with various superpowers for its control of Eritrea has, as Tekie shows, a long history. His research is based on extensive work done in London, in the UN Library in New York, and on information gathered through the U.S. Freedom of Information Act. He has synthesized the original sources and has presented a fine work on the diplomatic history of Eritrea from 1940 to the present.

hopeful that at the end of the war Great Britain would do its utmost to secure the "return of Eritrea to the Ethiopian Empire." The basis of the claim, which would be repeated numerous times in subsequent years, included the alleged historical link between Ethiopia and Eritrea. The note also stated that since Eritrea was taken "illegally" by the Italians from Ethiopia, the territory should be returned to its rightful "owner," Ethiopia.³

The Foreign Office in London instructed the British Legation in Addis Ababa to review and assess the validity of the claims contained in the April 18 Ethiopian diplomatic note. A memorandum prepared by E.A. Chapman-Andrews of the British Legation concentrated on two points raised in the Ethiopian note: historical and legal facts. The memorandum made several points — that throughout her history Eritrea changed hands many times, and portions of what is now Eritrea were ruled at one time or another by the Arabs, Turks, Egyptians and Italians. In response to the legal issue raised in the Ethiopian note the memorandum said:

The importance of the two treaties (Ucciali: 1889; and Addis Ababa: 1900) lies in the incontrovertible fact that they were freely negotiated by Menelik, the undoubted master of the United Ethiopia, in his hour of triumph. In them were fixed the frontiers between Eritrea and Ethiopia, and the frontiers stood until the Italo-Ethiopian War, 1934-36. It will be observed that Agordat, Keren and Asmara are well within the Italian boundary. *It follows, therefore, that on treaty or juridical grounds the Emperor Menelik's successors can have no claim on Eritrea.*⁴ (emphasis added)

Though the Chapman-Andrews memorandum was emphatic in its rejection of Ethiopian claims based on history and international law, it suggested that there may be other factors that would have to be considered before Ethiopia's claim is ultimately settled:

The Ethiopian claim to Eritrea cannot be settled now, though it will have to be faced one day. Tricky questions of geography, race, religion,

language, culture, economics and higher politics, which have hardly been touched upon in this note, will then have to be most carefully weighed.⁵

Of all the "tricky questions" alluded to in the memorandum, the one based on the imperatives of higher politics would ultimately guide and inform British resolution of the Eritrean question. On the recommendation of the Chapman-Andrews note, the Foreign Office advised the Ethiopian government that Ethiopia's claim can only be properly considered at the peace settlement, and that it would be impossible for the United Kingdom government to give assurances to Ethiopia regarding the future of Eritrea.

The Foreign Office asked the eminent historian, A.J. Toynbee, then with its Research Department, to prepare a detailed study of the Eritrean issue and prepare his recommendations on the future of the territory. Toynbee presented two sets of proposals: (1) that Beni-Amer should be ceded to the Sudan; and (2) that one of the Victorious Powers (Toynbee did not specify which) should occupy Massawa and the hinterland. If, for some reason, the two proposals were not acceptable, Toynbee had an alternative plan which would cede the whole, or a large part, of Eritrea to Ethiopia for a suitable quid pro quo. Yet, the noted historian was not unmindful of the legal complications inherent in any scheme that purports to cede all or part of Eritrea to Ethiopia. In his memorandum to the Foreign Office, Toynbee wrote:

It (incorporating Eritrea into Ethiopia) has a juridical weakness in that approximately the present frontier was first conceded to Italy by the Emperor Menelik at a time when he had defeated an Italian army in the field, and therefore could not plead that he was signing the peace treaty under duress.⁶

Yet, in spite of the "juridical weakness" of his proposal to cede Eritrea to Ethiopia, Toynbee nevertheless proceeded to argue:

But in spite of this alienation on Abyssinian rights (by Menelik) it would be practically im-

possible, if the Emperor were asked to cede the Ogaden region as a contribution to the Greater Somalia project, and the Sudan at some cost to himself, to withhold from him the mountain core of Eritrea and an outlet to the sea.⁷

Toynbee's recommendations were discussed in depth within the various departments of the Foreign Office during most of the 1943-1944 period. As a result of these deliberations, the Foreign Office, in May 1944, formulated the elements of a possible quid pro quo with Ethiopia:

If it were decided to ask the Emperor to relinquish the whole Province of Ogaden with parts of Harar and Bale, a strip of territory along the Kenya frontier near Moyale, and the Barro triangle in the west, it might be thought necessary to offer him in full sovereignty all of those parts of Eritrea to which he will attach particular importance — the Tigrinya-speaking area, the Danakil country and Massawa. If strategic considerations were to preclude the offer of Massawa, it might be necessary to lighten the other side of the scale accordingly.⁸

The Colonial Office, too, presented a memorandum that stressed the strategic value of Eritrea and the importance of insuring that Eritrea not fall into enemy hands.

In hostile hands it may block our sea communications through the Red Sea to various parts of the British Empire, and if used as a stepping stone to the Abyssinian mountains bastion, may constitute a threat to the whole of Eastern Africa.⁹

Thus, what position should Great Britain adopt in the upcoming negotiations on the future of Eritrea? The Colonial Office's recommendations was not significantly different from the Foreign Office's. According to the Colonial Office:

Britain may decide to offer a part of it (Eritrea) to the Emperor in order to provide him with an outlet to the sea . . . if this is adopted, *the importance of using it as a bargaining level for the*

*purpose of securing frontier rectifications should on no account be neglected.*¹⁰ (*emphasis added*)

The combined recommendations of the Foreign and Colonial Offices were submitted to the Chiefs of Staff of the Armed Forces for their comment. Since Britain was in the midst of a war, it was important to solicit the advice of the British military command to assess the strategic value of Eritrea. The Chiefs of Staff stressed the strategic importance of the Eastern Mediterranean and the Red Sea. On the disposal of Eritrea, the Chiefs agreed with the recommendations of the Foreign and Colonial Offices, reiterating the importance of denying Massawa and Asmara to potential enemies and underlined the need for keeping these two population centres under British control.

The Cairo Conference: February, 1945

For Emperor Haile Selassie, the issue of the 'return' of Eritrea was the most pressing. Ever since the Emperor was returned to Ethiopia by British and Commonwealth forces, Haile Selassie persisted in staking his claim to Eritrea. The basis for the claim was spelled out in a memorandum the Emperor submitted to Prime Minister Churchill during their Cairo, Egypt, meeting on February 15, 1945. In the memorandum, Ethiopia argued that "with the forfeiture of Italian rule Eritrea should revert to its former and rightful owner."¹¹ The memorandum went beyond the previously stated justifications based on the alleged shared experiences and history of the peoples of Ethiopia and Eritrea. It introduced two entirely new reasons why Eritrea should 'revert' to its 'rightful owner.' The memorandum argued that Ethiopia deserved to acquire Eritrea partly as a compensation "to redress in part the injustices visited upon Ethiopia by the Fascist regime."¹² Furthermore, Ethiopia deserved access to the sea because of the "cruel experience of the hostilities of 1935-36, when, for purely political reasons Ethiopia was denied the importation of the necessary arms for prosecuting the war against the Italian invader, (this) should sufficiently demonstrate the urgency of this vital need for Ethiopia."

The memorandum also alluded, indirectly, to Britain's self-serving neutrality during Mussolini's invasion of Ethiopia, despite the Emperor's appeal for help from the League of Nations, of which both Ethiopia and Great Britain were members. Churchill was not able to respond affirmatively to Ethiopia's request for Eritrea. He informed the Emperor that though Britain was sympathetic to the Emperor's claim, the decision of the disposal of the former Italian colonies was not up to Britain alone. Eritrea and other post-war issues would be the subject of an upcoming peace conference in Paris, and it would be up to the Allied Powers to decide what to do with Eritrea.

The Paris Peace Conference

The Paris Peace Conference, held between July 29 and October 15, 1946, was attended by the four Allied Powers and sixteen other invited countries, including Ethiopia and Italy.¹³ At the Conference, Ethiopia made her oft-repeated claim that Eritrea was a "lost" province of Ethiopia and that the Allied Powers should "return" Eritrea to her "mother," Ethiopia. Italy wanted to return to her former colonies as a "trustee," to prove to the people of Italy that their democratically elected government was indeed a respected member of the Western Alliance. France and the Soviet Union supported Italy, though for different reasons. The Soviet Union proposed that in Tripolitania (Libya) both Italy and the Soviet Union should be co-trustees, adding that the United States and Britain should establish a trusteeship authority over the rest of Eritrea. The United States, however, insisted that Eritrea become independent after ten years of British trusteeship.

As in the London Conference the year before, the foreign ministers of the Allied Powers again were mired in an impasse they could not break. Thus side-stepping the colonies issue, the envoys ratified a Peace Treaty with Italy on February 10, 1947. The Treaty forced Italy to renounce all titles and rights to its former colonies, and the disposal of the former colonies was left in the hands of the Allied Powers. The Allied Powers decided to send a Commission of Investigation to Eritrea to ascertain the needs and wishes of the territory and to

seek appropriate solutions to the disposal of the territory.

Whatever may be said of Haile Selassie's substantial failings as a leader of his people, in regard to this objective on Eritrea, his achievement was extraordinary. He was always the consummate diplomat, and he orchestrated a series of apt political maneuverings that, in the end, culminated in the annexation of Eritrea in 1962. Haile Selassie framed the Eritrean question in such a way that informed world public opinion was sympathetic to his objective. That the late Emperor was able to sway public opinion to his side was, in large part, due to Mussolini's invasion of Ethiopia in 1936 and Haile Selassie's subsequent futile address at the League of Nations, pleading with members of the League to take positive steps to stop Mussolini's invasion of Ethiopia.

In his address in Geneva, Haile Selassie cut a sympathetic yet heroic figure. Though the League ignored his request, public opinion and editorial writers in Europe and the US rallied to his side, since his country was inarguably a victim of fascist aggression. Mussolini's invasion generated a ground swell of sympathy for Ethiopia, which Haile Selassie skillfully exploited to promote his ambition of acquiring Eritrea. Thus, after the war, Ethiopia pressed her claim in regard to Eritrea in the name of justice, reminding the world that Ethiopia should not be denied justice *twice*, and that the Big Powers had a moral responsibility to acknowledge Ethiopia's claim. Ethiopia's main diplomatic effort during the late forties was to press her claim herself or through third parties, and simultaneously to engage in a rear guard fight to squelch any ideas or plan that envisaged granting independence for Eritrea.

The Four-Power Commission of Inquiry

The Four-Power Commission stayed in Eritrea from November 12, 1947 until January 3, 1948. Its mandate was to collect necessary data on the economic/political/social condition, as well as the wishes and welfare of the people of Eritrea. The findings of the Commission were intended to be used by the Council of Foreign Ministers of the Four Powers to assist them in their deliberations

toward their search for an acceptable solution to the former colonies issue.

The Commission members, one from each of the Four-Power countries, went to Eritrea with perceptible predispositions as to how the Eritrean question should be resolved. Commission members disagreed among themselves in their interpretation of the facts they collected in Eritrea and consequently, the final report they submitted to the Council of Foreign Ministers at their meeting in Lancaster reflected the deep schism among the Commission members.¹⁴ The UK Deputy Foreign Minister expressed his government's preference that the whole of Eritrea be placed under Ethiopian trusteeship for ten years, at the end of which Eritreans would decide their own future. The US and French delegates proposed to partition Eritrea with the seaport of Assab going to Ethiopia. In the United States' plan, any resolution of the remaining part of Eritrea, including Asmara, Massawa and the Western Province, would be postponed for one year. The French suggested that Italy administer the remaining portion of Eritrea.¹⁵ The Russian delegate stood before his colleagues to defend the accomplishments of Italian colonialism, and particularly its 'civilizing' mission in Eritrea. He presented the Soviet government's proposal that Italy be permitted back in Eritrea as a Trustee Power so as to be able to do the good work Italians had done during the previous years.

The Soviet delegation has studied very carefully and closely this question and having in mind the great progress and extensive work which has been done by the Italian government in this colony during their administration as to industry and agriculture, and having also in mind the enormous work carried out in connection with transport in this colony, and bearing in mind the statement made publicly by the Italian spokesman that the Italian government would do its best to improve the standard of living and well being of the Eritrean population, the Soviet delegation considers that Eritrea should be given under the trusteeship of Italy for a definite and acceptable period of time.¹⁶

As has been discussed above, the Four Powers,

once again, could not agree about what to do with Eritrea. On September 15, 1948, the Four Powers advised the Secretary General of the United Nations that according to the terms of the Treaty of Peace with Italy, the issue of Italy's former colonies, including Eritrea, was being referred to the General Assembly of the United Nations for its consideration.

Phase Two: (1948-1952)

At the United Nations

The General Assembly of the United Nations addressed the issue of Eritrea on September 21, 1948, and immediately forwarded it to the First Committee, which was given the unenviable task of finding a solution that has eluded the Four Powers for four years. The First Committee formally took the Italian colonies issue on April 5, 1949 and submitted its recommendation to the General Assembly for its consideration. The recommendation was rejected 37 to 14, with 7 abstentions, in favor of the plan to partition Eritrea between Ethiopia and the Sudan. The General Assembly recommended that the issue of the former colonies be taken up at its next (fourth) regular session.

On September 20, 1949, the Fourth Session of the General Assembly began to consider the recommendations of its First Committee on the question of former Italian colonies. The debates on Eritrea revolved around three possible solutions for the territory: independence; partial incorporation into Ethiopia; and international trusteeship. The cast of characters active on the Eritrean question did not significantly change from before: the same parties or governments pushed for the same solutions they had favored in the past.

However, there was one important change. The Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc countries, in a dramatic about-face, now demanded that Eritrea be given independence immediately.¹⁷ Less than a year earlier, at the Lancaster House Conference, the Soviet delegate presented his government's proposal that Italy be allowed back into Eritrea as a trustee power to continue the "positive contributions" she had made to Eritrean society for about sixty years. In the General Assembly, the Soviet

delegate, Mr. Arutiunian, condemned Italian colonialism with the same fervor his compatriot praised it earlier at Lancaster House in 1948.

This Soviet espousal of Eritrean independence at the General Assembly in November, 1949, was more a reflection of Soviet disappointment with Italy's decision to join the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in 1942, and had less to do with the Soviet Union's sudden discovery of the Eritrean people's right to self-determination, as the Soviet delegate repeatedly invoked. The Soviet posture on Eritrea, even though it revealed more twists and turns, was fundamentally similar to that pursued by the other major Powers, including the United States and Great Britain. For all of them, the overriding leitmotif was the advancement of their particular geopolitical concerns, regardless of the lip service they paid to safeguarding the interests and wishes of the Eritrean people.

Ethiopia was represented at the Fourth Session by her foreign minister, Mr. Aklilu Habtewold. In his address to the General Assembly, Mr. Aklilu took pains to differentiate the imperialism of Italy, the United Kingdom and France. He commended Britain and France for following "a just and liberal policy" in their imperialist practices and then, inexplicably, he declared that, as of 1949, neither Great Britain nor France had an imperialist presence in Africa. He then proceeded to defend the United States, the United Kingdom and France from the Soviet delegate's charge that the three Powers were practitioners of imperialism:

The Great Powers which had been accused of imperialism, namely the United States, the United Kingdom and France, were the very countries which had made the first move in the Assembly in a campaign to bring to an end the unhappy period of imperialism in Africa.¹⁹

In Mr. Aklilu's political lexicon, Italy was the only imperialist country in Africa in the late 40s, though this was the period when almost the entire continent was ruled either by Great Britain or France!

When he realized that a sizable portion of the delegates were leaning toward voting for an independent Eritrea, the Ethiopian foreign minister

lashed out at Italy. He argued that lurking behind the advocacy of independence for Eritrea was a sinister Italian plot to create a puppet government in Eritrea. To him, an independent Eritrea was an absurdity:

Nobody in the Assembly would go so far as to say that the poor territory of Eritrea and its inhabitants were capable of leading an independent existence. . . . the territory has neither the economic resources, the necessary trained personnel, nor the essential foundations of political unity.²⁰

And if by some "misguided" action Eritrea were granted independence, Aklilu warned that the outcome for Eritrea would be catastrophic:

The immediate and inescapable result of such a step (independence) would be revolution, disorder, bloodshed and *inevitable foreign intervention and interference*. No one could deny that such intervention would take place.²¹ (emphasis added)

The Ethiopian foreign minister did not clarify or speculate the possible source of foreign intervention. Mr. Aklilu concluded his presentation at the Fourth Session by referring, once again, to Ethiopia's plea that justice be rendered to her people since they suffered immeasurably under fascist rule, and that Ethiopia should be allowed to incorporate Eritrea, as a "reparation" for "half-a-century of wrongs and injustices" done to the Ethiopian people.

Sheik Ibrahim Sultan, head of the Independence Bloc of Eritrea, was one of the four Eritrean political leaders invited to address the Subcommittee on Eritrea. Sheik Ibrahim challenged the Ethiopian foreign minister on almost every point he made on Eritrea. He rebutted Aklilu's assertion that Eritrea lacked economic resources and the trained personnel to exist as an independent state. The head of the Independent Bloc reminded the Ethiopian foreign minister of various statements made by the Emperor and Aklilu himself to the effect that numerous Eritreans were holding high and responsible jobs in the Ethiopian civil service system. Sheik

Ibrahim reminded the Subcommittee that the Eritrean people requested that "no colonial regime, European or Ethiopian, be imposed on them."²²

After listening to the various interested points on Eritrea, the majority of the Subcommittee members argued that they did not have adequate information on which to base their recommendation for Eritrea. As a result, they accepted the Chilean delegate's proposal to dispatch a United Nations fact-finding mission to Eritrea, to gather information and ascertain the wishes of the inhabitants. November 21, 1949, the General Assembly, by a vote of 48 yes, 1 no and 9 abstentions, voted for the resolution, officially known as 289 A (IV), stated that a five-member United Nations Commission would be sent to Eritrea "to ascertain more fully the wishes and the best means of promoting the welfare of the inhabitants of Eritrea, to examine the question of the disposal of Eritrea and to report for the General Assembly, together with such a proposal or proposals as it may deem appropriate for the solution of the problem of Eritrea."²³

UN Commission of Inquiry

A five-man delegation from Pakistan, Guatemala, Burma, South Africa and Norway visited Eritrea for a period of seven weeks, from February 14 to April 6, 1950. The Commission arrived in Asmara to commence its work in the midst of intense political ferment. British authorities in Eritrea were able to establish a direct link between the activities of Colonel Nega Haile Selassie and the terrorism of the Union Party. The Colonel channeled funds and propaganda to Andinet, the terrorist army of the Union Party. The campaign of intimidation, terror and sometimes bribery began to have the desired effect: the Ethiopian-orchestrated political turmoil created serious doubts in the minds of the Commission members as to whether Eritreans had the political maturity to run an independent state, a point the Ethiopian foreign minister made in the debate during the Fourth Session of the General Assembly.

The governments of the US and UK received prior information that the Commission of Inquiry would not adopt the basis US/UK proposal — the partition of Eritrea — in any of its recommenda-

tions. Therefore, in anticipation of the Commission's recommendations, which might include independence (unacceptable to Ethiopia), the State Department and the Foreign Office formed a committee to formulate a common US/UK position. The thrust of the US/UK plan was to wage a diplomatic campaign to persuade other countries in the General Assembly to support the basic US/UK position: to make it possible for Italy and Ethiopia to work out an agreement acceptable to both regardless of the findings of the UN Commission of Inquiry; to secure an agreement with whomever acquires Eritrea to safeguard the rights and privileges of the Italian settlers in the territory; and finally, the US and UK committed themselves to searching for a formula that would be acceptable to the advocates of independence in the General Assembly and that would also permit Ethiopia to achieve a substantial portion of her Eritrean objective.²⁶

When the Commission of Inquiry finally submitted its reports, neither the contents nor the recommendations contained in those reports adopted, even in part, the core US/UK proposal: the partition of Eritrea.²⁷ Instead, the Commission made three recommendations: UN trusteeship, then independence (Pakistan and Guatemala); federation with Ethiopia (South Africa and Burma); and union with Ethiopia (Norway). Of the three recommendations put forward by the UN Commission, the United States government felt that the one sponsored by South Africa and Burma for a federal union between Ethiopia and Eritrea seemed to offer the best solution at the time. In the opinion of the State Department, a federal arrangement was the type of proposal the advocates of independence in the General Assembly would find attractive, because it offered local autonomy; it would also find favor with Ethiopia, because now Ethiopia would have an outlet to the sea. What was left, then, was to draft the proposal in such a way that it would receive wide acceptance in the General Assembly and, simultaneously, to make it attractive enough for Ethiopia so that the Emperor would finally accept it.

The idea of establishing a federal union between Ethiopia and Eritrea did not originate with the South African or Burmese delegations of the UN

Commission. Early in 1949, when the Independence Bloc was at its zenith and the Unionists were disintegrating, Ethiopia, on her part, subtly initiated discussions toward the creation of a federal arrangement with Eritrea, since from Ethiopia's point of view federation was much preferred to the dreaded independence. Ethiopian ministers visited Asmara frequently to seek advice from the British officials in the Eritrean capital on how to combat the increasing strength of the Independence Bloc.²⁸ According to Brigadier Drew, the governor of Eritrea, Ethiopian officials were becoming increasingly pessimistic that Ethiopia might never be able to acquire any part of Eritrea if the present trend continued. In a cable to the Foreign Office, Brigadier Drew reported:

The Ethiopians were prepared to discuss secretly, with influential members of the Bloc, a policy of conditional federation of the whole of Eritrea to Ethiopia, subject to the Bloc obtaining satisfactory conditions from the Ethiopian government.²⁹

As the Ethiopians intimated to Drew that they would meet secretly with influential pro-independence Eritreans, Emperor Haile Selassie invited some members of the Independence Moslem League of Massawa and the Liberal Unionists to meet with him in Addis Ababa for secret negotiations. The Ethiopians and the Eritrean group agreed to a basic federal formula that granted Eritrea substantial local autonomy under nominal sovereignty of the Emperor. Ato Seium Maasho, the former member of the Independence Bloc who had quit the Bloc the year before and was one of the Addis Ababa negotiators, made public the contents of the federal proposal agreed to by his group and the Ethiopians. In his appearance before the Commission of Inquiry, Ato Seium stated that his group prepared the General Assembly to consider and sponsor the federal arrangement so as to guarantee its proper implementation.³⁰

The federal alternative was also the subject of bilateral discussion between the governments of Ethiopia and Italy under the auspices of the US government. About the time Ethiopian officials were secretly conferring with Ato Seium and his

group, Foreign Minister Aklilu Habtewold approached US officials with another federal plan he wanted the US government to sell to the Italians.³¹ Under Aklilu's plan, Ethiopia would assume jurisdiction over foreign affairs, defense, police, communications, commerce and finance, while Eritreans would be assured basic rights and fundamental freedoms as well as adequate safeguards for the rights of Italian settlers in Eritrea. Under Aklilu's conception of federation, Eritrea would become a virtual province of Ethiopia.

The two federation proposals submitted by the Ethiopians were markedly different from one another. The one worked out with the Eritrean group in Addis Ababa gave Eritrea a substantial degree of self-rule and legislative autonomy; it precluded the stationing of foreign troops on Eritrean soil, and also guaranteed Eritreans cultural autonomy. However, the plan in the hands of the Americans left very little for Eritreans except a general statement that their human rights would be respected. It was not clear at the time why the Ethiopians came with two substantially different forms of federation. Perhaps they felt that by conducting a separate deal with the Italians, Ethiopia would confront Eritreans with a *fait accompli* and Eritreans would have no alternative but to accept whatever Ethiopia and Italy agreed on. According to Aklilu, if only Ethiopia could get Italy's concurrence on a plan, then Eritreans would soon be forced to fall in line. Ethiopian officials had long felt that if it had not been for Italian influence on Eritrean politics, union between Ethiopia and Eritrea would have been carried out a long time ago. It is unlikely that Seium Maasho and the other proponents of the federal plan were aware of Aklilu's back door approach to the Italians through the American government with a plan offering much less than agreed to by the Eritreans.

The Italians, too, had indicated to the United States government Italy's readiness to accept a federal union between Ethiopia and Eritrea.³² Under Italy's proposal defense, foreign affairs and international trade would fall under the jurisdiction of the federal government, while matters of local government, including domestic trade, taxation, maintenance of law and order, would be in the hands of Eritreans. Included in the Italian plan

was a provision for a customs union for the entire area so as to form a viable economic unit. The Italians stressed that any federal arrangement should contain strong features to safeguard the rights of the Italian community in Eritrea and the plan should be acceptable to all independence groups in Eritrea.

Back at the United Nations

At the time when the US was immersed in behind-the-scenes negotiations to win approval of the federal solution, the Interim Committee of the United Nations met to receive and debate the findings of the UN Commission of Inquiry for Eritrea. The Committee, however, could not make specific recommendations because of an intense diplomatic campaign by the US that its own favored solution, federation, should be considered. The General Assembly, however, referred the issue of Eritrea to the *Ad Hoc* Committee for consideration and final recommendation.

When the *Ad Hoc* Committee began to consider the question of Eritrea, there were two main proposals and five resolutions before it: independence, sponsored by the Soviet Bloc countries, Pakistan and Iraq; and federation, co-sponsored by 14 states (but mainly drafted by the US and the UK). The *Ad Hoc* Committee heard from interested parties, including Eritrean political leaders. Sheik Ibrahim Sultan, head of the Independence Bloc of Eritrea, reiterated his people's desire for independence. Since the passage of the federation proposal was a foregone conclusion, Ibrahim Sultan expressed the dismay of his people that the UN was preparing to impose a government structure on Eritrea without giving the people a chance to express their opinion on the matter. Sheik Ibrahim called federation "an ambiguous scheme"³³ which was incompatible with the aspirations of the Eritrean people, since a "federation can only exist between Independent states of equal sovereign rights, and not being one an independent state and one which is being denied independence."³⁴

The issues raised by Sheik Ibrahim were later elaborated by some members of the *Ad Hoc* Committee. Sheik Abdul-Jabar of Saudi Arabia challenged the assertions by the pro-union and pro-fed-

eration groups that Eritrea's economic viability was doubtful. Sheik Abdul-Jabar argued that any solution other than independence was unreasonable and discriminatory and unjustly penalized the people of Eritrea. If the criteria that were being imposed on Eritrea were to be applied to other countries of the world, perhaps half of them would not be able to retain their sovereignty today.³⁵

The Soviet delegate saw the federation proposal "as the outcome of the struggle among the colonial Powers for a new partition of the former Italian colonies."³⁶ If federation is a suitable solution for Eritrea, argued the Soviet delegate, then "the question should be decided by the people of Eritrea themselves, and not by some international organization."³⁷ The USSR submitted a counter-proposal calling for Eritrean independence immediately, arguing that independence was "the equitable solution."³⁹

After disposing of the Soviet-sponsored proposal to grant Eritrea independence, the General Assembly, on December 2, 1950, voted to accept the *Ad Hoc* Committee's recommendation to federate Eritrea with Ethiopia. Foreign Minister Akililu Habtewold stood before the General Assembly and pledged that Ethiopia would do its utmost to respect and honor the terms of the federal agreement.

On December 14, the General Assembly appointed Dr. Anze Matienzo of Bolivia to draft a constitution for Eritrea: to convoke an Eritrean Assembly and to ratify the Federal Act in the name of the Eritrean people. However, Dr. Matienzo's task was made much more complicated, because Article 12 of the UN federal resolution required him to consult with the Ethiopian government in preparing a constitution for Eritrea. Although Eritrea was mandated to have a democratic form of government, the UN Resolution did not make it clear how the Ethiopian Emperor was expected to give his assent to the establishment of democracy and fundamental freedoms in Eritrea without simultaneously providing the same privileges and rights to his own subjects in Ethiopia proper. Those who espoused federation as the best solution for Eritrea must have known that there was very little likelihood that the Emperor would adhere to the terms of the federal arrangement without substantially liberalizing his

own rule in Ethiopia, something he was not inclined to do. Therefore, since the Emperor did not give any signs that he was moving toward democratizing his regime, the possibility that he would permit Eritreans to enjoy the rights accorded to them by the federal charter.

Setting up the New Government of Eritrea

As instructed by Article 12 of the 1950 UN Resolution, Dr. Matienzo held a series of formal and informal meetings with Foreign Minister Aklilu and his deputies in Asmara, Addis Ababa and Geneva from May to July, 1951. However, right at the outset it became clear that the overriding objective of Aklilu was to weaken the democratic basis of the proposed Eritrean government, to dilute its autonomy, and eventually to facilitate the integration of Eritrea into Ethiopia. Dr. Matienzo saw his responsibility in a much different light: to draft a constitution for Eritrea that would safeguard its autonomy and insure that its government would be based on sound democratic principles. Dr. Matienzo sought to translate the UN Resolution by giving Eritrea a sound autonomy; Foreign Minister Aklilu strove to weaken and eventually kill that autonomy.

The negotiations between Anze Matienzo and Aklilu were becoming long and contentious, since the Ethiopian Foreign Minister was determined to install his version of autonomy on Eritrea as opposed to the strong autonomy envisioned by Anze Matienzo. In the end, Aklilu's persistence began to pay off as Anze Matienzo's steadfast defense of the democratic foundation of the UN Resolution began to wane. As a direct result of Aklilu's incessant effort to weaken the implementation of UN Resolution 390A (v), Anze Matienzo agreed to incorporate into the Eritrean constitution elements that were not implied, directly or indirectly, in the Federal Act. Not only did Anze Matienzo agree to recognize the Ethiopian government as the Federal Government, he also consented to allow the Emperor to have a representative in Eritrea with the power to promulgate new legislation.

On April 25, 1952, Anze Matienzo submitted the final draft of the Eritrean constitution to the Ethiopian government. Since one of the mandates

of UN Resolution 390A (v) was for Anze Matienzo to convoke an Eritrean Assembly to consider and approve the constitution, Anze Matienzo informed the British authorities to prepare the Eritrean population for the election of their representatives. Four months before the final draft was in the hands of the Ethiopians, the British authorities published Proclamation 121 setting the guidelines for indirect election in all parties of Eritrea outside Asmara and Massawa, where the authorities decided to hold direct elections.

Proclamation 121 divided Eritrea into 238 administrative and electoral wards out of which 68 constituencies were established, each constituency representing one seat in the 68-member Eritrean Assembly. Even though the districting of the electoral constituencies was based on "social, geographical and political situations" prevailing in Eritrea at the time, nevertheless, Proclamation 121 exhibited gross irregularities: it assigned more seats to Union Party strongholds in a proportion much higher than their share of the total population at the expense of those areas dominated by the Eritrean Democratic Front, an umbrella group of parties that consistently advocated a strong federal government for Eritrea. Though the stated aim of the Proclamation was to create a constituent Assembly that was equally divided between Christians and Moslems to reflect the approximate composition of the Eritrean population, the electoral wards were drawn in such a way that among the Moslems those who were aligned with the Unionists, and thus who should be easily controlled, were overrepresented. Though neither the British administering authorities nor the Government of Ethiopia stated it openly, their objective was to create a weak and malleable constituent Assembly. Of particular concern to the Ethiopians was the possibility that the new Assembly, in asserting its independence, may reject aspects of the constitution Foreign Minister Aklilu fought to incorporate.

Since no single political party was expected to win enough seats in the Assembly to amend, delete or revise any article of the draft constitution, any one of the major parties, the Unionists and the Democratic Front, would need to join forces with some of the smaller parties to command the two-

thirds majority required for passage of any article in the draft. Of the 68 seats in the Assembly, the Unionists and their sympathizers won 34 seats, the Democratic Front and Independents controlled 19, and the remaining 15 went to the Moslem League of the Western Province, thus holding the balance in the Assembly. As expected, the Unionists and the Moslem League of the Western Province soon formed the winning coalition, effectively assuring the passage of the draft constitution without substantial revisions.

In the end, the Government of Ethiopia and the British administering authorities succeeded in engineering an election outcome that ensured not only the passage of the draft constitution, but also the selection of Telda Bairu, leader of the Unionist Party, as the first Chief Executive of Eritrea, and Ali Radai, of the Moslem League of the Western Province, as President of the Eritrean Assembly. At the head of the newly born government of Eritrea were persons whose past history showed no evidence of commitment to the notion of establishing a strong and effective self-rule in Eritrea as mandated by the 1950 UN Resolution. Thus, when the Eritrean Assembly met for the first time on September 15, 1952, it marked the beginning of the end of Ethiopian-Eritrean federation.

Phase Three: (1962-1975)

When the General Assembly passed UN Resolution 390A (v) in 1950, creating the Ethiopian-Eritrean federation, it gave Eritrea a constitution which explicitly stated that the provisions of the federal charter would not be amended or violated by anybody other than the General Assembly.⁴⁰ Yet almost immediately, Ethiopia began to take a series of steps whose cumulative effect was to dismantle key features of the federal arrangement without being subjected to any degree of disapproval from members of the United Nations. Ethiopia was able to accomplish its long-standing dream of annexing Eritrea because no single country or block of countries were sufficiently interested in the integrity of the UN Resolution that they were prepared to take Ethiopia to task for violating that Resolution. Almost no government was willing to confront Ethiopia over Eritrea, di-

rectly or indirectly, mainly because for no other country was Eritrea as vitally important as it was for Ethiopia. Furthermore, Ethiopian diplomatic activity during the period successfully cemented critical alliances with the United States, Israel and key African countries which, in turn, enabled Ethiopia to prevent the question of Eritrea from being discussed in any international forum.

Though the United States government knew early of Ethiopia's encroachment of Eritrea's autonomy, it did very little to safeguard the integrity of the political solution for Eritrea, even though the US was responsible for drafting the Resolution and getting it considered and approved by the General Assembly. Over the ten-year life of the ill-fated federation, successive American consuls in Asmara reported to the State Department about Ethiopia's methodical abrogation of the vital elements of the federal charter. As early as September 19, 1952, four days after the birth of the federation on September 15, Mr. Edward Mulcahy, the first American consul in Asmara, observed in a secret dispatch to the State Department that the Ethiopians were trying hard to make the federation look much like annexation.⁴¹ Another American consul, Mr. Earle Richey, sent a candid assessment of the political situation in Eritrea in 1959 in which he wrote:

Eritrea is run as a police state in so far as political opposition is concerned. . . . Devoid of any free or opposition press, and with a populace denied the political and other rights guaranteed to them by their constitution, Eritrea is today anything but the autonomous and democratic 'unit' envisioned by the framers of the United Nations Resolution.⁴²

Despite their private misgivings about the course of the federation, American consuls in Asmara either misjudged or misrepresented the extent of Ethiopian encroachment on Eritrea's autonomy. At one point, Mulcahy confided to Sheik Ibrahim Sultan that the entire process of forming the federation had gone smoothly, and the consul blithely added that the process "had set an example that the rest of the African continent and the Mid-East might emulate."⁴³ Regardless of the assurances of the

American consuls that all was well with the federation, Eritrean political leaders pressed the various consular representatives in Asmara to restrain Ethiopia from making a mockery of the 1950 UN Resolution. Sheik Ibrahim underscored the urgency of taking a quick action on the part of the United States to save the federation before it was too late. In his conversation with American consul Richey, Sheik Ibrahim observed:

The US should not wait until the crocodile has swallowed his victim before taking any action, since it would be most difficult to extract the victim from the crocodile's belly once the crocodile had him there.⁴⁴

'The Crocodile Swallows His Victim'

In November 14, 1962, Asfaha Woldemikael, Emperor Haile Selassie's hand-picked Chief Executive of Eritrea, went before the Eritrean Assembly and read from a written statement in Amharic, a language understood by only a handful of the 68-member body. Asfaha informed the Assembly:

The statement that I am going to read to you is the final issue of the Eritrean case, and there is nothing you can do other than accepting it as it is. We have rendered the Federation null and void; we are hence forth completely united with our motherland.⁴⁵

Even though the Assembly was packed with known sympathizers of the Ethiopian cause, it was remarkable that the motion to dissolve the Federation was defeated four times the day before Asfaha's fateful announcement. Members of the Assembly opposed to the demise of the Federation were bodily dragged to attend the November 15 session so as to give the appearance that the motion to dissolve Eritrea's special status was passed by a unanimous acclamation. The unification of Eritrea into Ethiopia was rammed through the Assembly, regardless of what the members felt about it.

The significance of Ethiopia's cynical and brazen violation of the terms of the 1950 United Nations Resolution was not lost on the consular corps

in Asmara, who termed Ethiopia's move "a brutal and arbitrary act."⁴⁶ Richard G. Johnson, the resident American consul in Asmara, wrote in a confidential memorandum to the State Department:

The 'unification' was prepared and perpetrated from above in maximum secrecy without the slightest public debate or discussion. The 'vote by acclamation' was a shoddy comedy, barely disguising the absence of support even on the part of Government-picked Eritrean Assembly.⁴⁷

Consul Johnson's assessment notwithstanding, the United States government said or did very little, in public or in private, to express its displeasure concerning the illegal demise of the federal union. Even though, according to Johnson's memorandum, Ethiopia's action betrayed "considerable disrespect"⁴⁸ to the United Nations, and the Ethiopian government had from the start "enfeebled and devitalized"⁴⁹ the Eritrean government, the United States decided not to object to the destruction of the federal union, thus implicitly accepting Ethiopia's move on Eritrea. United States official response to Ethiopia's 'putsch' was limited to withholding a congratulatory message to the Emperor on the occasion of the 'union' between Ethiopia and Eritrea.⁵⁰ Indeed, the United States government was uncomfortable about Ethiopia's flagrant disrespect to the United States-sponsored 1950 United Nations Resolution. Yet, US officials were either unwilling or unable to take their private assessment of Ethiopia's action to the Ethiopian government, and in the end, out of political expediency, the United States acquiesced to Ethiopia's takeover of Eritrea.

The Beginning of the Armed Struggle

The dissolution of the Ethiopian-Eritrean Federation in 1962 opened a new phase in the development of Eritrean nationalism. This was the period when Eritreans abandoned all hope that the UN would act to resurrect its 1950 resolution and request Ethiopia to abide by the 1950 decision of the General Assembly. Much to their dismay, Erit-

reans finally realized that all peaceful avenues for getting their case heard by the international community were blocked by Ethiopia and its powerful allies, at which time Eritrean nationalists decided to wage armed struggle to drive the Ethiopian army of occupation off Eritrean soil.

On December 4,⁵¹ a few days after the federation was abolished, two large demonstrations, one in Asmara and another in Massawa, took place simultaneously. Both demonstrations were attended by hundreds of students and workers, many of whom were carrying banners and "FREE ERITREA" placards as well as the defunct federal flag.⁵¹ Though Ethiopian soldiers and policemen responded swiftly and firmly, dispersing the crowd, the bold demonstration caused unrest to spread to other towns in Eritrea. A week later, on December 11, another demonstration attended by hundreds of youth and similar in tone and purpose to the Asmara and Massawa events occurred in Keren.⁵² The demonstrations were the first signs of organized resistance to the Ethiopian action. Despite their heavy-handed response to the demonstrations, the Ethiopians did not fully understand the importance of what had occurred.

The Asmara, Massawa and Keren demonstrations did not take place in a vacuum. Economic stagnation and political crack-down sent thousands of Eritreans to the neighboring countries of Sudan, Saudi Arabia, Somalia and Egypt. Included among the immigrants were well-known Eritrean political leaders such as Sheik Ibrahim, Wolde-ab Woldeariam, former head of the Independence Party, and Idris Mohamed Adem, previously President of the Eritrean Assembly. These political leaders sent petitions to the United Nations and various foreign governments in regard to Ethiopia's violation of the 1950 UN Resolution.⁵³ In a memorandum to Dag Hammarskjöld, Secretary General of the UN, the three Eritrean nationalists expressed their distress and desperation that the UN had completely ignored the fate of the federal union it mandated through its 1950 Resolution. They warned Hammarskjöld that they could no longer restrain their people from resorting to violence to seek justice and freedom in the face of the unwillingness of the United Nations to stop Ethiopia from "swallowing" Eritrea:

We regret that all our complaints, protests and representations made in the name of the Eritrean people through Your Excellency to the UN have had no effect whatsoever. We fear that the people, exasperated by continuous disappointments, may eventually resort to force, which would certainly lead to disorder and anarchy, contrary to the basic principles of the United Nations.⁵⁴

As soon as the three nationalists discovered that their petitions were going nowhere, they met in Cairo in July, 1960, to form the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF), whose objectives were to organize Eritrean refugees for political action: to initiate political organizing within Eritrea and finally to wage an armed struggle against Ethiopian occupation. Within Eritrea, and especially in the urban areas, political cells with membership of not more than seven were established. It was these ELF-organized cells that were responsible for organizing and orchestrating the December 4 and 11 demonstrations.

Ethiopia used its position in the international community to deny a platform to Eritrean to press their grievance against dissolution of the Federation. With all peaceful avenues blocked, the leadership of ELF decided to link up with Idris Hamit Awate, a former soldier with a long history of resistance against Italian and British rule. In September, 1961, with a small contingent of fighting men, mostly Eritrean nationals formerly attached to the Sudanese army and police, and a "contingent of superannuated Italian rifles,"⁵⁵ Awate opened a new chapter in the history of armed struggle in Eritrea. By mid-1962, Awate, leading a rag-tag army of around 500 under his command, was successfully harassing Ethiopian garrison troops around Agordat. However, resistance to Ethiopian rule was not limited to Awate's army or the Western lowlands. On December 19, a small group of policemen deserted the Eritrean Police Force in Massawa, taking with them 21 rifles, 2 machine guns and 3000 rounds of ammunition; more significantly, the deserting policemen were accompanied by several prisoners arrested during the December 4 demonstrations in Massawa.

The full ramifications of the armed uprising in

the Western Lowlands was not lost on the Ethiopian government, even though it refused to acknowledge publicly the existence of opposition to the Emperor's rule. Nevertheless, Ethiopia responded to Awate's challenge by waging extensive military campaigns in the Western Lowlands, terrorizing civilians, burning villages accused of harboring ELF fighters. Ethiopia's military campaign, however, only succeeded in giving ELF visibility and credibility among Eritreans not previously committed to the struggle. Furthermore, Ethiopia's relentless and brutal forays into the Western Lowlands drove hundreds, and later thousands, of refugees into the Sudan. Among these refugees and displaced youth, ELF was able to recruit without difficulty. Accounts of Ethiopian brutality and reported cases of mass murder against civilian targets, mostly Moslems, brought sympathy and support to ELF from many Arab countries. The Ethiopians, therefore, through their actions, unwittingly re-internationalized the Eritrean issue.

Through the mid-sixties, the encounters between the Ethiopian army and ELF were confined to the Western Lowlands. Because most of the external backers of ELF were Arab governments, the Eritrean issue was becoming intertwined with Mid-Eastern politics. From their headquarters in Damascus, Syria, ELF leaders, to insure continued Arab support, found it expedient to characterize the Ethiopian government as adroitly exploiting the situation to seek material and political support from the United States and Israel. Emperor Haile Selassie was active in diplomatically weaning some of the Arab-African countries from their support of the Eritrean cause. At the 1964 Organization of African Unity (OAU) meeting in Cairo, the Emperor masterminded the inclusion into the OAU Charter of a key clause sanctifying existing frontiers, which made the Arab-African members of the OAU wary in their support of ELF. Furthermore, in 1967, Emperor Haile Selassie played a key role in settling the long-standing dispute between the government of Sudan and the Anyanya in the southern part of that country, for which the Sudanese government expressed its gratitude to the Emperor by denying ELF access to Sudanese territory to operate against Ethiopian military in Eritrea.

Clearly, the combined diplomatic and military offenses against ELF appeared to weaken the capability of the resistance movement. The 1967 Arab-Israeli war further cut dramatically into the supply lines of ELF, since the Arab governments were now more preoccupied with the humiliating defeat they suffered at the hands of the Israelis. The Ethiopians reasoned that the Arabs now would not have the interest to champion ELF, and without Arab support the Ethiopians expected ELF to wither away.

By the end of the 1960s, however, changes in the Arab world created opportunities for ELF to regroup and to strike vulnerable Ethiopian targets. A coup in Libya by Muannumar el Qaddafi in 1969 made it possible for the new Libyan regime to be more sympathetic to the Eritrean cause and to supply arms and ammunition to Eritrean nationalists. Because of the victory of the National Liberation Front of Southern Yemen in 1969, Aden became an important staging area for smuggling arms and men across the Red Sea into Eritrea. Also, Gaffar Numieri, who assumed power via a coup in the Sudan in 1969, reversed the pro-Ethiopia policy of his predecessor and allowed ELF to operate once again from bases in the Sudan.

Before the decade was out, the resistance movement carried out a series of dramatic actions inside Eritrea that forced the Ethiopian government to acknowledge the existence of a serious challenge to Ethiopia's rule in Eritrea.

Emperor Haile Selassie succeeded in annexing Eritrea as a result of political and diplomatic support that he solicited and received from foreign governments. He now turned his attention to a similar strategy to assist him in putting down the rebellion in Eritrea. In 1970, the Emperor journeyed to the Soviet Union and Egypt to drum up support in his battle against the Eritrean resistance movement. He attempted to persuade the leaders of the two countries he visited to intercede on his behalf with some of the Arab countries supporting the Eritrean cause. The Emperor always felt that because the support for the Eritrean nationalists was externally based, a withdrawal of that support would seriously weaken the independence movement. Parallel to his diplomatic offensive, the Emperor undertook a military campaign inside Eritrea,

which he was able to carry out due to the massive quantities of arms Ethiopia received from the United States government.

Since May, 1953, when the United States and the Ethiopian governments entered into a military assistance agreement, as a result of which the Ethiopian Army and Air Force were entirely equipped and trained along American lines. Between 1953-1970, the United States supplied Ethiopia with \$200 million worth of arms and equipment for "security needs," most of it coming after 1962. However, it was not Ethiopia's security that was in jeopardy, necessitating massive US arms shipments to be funnelled to Ethiopia. What was at stake was the threat to Ethiopia's rule in Eritrea, and the brewing political ferment that was beginning to engulf the Emperor's government inside Ethiopia proper.

Thus, the rationale of US military aid to Ethiopia, ostensibly for its "security needs," was in reality a cover to enable the Emperor to reassert himself both in Eritrea and Ethiopia. The US was committed to the status quo in Ethiopia for various reasons, including (a) the existence of communication facilities at Kagnew Station in Asmara; (b) the perception on the part of U.S. officials that Ethiopia was a stabilizing force on the continent; (c) the proximity of Ethiopia to the Middle East and Indian Ocean, both of considerable importance to the US and (d) US access to Ethiopia's airfields. It was the official position of the US to stand by Ethiopia, because "protracted instability in this second-most populous country in Black Africa could have adverse repercussions"⁵⁶ which would ultimately harm US interests in the region. Emperor Haile Selassie and the Americans were in agreement that events in Eritrea, if left unattended, could create a degree of instability in the region which would not be in the best interest of Ethiopia and the US.

Phase Four: (1975-Present)

By extending the geopolitical carrot, Ethiopia succeeded in drawing the US and Israel into a united front with Ethiopia in her campaign to crush armed resistance in Eritrea. The Eritrean campaign was too costly for Haile Selassie and his allies, how-

ever. It cost him his throne, and it wasn't long before the US and Israel were unceremoniously kicked out of Ethiopia by the new military regime in Addis Ababa. The Eritrean independence struggle took a new turn when the fledgling Eritrean Peoples' Liberation Forces made their presence known as a result of a series of stunning victories against Ethiopian forces. The new liberation group soon demonstrated its superb organizing abilities in marshalling the resources and personnel required to carry out an effective guerrilla war. The inability of Haile Selassie to fight a war in Eritrea and simultaneously to deal with grave economic problems in Ethiopia led to the overthrow of the monarch by mid-level army officers. However, the change in regime in Addis Ababa did not improve Ethiopia's fortunes in Eritrea. The independence forces liberated huge chunks of Eritrea as well as scores of towns and population centres. By late 1977 and early 1978, only Asmara, the two ports of Massawa and Assab, and two or three other towns were in Ethiopian hands. For the regime newly installed in Addis Ababa, the situation in Eritrea was very bleak. Eritrea was on the verge of being liberated by the independence forces.

The Russians who were in Somalia for many years training Somali soldiers saw an opening in Ethiopia when the new government asked the US which was closely identified with the Haile Selassie regime, to leave Ethiopia. The military junta invited the Russians to Ethiopia partly because the Russians promised huge quantities of war material to be used in the campaign to recapture the Ogaden as well as Eritrea. Thus, the Eritrean question entered its *fourth* and most paradoxical phase. Right on the heels of the Russians, the Cubans left Somalia for Ethiopia. That both the Russians and Cubans were arrayed against the liberation forces in Eritrea was one of the improbable paradoxes of the 1970s. It bewildered friends of Cuba to see Cuban forces participating in a campaign to liquidate the Eritrean cause. The Soviet Union, on the other hand, seemed to find it difficult to adopt a consistent Eritrean policy. In 1948, as a member of the Big Powers that met to discuss the fate of Eritrea, the Soviet Union suggested that Eritrea be *returned* to Italy: in 1950 at the United Nations in New York, the Soviet delegate advocated indepen-

dence for Eritrea, and since the late 1970s the Russians have been spending huge amounts of resources to prevent Eritrea from becoming independent.

Whether it is cynicism or pragmatism, the Russians have historically adopted a position on Eritrea that seems to meet their immediate geopolitical needs as opposed to any attachment to progressive ideals. It is a distressing misfortune of Eritrean nationalism that the US and USSR would have to take turns to come to Ethiopia's aid to fight and resist Eritrean aspirations for independence and national liberation.

The about-face of the Cubans cannot be readily explained.⁵⁷ There is ample evidence that Cuban officers trained and led Ethiopian militia in their campaign to recapture Eritrea, though Cuba has vehemently denied any involvement in Eritrea. What is beyond question, however, is Cuba's past association and championing of Eritrean independence forces. At the Conference of Non-aligned Nations in Havana in March, 1974, the Cuban delegate asked during the meetings of the preparatory committee that the question of Eritrean independence be placed on the agenda, though the motion failed because of heavy lobbying by Ethiopia among members of the committee. Even as late as 1978, Carlos Rafael Roderiquez, Cuba's Foreign Minister, underlined the justness of the Eritrean struggle for independence as well as Cuba's support for that struggle. So why did the Cubans turn their backs on Eritrea? Especially when Cuban allies in the Third World and elsewhere urged Cuba not to get involved in the campaign to recapture Eritrea. There are at least two possible explanations; either the Cubans were acting as surrogates of the Soviet Union against their own convictions, or they succumbed to the socialist and anti-imperialist rhetoric of the ruling junta.

The young army officers who overthrew Haile Selassie's government faced a severe crisis on the Eritrean question. In the battle front, Ethiopian forces were in disarray; town after town was falling into the hands of the liberation forces. The world press was commenting extensively on the Eritrean issue and for the first time since the annexation of 1962 details of the illegal demise of the federal situation were aroused. In short, the Eritrean issue

was internationalized, and the new government found itself on the defensive. In a remarkable secret document, "Ethiopian Foreign Policy and the Eritrean Question," prepared by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1975, the military government prepared detailed steps to isolate the Eritrean question from world public opinion. The document admitted that the dissolution of the federal structure could not be defended legally. Because the United Nations was responsible for granting the federal charter, any dispute involving Eritrea was an international issue. Yet, the document conceded that to take the Eritrean issue to the United Nations would be to the disadvantage of Ethiopia. The document then outlined policy guidelines in dealing with the foreign policy aspect of the Eritrean question. *One*: to reiterate Ethiopia's fundamental position regarding the Eritrean issue — that it is an internal affair of Ethiopia and should be solved with the general context of Ethiopia as a whole. *Two*: to the extent possible, to isolate Eritrea from world public opinion. *Three*: to adopt different approaches to different countries when explaining the Eritrean issue. For example, African countries would be told that if Eritrea becomes independent it will establish a dangerous precedent that may actually affect almost all new nations in Africa. Arab countries would be reminded that if they continue supporting Eritreans, their actions may result in estrangement between Africans and Arabs, since Ethiopia had a substantial influence with African countries. Other policies tailored for Western Europe, Asia, Latin America and the Socialist countries were also spelled out.

The Dergue went a long way toward implementing the policy guidelines published in the 1975 Ministry of Foreign Affairs document. Ethiopian officials toured African, Warsaw Pact and Arab countries to explain the Ethiopian revolution in a tone tailored to fit the ideological predispositions of the countries they visited. The Warsaw Pact countries were informed by their Ethiopian visitors that as long as the Eritrean were fighting the former regime of Emperor Haile Selassie, the Eritrean cause was a valid one. However, since the overthrow of the discredited regime of the Emperor by a new socialist government, there was every reason to believe that Eritrean would be ac-

corded full quality and participation in the new socialist Ethiopia, an argument the Warsaw Pact countries readily accepted. The Soviet Union endorsed the Dergue's view of the Eritrean issue in its broadcast on Moscow Radio on March 7, 1977, in which it said:

Those countries in which national democratic systems have been established cannot be considered non-progressive just because they suffer from some complex problems or other, which is just a vestige of the past and is awaiting solution.⁵⁸

With the endorsement of the Soviet Union of the Dergue's position on Eritrea, other members of the Warsaw Pact countries soon followed suit. Their long-held defense of the Eritrean cause was soon swept away to accommodate the new geopolitical reality emerging in the Horn of Africa. The Ethiopians also used similar lines of arguments with some degree of success with Libya, South Yemen and the Palestinian Liberation Organization, thus isolating Eritrean nationalist from their traditional backers in the socialist world and at least one wing of the Arab camp.

In their tours of African capitals, Ethiopian officials reminded African leaders of the sanctity of the OAU Charter, which held inviolable existing borders and forbade the interference in the internal affairs of a sister African country. By raising the spectre of Biafra and Katanga, Ethiopian diplomats convinced African governments that to the extent that Eritreans were trying to secede, and if they succeed in their endeavor, then no African country would be immune from secessionists. By recasting the Eritrean issue as an 'internal matter' of Ethiopia, the new rulers of Ethiopia, like the Emperor they overthrew, were able to win the political support of most of the OAU member countries.

Even though there is no public record that an official of the new Ethiopian government visited Israel, the Dergue resumed the former Emperor's covert relations with the State of Israel, despite Ethiopia's severance of diplomatic relations with the Jewish State in 1973. The Israelis offered the Dergue what they always offered Emperor Haile Selassie's government: political and military as-

sistance to fight the war in Eritrea. At least up to 1978, Israel supplied Ethiopia with arms and ammunition as well as training commando units and tank operators to permit the Dergue to put down the insurrection in Eritrea. The Dergue and Emperor Haile Selassie impressed on the Israelis that if the Eritreans ever become independent, they will join the Arab League and thus deny Israel use of the Southern portion of the Red Sea and the Eritrean islands therein. In its official pronouncements, the Dergue has been a staunch supporter of the Palestinians' rights to their homeland, but at the same time the Ethiopians were directly collaborating with Israel. However, once Ethiopia's dependence on Israel for arms and ammunition was made public by Moshe Dayan in 1978, the Dergue officially severed all relation contracts with Israel.

Over the years, Ethiopia's foreign policy, as it applied to its objective in Eritrea, has changed very little. One cannot help but observe the ever-present striking symmetry between the approaches and objectives of Mengistu Haile-Mariam and Emperor Haile Selassie, since on Eritrea at least, there is not the slightest difference between "Socialist" Ethiopia and "Imperial" Ethiopia. The expansionist tendencies of Ethiopian rulers did not start with Mengistu. Historically, Ethiopian rulers, through an amalgamation of facts and fiction, have attempted to expand Ethiopia's geographic horizon. Margery Perham, the eminent historian, commenting on Haile Selassie's claim to Eritrea and Somalia in the early forties, wrote:

It is indeed sad that Ethiopia, so recently herself the victim of imperialism at its most ruthless, and faced with immense tasks, at home and especially in the former misgoverned regions conquered by Menelik, should be reviving his (Menelik's) imperialist policy.⁶⁰

What Praham said of Haile Selassie 37 years ago is equally true of Mengistu Haile Mariam today. Just as Haile Selassie followed Menelik's expansionist policy, so is Mengistu following Haile Selassie's.

Notes

1. For a thorough account of the early days of the British Military Administration of Eritrea, see Lord Rennel Rodd,

- K.B.E., C.B., *British Military Administration of Occupied Territories in Africa* (1941-1947), London: H.M. Stationary Office, 1948.
2. Public Records Office, London J2807/2807/1, June 27, 1942.
 3. Ibid.
 4. E.a. Chapman-Andrew, "Memorandum on Eritrea," PRO J2807/2807/1, May 29, 1942.
 5. Ibid.
 6. A.J. Toynbee, "Disposal of Eritrea," Most Secret Fo. 371/354 14, n.d.
 7. Ibid.
 8. Foreign Office Research Department, Most Secret Fo. 371/40601, March, 1944.
 9. Colonial Office, "The Future of Italian Colonies," A Memorandum to the Foreign Office; Most Secret Fo. 372/35414, April 21, 1943.
 10. Ibid.
 11. Cairo Conversations, February, 1945, between Emperor Haile Selassie and Prime Minister Winston Churchill, Annex I, Memorandum on Eritrea, Top Secret Fo. 371/46052.
 12. Ibid.
 13. Ibid.
 14. Government of the United States of America, Department of State, Paris Peace Conference, 1946 (selected documents), Publication 2868, Conference Series 103, Washington, D.C., US Government Printing Office, 1947.
 15. *Four Power Commission of Investigation for the Former Italian Colonies*. Vol. I, Report on Eritrea, 1948.
 16. Council of Foreign Ministers (Deputies), Former Italian Colonies. Minutes of Meetings (Lancaster House, London, 1948).
 17. Ibid.
 18. General Assembly, 145th Plenary Meeting, United Nations, November 21, 1949.
 19. Ibid.
 20. Ibid.
 21. Ibid.
 22. Ibid.
 23. Report of the United Nations Commission for Eritrea.
 24. Official Records of the Fourth Session of the General Assembly, Plenary Meeting, Summary Records of Meetings, p. 302.
 25. Report of the United Nations Commission for Eritrea.
 26. Foreign Relations of the US, 1950, Vol. V, *The Near East, South Asia and Africa*, Department of State, Washington, D.C., 1978, p. 1656.
 27. Final Report of the United Nations Commissioner in Eritrea, General Assembly, Official Records. Seventh Session, Supplement No. 15 (A/2188).
 28. Draw to Foreign Office, Cable #9, August 8, 1949, Fo. 371/73846.
 29. Ibid.
 30. *It Quotidiano Eritrea*, March 11, 1950.
 31. Foreign Relations of the United States, 1950, pp. 1657-58. The Ethiopian government approached the Italian government through the State Department as to whether Italy would cease demanding independence for Eritrea in exchange for Ethiopia giving up annexation of Eritrea as an objective. See Embtel 3625, June 26, 1959, 77.00/6'2650.
 32. Ibid.
 33. United Nations General Assembly, Fifth Session Ad Hoc Political Committee, November 27, 1950, A/AC 38/L.51, p. 9.
 34. Ibid.
 35. *New York Times*, November 11, 1950.
 36. Fifth Session Plenary Meeting of the General Assembly.
 37. Ibid.
 38. Ibid.
 39. Ibid.
 40. Constitution of Eritrea, Article 91.
 41. Edward W. Mulcahy, American Consul, to the State Department. Foreign Service Dispatch, 775A. 00/9-1952.
 42. Earle J. Richey, American Consul, to the State Department. Foreign Service Dispatch, 775. 00/6-2959.
 43. Edward W. Mulcahy, American Consul, to the State Department. Foreign Service Dispatch 775A. 00/9-1952.
 44. Earle J. Richey, American Consul, to the State Department. Foreign Service Dispatch 775A. 00/6-956.
 45. ERITREA: A VICTIM OF UN DECISION AND ETHIOPIAN COLONIAL AGGRESSION. Appeal of the Eritrean to the 26th Session of the UN General Assembly, Eritrean Liberation Front Liberation Front; Peoples Liberation Forces, New York, December 1971, p. 33.
 46. Richard G. Johnson, American Consul, to the State Department. Airgram 775.00/11-1662.
 47. Ibid.
 48. Ibid.
 49. Ibid.
 50. The Office of the Emperor's Representative invited the Consular Corps in Asmara to 'send' a congratulatory message to the Emperor on the occasion of the 'union' of Eritrea and Ethiopia. The American Consul in Asmara, Richard G. Johnson, advised the State Department against sending such a message to the Emperor.
 51. Richard G. Johnson, American Consul, to the State Department. Airgram 775.00/12-1162.
 52. Richard G. Johnson, American Consul, to the State Department. Airgram 775.00/12-2162.
 53. On November 24, 1959, Ibrahim, Woldeab and Idris Adem went to the U.S. Embassy in Cairo, Egypt to present their views on the dismantling of the federal arrangement. The trio reminded the Embassy official whom they saw of the responsibility of the U.S. in the creation of the federation. Since Ethiopia had decided to abrogate the U.S.-sponsored arrangement, it was up to the U.S. to appraise the UN of the matter. See Claude G. Ross, Counselor to the Embassy for Political Affairs, American Embassy, Cairo, to the State Department. 775A 00/11-3059.
 54. Message to the Honorable Dag Hammarskjöld, Secretary General, United Nations, June 30, 1959.
 55. Tom J. Farer, *War Clouds on the Horn of Africa* (New York, Carnegie Foundation Endowment for International Peace, 1976), p. 6.
 56. Statement of Hon. Edward W. Mulcahy, Acting Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs; Hearing before the Subcommittee on International Political Affairs of the Committee on Foreign Affairs. House of Representatives, Washington, D.C., March, 1975.
 57. *Cuban Studies (Special Issue: Cuba in Africa)*, January, 1980.
 58. Moscow Radio Broadcast, March, 1977.
 59. Bereket Habte Selassie, *Conflict and Intervention in the Horn of Africa* (Monthly Review Press, New York, 1980).
 60. Letter to the Editor, *The Times* (London), March 11, 1946. Praham's letter was in response to Prime Minister of Ethiopia's letter in the previous day's issue of *The Times*, where he restated his country's claim on Eritrea based on the 'historical' relationship between Ethiopia and Eritrea.

plying a substantial portion of our aviation needs, located close to a crude supply and also close to areas where naval task forces would be operating and where airfields would be located, yet far enough removed to be reasonably safe from effective enemy bombing.

With respect to the Middle East, refineries located in Italian Somaliland and Eritrea would meet the foregoing conditions . . . therefore, as a long-range provision of potential military value, it is believed that concession on rights should be sought for United States interests to construct and operate refineries in Italian Somaliland and Eritrea. These rights should include necessary transportation and port concessions, together with air and naval base rights and communication facilities.²

The letter goes on to give a glimpse of things to come — of the agreement between the U.S. and Emperor Haile Selassie. Forrestal argues:

It would appear that demands by our probable enemies for concessions of like nature would be invited if efforts were made by the United States to include the matter of concessions to us in prospective United Nations agreements for the disposition of former Italian colonies. This would, however, be satisfactory from the military viewpoint if the matter could be handled by separate agreement with friendly nations desiring control of Italian Somaliland and Eritrea.

It is obvious who the "friendly nations" were that Secretary Forrestal had in mind. Less than four months later, Aklilu Habtewold, the then Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs of Ethiopia, visited Secretary of State Dean Acheson at the State Department, accompanied by his American legal advisor, John Spencer, who was one of the architects of Ethiopian foreign policy for many years. A recently released document shows the emerging pattern of a mutuality of interests between the American and Ethiopian governments. One passage of the document of interest to the present discussion reads as follows:

The Secretary [Acheson] expressed the pleasure

of the American Government at the military facilities which the Emperor indicated he would grant to the U.S. in Eritrea after that area has been ceded to Ethiopia. Mr. Aklilu responded that the Emperor was pleased to be of help in this matter. Still speaking in the name of the Emperor, Mr. Aklilu expressed satisfaction at the assignment of an American military attache to the Mission in Addis Ababa and with the elevation of that Mission to the rank of Embassy.³

American policy was thus wedded to the idea of meeting Ethiopian demands, as a *quid pro quo* for strategic interests in Eritrea. State Department internal memoranda issued as guidelines for the U.S. delegation at the General Assembly were clear-cut on this issue. (See a secret internal memo of September 27, 1948.) In every instance, strategic and geo-political factors, not the welfare of aspirations of the Eritrean people, were the primary considerations.

It was against this background of behind-the-scenes "deals," then, that the UN Commission of Enquiry was sent on a mission which was predetermined to a strategic objective. While the U.S. was steering Resolution 390 A(v) through the UN General Assembly, a debate raged, with the USSR leading the attack against the proposed "federation." The Soviet delegate charged:

. . . a decision is being imposed on the Eritrean people without its consent and hence, in violation of the fundamental principle of the right of self-determination of peoples. . . . The United Nations must take a decision which will satisfy the longing of the Eritrean people for independence. . . . The USSR delegation objects to the proposal for the federation of Eritrea with another State adopted without the participation of the peoples concerned, that is, without the participation of Eritrea.⁴

The Czechoslovakia delegate put it even more poignantly:

Contrary to the fundamental purposes of the [UN] Charter it [the Resolution] would deny the people of Eritrea the right to self-determination and impose on them a federation with Ethiopia

which the great majority oppose. Instead of maintaining peace in that part of the world, the Resolution would foster civil war and discord. Instead of assisting an oppressed and exploited people to achieve freedom and independence, *it would attempt to cover up the annexation of a small State by a larger State. . . .* The Czechoslovakia delegation will never be a party to intrigues against the freedom of peoples. (emphasis added)⁵

These were prophetic words. For, in point of fact, the "federal" scheme was only a step leading to annexation, and the region has not known peace since that time.

Federation: Prelude to Annexation

Though it denied the Eritrean people the exercise of their right to self-determination, Resolution 390 A(v) did nonetheless contain the following features:

- It implicitly recognized the national identity of the Eritrean people and the territorial unity of Eritrea pursuant to the colonially fixed boundaries.
- It provided for an autonomous Eritrean government with clearly defined domestic jurisdiction in legislative, executive and judicial matters.
- It guaranteed the Eritrean people "the fullest respect and safeguards for their institutions, traditions, religions and languages. . . ."
- It guaranteed all persons in Eritrea the enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms, through a detailed provision of a Bill of Rights and Fundamental Freedoms.
- It enshrined the democratic principle in Article 16 of the Eritrean Constitution (derived from the Resolution) which was the foundation of the above-listed rights and fundamental freedoms. Moreover, Article 16 was not to be amended under any circumstances.

It was clear from the outset that this democratic principle, and a democratic government in Eritrea, was a thorn in the imperial flesh of Emperor Haile Selassie's semifederal government. The Emperor's

government began to subvert the principles of the UN Resolution embodied in the Eritrean Constitution and the Federal Act, which put the UN Resolution into effect. In November, 1962, ten years after the federation came into force, the Emperor abrogated the federation and incorporated Eritrea as a province.⁶ This event occurred a little over a year after the Eritrean Liberation Front started the armed struggle and less than six months before the founding conference of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) in May, 1963. The Emperor was expertly advised to do this. The timing was crucial for the success of his gamble. The aim was to present a fait accompli of an annexed Eritrea to the first meeting of an All-African Heads of States which established the OAU in Addis Ababa.

His gamble seemed to work; not only was the Eritrean question not raised at the first OAU meeting, but a year later when the African leaders agreed to accept the colonially fixed boundaries to define their statehood, Eritrea (a former colonial territory) was forgotten. This was due to Ethiopian perfidy and the Emperor's special status as an elder statesman and father-figure in a divided Africa desirous of a consensus. Thus was the Eritrean question kept off the African agenda for over a decade, with Haile Selassie's successors benefiting from his imperial designs and astute diplomacy, until the military successes of the EPLF forced the issues on the international community.

Eritrea and International Law Today

The fall of Emperor Haile Selassie's government in 1974 and the advent of a radical military government reversed the traditional pattern of alliances. By 1977 the Soviet Union switched sides from support of the Somalis to that of the Ethiopians in the contention for the Ogaden and the right of its people for self-determination. The Somali army lost out to the Ethiopian army in a war in which Soviet weapons and military advice together with some 15,000 Cuban troops fighting on the Ethiopian side changed an earlier Somali victory into defeat, by the spring of 1978. The Soviet-backed Ethiopian army, now considerably strengthened, turned its attention to Eritrea. Here again, the Soviet Union unabashedly changed sides, reversing its previous support of the Eritrean cause as a just

one. This powerful external involvement revived the question of international law in the Eritrean quest for self-determination.

Articles 1 and 55 of the United Nations Charter and several Resolutions of the UN General Assembly provided the legal framework for the exercise of the right of peoples to self-determination. Indeed, the evolution of international law in the era of decolonization, particularly since 1960, has been dramatic. The adoption of Resolutions 1514 and 1541 in 1960, and 2526 in 1970 leave no room for doubt but that the international community (and its legal expression, the UN) hold no quarters for even entertaining any denial to the quest of peoples under colonial rule or alien domination, for self-determination up to independence. It is unthinkable today even to contemplate the adoption of Resolution 390 A(v) under which the Eritrean people were denied their right to self-determination. The fact remains, though, that not only were the Eritrean people's right denied in the first place, but the Ethiopian government's violation of the terms of the Resolution went unheeded, and remain un-sanctioned today.

The question now is: how long can the issue be evaded or postponed, without calling into question the integrity of the UN system as a whole? Certainly, in the face of the murderous war which has sent nearly a million refugees wandering across the border, and in view of the persistence of the Eritrean popular resistance and the growth of the guerrilla army backed by the entire population, the UN can no longer continue to ignore the question. In terms of general principles of international law, the Eritrean people demanded (this time, arms-in hand) that what was granted to the other former colonial peoples of Africa as a matter of right must be granted to them, too. Few have questioned the justice of their cause, on moral or legal grounds. And justice, like peace, is indivisible.

In more specific terms, the following questions arise with respect to the Eritrean people's claim to self-determination and independence:

- (1) Is the population of Eritrea a "people" within the meaning of international law pertaining to self-determination?
- (2) If the answer is in the affirmative, was that

right exercised in 1952 when the UN Resolution (390 A(v)) came into effect?

- (3) What was the effect of the abolition of the federation and the incorporation of Eritrea into Ethiopia in 1962?
- (4) Does the United Nations have the right now to enquire into the Eritrean claim for independence made by the liberation movement?

The first question was aptly answered by the International Commission of Jurists like this: "... the Eritreans have as much right to be considered as a "people" as the people of most of the African countries which were created by the division of Africa among the imperial powers at the end of the 19th century."⁷ The ICJ goes on to point out that UN Resolution 390 A(v), which proposed that Eritrea be treated as an autonomous unit within the Ethiopian federation was clearly treating the Eritrean population as a "people" distinct from the people of Ethiopia, with a territory of their own defined by colonial history. This was also the conclusion reached by the Permanent Tribunal of Peoples in May, 1980.⁸

As to the second question, the introductory discussion has demonstrated that the Eritrean people did not "accept" the UN proposal; it was forced on them. No referendum or plebiscite was arranged to enable them freely to express their wish.

Resolution 390 A(v) created a vicious circle: the Eritrean people were in a "take-it-or-leave-it" situation under which an Assembly accepted a fait accompli. That Assembly cannot be regarded as representative of the Eritrean people or as having popular mandate to agree to the UN proposal. Addressing this issue, the ICJ expressed a demurer, as follows:

It is clear that they [the Eritreans] can bring forward strong evidence to support these contentions. Nevertheless, it seems difficult to conceive that the United Nations of today would agree to override a decision of the United Nations taken 30 years earlier on a matter of this kind. . . .⁹

In answer to question 3, the ICJ argues that even

assuming that the Eritrean people were presumed to have accepted the UN proposal of local autonomy within an Ethiopian federation, the people have the right to claim independence afresh, "if the federal state concerned denies its democratic rights to the people who have opted to join it." The authority for this conclusion is UN Resolution 2526 of 1970, which declared the principles of international law concerning friendly relations and cooperation among states. Resolution 2526 provides the clearest legal authority for the principles of equal rights and self-determination of peoples. It defines the relationship between this principle and the principle of the territorial integrity of states by making the latter conditional upon the observance of the former principle. It states:

Nothing in the foregoing paragraphs shall be construed as authorizing or encouraging any action which would dismember or impair, totally or in part, the territorial integrity or political unity of sovereign and independent states *conducting themselves in compliance with the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples as described above and thus possessed of a government representing the whole people belonging to the territory without distinction to race, creed or colour.* (emphasis added).¹⁰

It is clear from this crucial passage that where there is a violation of the principles of equal rights and self-determination, this right would prevail over that of territorial integrity.

As noted earlier, the violation of the terms and conditions set forth by the UN Resolution had started almost immediately after the federation came into force. The Emperor's representative infringed on the autonomous jurisdiction of the Eritrean government. Basic democratic and human rights, including freedoms of the press, of assembly and of association, were suppressed. Less than five years after the entry into force of the federation, Tigringna and Arabic, which were the official languages of Eritrea, were suppressed and arbitrarily substituted by Amharic. This created enormous obstacles to the educational advance of a whole generation of Eritreans.

Then the Emperor caused to be read to the Eritrean Assembly a proclamation announcing the termination of the federation. The "assent," which the Eritrean Assembly supposedly gave to the proclamation was obtained literally at gun point with armed members of the para-military police present in the Assembly Hall, with others demonstrating outside, brandishing their arms menacingly. But even if the assent had not been obtained under duress, it would still be illegal. Members of an Eritrean Assembly sworn to defend the Eritrean Constitution and the rights of the citizens, had no mandate to assent to the overthrow of the system without a referendum or other forms of popular participation. Indeed, the Eritrean constitution provides that the Assembly "may not, by means of an amendment, introduce into the constitution any provision which would not be in conformity with the Federal Act,"¹¹ and "Article 16 of the constitution, by the terms of which the constitution of Eritrea is based on the principles of democratic government, shall not be amended."

It is clear from the above that the abolition of the federation and the incorporation of Eritrea as an Ethiopian province was not "in compliance with the principle equal rights and self-determination." As the ICJ has put it:

Since the people of Eritrea *ex hypothesi*, agreed to union with Ethiopia only as an autonomous unit, the abolition of that status and its integration within Ethiopia cannot be regarded as being in compliance with equal rights and self-determination of peoples unless there was a clear and unequivocal decision by the peoples of Eritrea in favour of that change.¹²

As to the question whether the UN is entitled now to enquire into the claim of the Eritrean people for self-determination, the above discussion in answer to the third question has indicated the answer. International law has affirmed the centrality of the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples. Not only the General Assembly of the UN, but authoritative juristic opinion has reaffirmed this principle. The International Court of Justice gave an opinion, at the request of the General Assembly, in respect of the right of the people

of Western Sahara to self-determination. They declared, *inter alia*, that the juridical ties which might have existed at the onset of Spanish colonization between the people of Western Sahara, on the one hand, and the Kingdom of Morocco and Mauritania, on the other, could not now impede the exercise of the right of the Sahrawi people to self-determination.¹³

The Permanent People's Tribunal, which gave an advisory opinion in the case of Eritrea in May 1980, makes specific reference to the opinion of the International Court on the Western Sahara, drawing a parallel between the Sahrawi and Eritrean cases, and affirming the existence of an Eritrean "people" in international law.¹⁴ The International Court of Justice, which is traditionally cautious and conservative, emphatically asserts the central role of the principle of self-determination in the contemporary international community. The People's Tribunal is even more categorical in asserting the centrality of this principle. And, as Friedman has written, in the development of general principles of law, "more important judicial advance will continue to come from special international tribunals, or from arbitration tribunals. . . ."¹⁵

The UN is clearly entitled to hear the case of Eritrea now more than ever before. Its responsibility did not end with the passage of Resolution 390 A(v) or its coming into force in 1952. As Anze Matienzo, the UN Commissioner on Eritrea, and his panel of jurists put it:

With regard to the application of the General Assembly's resolution after the entry into force of the Federal Act and the Eritrean constitution have come into force the mission entrusted to the General Assembly under the Peace Treaty with Italy will have been fulfilled and that the future of Eritrea must be regarded as settled, but it does not follow that the United Nations would no longer have any right to deal with the question. The United Nations Resolution of Eritrea would remain an international instrument and, if violated, the General Assembly could be seized of the matter.¹⁶

The UN is thus not only entitled but is duty-bound to entertain a hearing of the Eritrean case. The Ethiopian government cannot avail itself of Article 1(7) of the Charter, which must be read together with Resolution 390 A(v) and other UN Resolutions, notably Resolution 2526, as explained above. Indeed, the Ethiopian government, being aware of the legal validity of the Eritrean claim for self-determination and independence, issued a secret memorandum to its diplomats to steer clear from any involvement in legal arguments over the issue, but rather to stress politico-strategic imperatives.¹⁷

There is a growing awareness about the nature and justice of the Eritrean cause and prestigious juridical circles, including the International Commission of Jurists, have added the weight of their authority to that cause. It is to be hoped that the growing number of states that now support the Eritrean claim in Africa, the Middle East and elsewhere will succeed in bringing the matter before the UN General Assembly and thus help pave the way for a peaceful resolution of the 22-year-old conflict.

Notes

1. Market International Report, Ethiopia Summary.
2. Letter written December 11, 1948.
3. Department of State, Memorandum of Conversation, March 30, 1949.
4. The official stand of the Soviet Union on the Eritrean Question in the UN in 1950, reproduced in EPLF's *Memorandum*, August 1978, pp. 32-35.
5. *Ibid.*, pp. 36-38.
6. For a detailed discussion on the subject see the author's "Eritrea and the United Nations," in *The Eritrean Case (1982)*, Proceedings of the Permanent Peoples' Tribunal of the International League of the Rights and Liberation of Peoples, Session on Eritrea.
7. See *Review*, number 26, June 1981.
8. See *The Eritrean Case*, Brussels, 1982.
9. *Ibid.*
10. *Horn of Africa*, Vol. 1, No. 4, 1978.
11. Article 91.
12. *Ibid.*
13. See Court Opinion, 1973, p. 68, Paragraph 162.
14. *The Eritrean Case*, loc cit.
15. W.G. Friedman, *Law in a Changing Society* (1972), London, p. 87.
16. *Final Report of the United Nations Commissioner to Eritrea*, Chapter II, Paragraph 201.
17. See *Horn of Africa*, Volume 1, Number 4, 1978.

The General Assembly resolution does not give him the mandate to concern himself with this problem. He must work in close collaboration with the British Administration and the Ethiopian government and rigorously respect their respective jurisdictions. The problem of bandit activities falls under the British jurisdiction. The Commissioner does not wish to encroach upon this jurisdiction, but he has publicly condemned, in accordance with the principles of the United Nations, the activities of the *shifita*. He has also offered the British Administration the moral support of the United Nations in the fight against bandit activities in Eritrea.

These two elements — the unanimous favorable reaction to the General Assembly resolution on the one hand, and the continuation of dangerous activities on the other — constituted a great moral preoccupation which has pushed the Commissioner to decide that before undertaking consultations, there should be an attempt to establish peace and tranquility. In fact, certain preparatory stages for the adoption of the constitution — for example, the election of the Assembly — cannot be accomplished except in an atmosphere of calm and confidence.

The Commissioner exposed next the general ideas of the United Nations on the project of the constitution. This would have four parts: 1) a general part; 2) the Eritrean government *lato sensu*; 3) the judicial power; 4) the revision of the constitution.

The Commissioner will not now deal with the Federal Act which concerns the Federal Government as well as Eritrea. This Act indeed will be easily drafted, since all its elements can already be found in the resolution.

The first part or general part will deal with the following points.

The attribution of federal nationality to persons residing in Eritrea should be clarified. There will be a single nationality, the federal nationality, which is that of the nationality of the Ethiopian Federation. Foreigners who have lived in Eritrea for ten years will have the right to obtain the federal nationality.

With regard to human rights and fundamental liberties (which, in virtue of number 7 of the reso-

lution will be accorded to Eritrean citizens and to all persons residing in Eritrea), the provisions of number 7 could be integrated into the text of the constitution.

Even though the human rights and fundamental liberties of all people residing in Eritrea are recognized, these people fall into three different categories: 1) those possessing the federal nationality; 2) those possessing a foreign nationality and who have lived in Eritrea for ten years before the date of the adoption of the December 2, 1950 resolution. These people will be authorized to live in Eritrea and to consecrate themselves there to any peaceful law-abiding occupation; 3) other foreigners.

It would be useful to introduce into the actual text of the constitution an Article which reproduces the essential [parts] of the last paragraph of the preamble of the resolution concerning the respect and safeguarding of the institutions, traditions, religions and languages of the inhabitants of Eritrea.

The official and the recognized languages of Eritrea should be determined. One or several of the native languages should have the status of official languages (perhaps Tygrinia or Arabic). It also seems that a European language should have the status of official language (English, which as a great international diffusion; or Italian, which is understood and spoken by a large part of the native population).

Questions included in the jurisdiction of the Government of Eritrea and those included in the jurisdiction of the Federal Government must be determined. Number 3 of the resolution indicates the areas which come under the jurisdiction of the Federal Government. The other areas fall under that of the Eritrean Government.

Among the questions included in the jurisdiction of the Federal Government are found national defense and the police, foreign affairs, money, finance, exterior commerce, communications, (post office, telegraph and telephone systems on one hand, roads and railroads on the other — under federal jurisdiction when they are used for communications with foreign countries, or at the same time for local and foreign use), aviation, and ports.

Under the exclusive jurisdiction of the Eritrean government fall legislation and justice, public af-

fairs, prisons and local administrations, production (agriculture, industry, interior commerce and the government of professions), work legislation, social security, public assistance, education, and public health.

Apart from these, there are mixed jurisdictions, shared by the Federal Government and the Eritrean Government, such as finances (the Eritrean budget proper, collection of taxes intended to cover expenses for services special to Eritrea) and communications (roads and railroads of local and regional interest).

The emblem of Eritrea could be the federal flag of both Ethiopia and Eritrea. The Ethiopian national anthem would become the federal anthem; there would be no Eritrean anthem.

The second part, the organization of the Government, would deal with the following points.

The essential elements of a democratic constitution are the respect for human rights and fundamental liberties and universal suffrage (periodic, free, and sincere elections).

The Eritrean Government should be simple. It should also be effective (authority would be concentrated in a small number of people.)

The following problems present themselves for the electorate: universal suffrage or restricted suffrage, the establishment of the voting age — for Moslems, the legal age [age when one is considered to be an adult] is fixed at 15 years old, for Copts, there is, strictly speaking, no legal age. All of these questions must be studied later.

The right to vote will be given to: 1) inhabitants of Eritrea who have been granted federal nationality; 2) people of Ethiopian origin living in Eritrea (the only condition that will be imposed on them will be that of a delay of residency).

Taking a census of voters will be difficult due to the lack of a census and of established traditions.

With regards to the Assembly, the legislative power is generally composed of two chambers. It still seems that a single chamber should be envisioned, which is conceived on democratic principles and is elective.

There is no advantage either from the political or technical point of view of having an Assembly composed of a large number of members.

The principle of eligibility must be established. An exception could be made for certain civil servants because one could fear that they would use their authority to exert a certain pressure on the voters. The principle of the incompatibility of the public function and the parliamentary mandate must therefore be retained.

The mandate of the deputies need not be very short.

The method of the election of the Assembly will depend in large part on the manner in which the question of the utilization of traditional means for the choice of the representatives of the population or of the combination of traditional means with democratic methods is resolved.

The fact, for example, that certain elements of the population are semi-nomads will create a complication. As these people always have permanent points of attachment, they could be connected to a territorial district which is charged with electing a party.

The Commissioner developed a personal idea according to which an election method based on the indirect method could be adopted. Maybe unities of 1000 voters which would choose a delegate could be created. These delegates of electoral unities could in turn form a body of voters who would elect a representative to the Assembly.

Other than its ordinary sessions, the Assembly could hold [line missing from photocopy of document].

The Commissioner is in favor of a fixed salary for the members of the Assembly. Parliamentary immunity should be inscribed in the constitution.

It would be useful to establish in Eritrea, alongside the Government and the Assembly, a Council of technicians who would be asked to draft and revise the texts of legal projects and regulations. This council would be purely optional, its members would have to be jurists.

With respect to the Executive, it seems that he must be stable. He must remain in charge throughout the duration of his mandate.

The Executive Council would be composed of several elements: the chief of the Executive [branch] and the secretaries, charged with the direction of the different departments, which could

correspond to the diverse administrative activities. The terminology of these titles should be established later.

As for the Administration, it seems normal that the constitution fix certain rules concerning its institutions.

These categories of people who could have access to public functions are found. Access would be open to Eritrean citizens as well as to those in possession of the federal nationality who are not Eritrean citizens. The third category of people could include foreigners. Since there are relatively few native Eritrean citizens capable at this point of occupying posts in the superior levels of the administration, access to the administration could be opened to foreigners. Foreigners could be brought to Eritrea for this purpose; but it would seem more logical to employ those who are already there and who are already in possession of some experience, that is to say the Italians and the British subjects.

The Commissioner believes that the general idea which he has just set forth allow for a first discussion. He has avoided certain aspects of the question which he prefers to set forth in detail later.

He added that his trips to Eritrea have not constituted consultations properly speaking, but have had as their object to make contact with the population. The British Chief Administrator has also expressed the desire to know the major lines according to which the constitution would be established, in order to permit him to go ahead and undertake the formation of the administration.

He would like, after this first reunion, to hear the point of view of the Ethiopian government, and thinks that after that it should be possible to establish the agenda of the consultations which will take place at Asmara upon the visit of the Minister of Foreign Affairs. After this visit, if the need is felt, work groups will be formed which will stay in touch with the Ethiopian government and which will proceed with detailed studies of diverse questions.

AKLILOU ABTE WOLD (Minister of Foreign Affairs) thanked the Commissioner for his very clear and succinct exposé and stated that he would communicate the point of view of his Government during the course of the next reunion. He will then make several observations and will express some ideas on diverse points.

It was decided that the next reunion would be held Tuesday, May 29, at 4:00 P.M.

The session ended at 5:30 P.M.

AKLILOU ABTE WOLD (Minister of Foreign Affairs) indicated that he would expose the point of view of his Government, first in its principal lines and then entering into the major details, all the while following the order adopted by the Commissioner in his exposition of the day before.

In the first place, he wished however to say a few words on the subject of the security problem in Eritrea. The activities of the *shifto* do not constitute a new question. They were the subject of discussions at Lake Success before the arrival of the Commission of Inquiry in Eritrea, on the occasion of its visit to Eritrea and afterwards at Addis Ababa. All the members of the Commission agreed to acknowledge that Ethiopia was in no way responsible for this situation, especially since the Administration in Eritrea is a British Administration. When the question was again debated in the course of this last session, the Minister of Foreign Affairs evoked the diverse interventions of His Majesty the Emperor and his very own in view of putting an end to these dangerous activities. In fact the history of Ethiopia does not contain acts of terrorism committed for political ends. At the debates at Lake Success, the representatives of the United Kingdom himself recognized that the acts of bandit activities which were taking place in Eritrea were not political, and the Commissioner himself agrees on this point. The General Assembly resolution was favorably received in general by the population, happy to see a long period of waiting come to an end. The Ethiopian Government has always been ready to do all in its power to help stop bandit activities in Eritrea and will continue to do what it can towards this end. It is in fact in the interest of Ethiopia that peace and security should reign in a country that will become part of the Federation.

Referring next to Articles 11 and 14 of the resolution of December 2, 1950, relative to the arrangements to be taken by the British Administration in view of the transfer of powers, the Minister of Foreign Affairs called to mind how much he had insisted at Lake Success that the solution brought to the problem of Eritrea be accomplished in a very

brief amount of time in order to avoid problems of peace and security. The Eritrean population has waited nine years for its future to be decided; it should not have to wait any longer. But, in spite of this fact, the transition period has been fixed at two years.

Moreover, the Ethiopian government, which is responsible from the international point of view for the maintenance of order, the respect of the rights of foreigners, human rights and fundamental liberties and which however does not have the means to assure respect by the police of these rights, is justified in being concerned with the shifta problems.

The Minister of Foreign Affairs declared himself in agreement from the general point of view with the observations of the Commissioner relative to the consultations with the population, current consultations with respect to the constitution and ulterior consultations on the representative and democratic system of government.

“With respect to human rights and fundamental liberties (which, in virtue of Number 7 of the resolution, will be granted to Eritrean citizens and all persons residing in Eritrea), the provisions of Number 7 could be integrated into the text of the constitution.

The Commissioner had stated that the purpose of his trips to Eritrea had been to familiarize himself with the country, to enter into contact with public opinion, and to explain the resolution, but not to obtain the advice of the population on the federal solution. This [solution] had been decided upon by the General Assembly, after two Commissions of Inquiry had been sent on location to explore the opinion and after representatives from different Eritrean parties had been heard at Lake Success. Such a solution established in this manner is certainly accepted by the majority of the population. It is a compromise solution and it is no longer necessary to ask the opinion of the population. In adopting the constitution, the Eritrean people will express its acceptance of the resolution.

Otherwise, it should not be forgotten that it is the Commissioner himself who is preparing the constitution in consultation with the Imperial Government of Ethiopia and others, that the Eritrean Assembly only adopts it and that even this adoption is not definitive because it does not go into effect until it is ratified by His Imperial Majesty.

It also should not be forgotten that the desires of the inhabitants of Eritrea are not the only factor to take into consideration. In the resolution of December 2, 1950, in the resolution which created the Commission of Inquiry as well as in the Peace Treaty, the peace and security of this part of the world and the rights of Ethiopia are also considered.

All of these considerations assume some importance when the preamble to the constitution is being drafted. The ideas of the Minister on this point will be presented at the opportune moment.

As far as the other aspect of the consultations is concerned, namely the consultations implied by any democratic and representative system of government once it is established, as would be the case with Eritrea, the Minister of Foreign Affairs agrees with His Excellency the Commissioner when he declares that this would be the first time in its history that Eritrea would enjoy such a system of government. Consequently, the introduction of this system into a country with no representative tradition and where there have never been elections and where no census takes place, results in certain complications and difficulties, as, for example, the difficulty of establishing, in the absence of any census, genuine electoral bases; the question of the voting age; the introduction of the procedures and techniques of election; the problem already raised of indirect elections, etc.

Because of this lack of traditions and of men qualified to fill governmental functions, His Excellency the Commissioner was logical and rational in proposing a single legislative chamber, and the Minister of Foreign Affairs is in absolute agreement with him on this point. This would in effect avoid electoral complications, procedural and other, and would not require the search for enough people capable of filling the seats in two chambers. For this same reason, all precautions must be taken so that the Government is not at the mercy of a chamber without traditions — which could be the case for example if there were parliamentary system of government. The chamber must be simple and effective.

Otherwise it should be noted that Article 2 of the resolution mentions three distinct powers, that is, legislative, executive, and judicial, of the Eritrean government. Ethiopia is however responsible for Eritrea on the international level. And yet Ethiopia

cannot assure order there because it cannot control the police there. Ethiopia can hardly accept nevertheless that a state of anarchy reign in a part of the Federal state — such as the situation currently created by the shifta. Consequently, the Executive [branch] must be armed with the powers necessary to assure order, security, protection of foreigners, etc. It is by means of the Executive [branch] that the respect of federal jurisdictions will be assured. In addition, Article 1 of the Resolution states that Eritrea would be a unity federated with Ethiopia under the Crown of His Majesty the Emperor. Now it is evident that it is by means of the Executive [branch] that the link with the Supreme Executive of the Federation must be established.

The Minister of Foreign Affairs went next to the study of the major details of the clauses of the constitution.

The General Assembly was in agreement on the principle of unity established by Article 1 of the resolution.

The Commissioner's idea, according to which elections by districts can be envisioned is in accordance with this idea of unity, and the indirect elections on the basis of districts is an extremely interesting idea and certainly one to be studied.

The powers of the Legislative [branch] should be carefully considered. A detailed study should be consecrated as well to the powers of the Executive [branch] in light of the Federal Act and the observations the Minister just made.

AKLILOU ABTE WOLD formally acknowledged the exposition which the Commissioner had given of the respective jurisdictions of the Federal Government, the Eritrean Government, and the shared jurisdictions of the two Governments. He formally acknowledged the Commissioner's observations on this subject, citing as examples of matters of federal jurisdiction: finances; money; the ports; the telephone, telegraph, and postal systems; interstate communications and commerce; interstate roads; foreign affairs; defense; aviation; etc.; and [he stated that] when a matter is one of double jurisdiction (federal and local), it falls under federal jurisdiction. Falling under the exclusive jurisdiction of the Eritrean government are notably health and education. It should be noted

that health falls, in the case of international conventions, for example, under the jurisdiction of the Federal Government, since it will represent Eritrea on the international level. As far as education is concerned, the Federal Government will also have jurisdiction when it subsidizes Eritrean schools or if it sends Eritreans abroad [to study].

He does not feel it necessary to acknowledge in the constitution the functions which the autonomous constitution would obviously not be able to attribute to the Federal Government; but those which are a direct result of the Federal Act are under the exclusive jurisdiction of the Federal Government. For example, in Article 7 of the resolution, the problem of the expulsion of foreigners, paragraph (i), and the matter of the petition and the commutation of the death penalty, paragraph (j), fall under federal jurisdiction in virtue not of the constitution but of the Federal Act itself.

As far as Article 6 is concerned, it seems logical that those of mixed race cannot become nationals of the Federation before the Federal act goes into effect. This language is analogous to that used in many treaties. Now in these treaties no change of nationality is effected before the provisions which prescribe or permit this change go into effect. In fact, the Federal Act itself is not effective as long as it has not been ratified.

As for certain questions which fall under the jurisdiction of the Federal Government, as the hiring of foreign technicians due to Eritrea's lack of qualified personnel, it does not seem necessary to include them in the constitution. They can be the object of laws or of particular arrangements.

The Minister of Foreign Affairs stated that the question of languages had been discussed with the Eritrean representatives — notably representatives of the Muslim League of Massaua and of the Liberal Progressive Party — who had come to see him. It is known that language in general is a factor of unity. In Eritrea several languages are spoken. The Minister proposed that Amharic, which is the official language of Ethiopia, where several languages are also spoken, be adopted as the official language for Eritrea. Eritreans will nevertheless have the right to address themselves to the Administration in any other language which might be

their own and that the language of the region could be taught in the schools at the same time as Amharic. The Eritrean representatives who had come to see the Minister accepted this proposition.

The Commissioner had suggested including in the constitution an article based on the last paragraph of the Preamble relative to the respect and safeguard of the Institutions, traditions, religion, and languages of the inhabitants of Eritrea and the constitution, institutions, traditions, status and international identity of the Ethiopian Empire. This paragraph, on the one hand, refers not only to Eritrea, but also to Ethiopia. On the other hand, it appears in the Preamble to the Resolution, while the Federal Act, according to the provisions of Article 8 of the Resolution, consists only of Articles 1 to 7. Consequently, it is doubtful whether it is proper to include such a clause in the constitution.

He believes, like the Commissioner, that the budget for Eritrea should be prepared by the Eritrean Executive.

The Commissioner had also indicated that the constitutionality of the Eritrean laws could be determined by an Eritrean court; this seemed [to the Minister] to be an interesting idea.

The Minister of Foreign Affairs finished by saying that, at the next session, or when the Commissioner felt it was an appropriate time, he would be happy to study in their major details the powers of the Executive and Legislative [branches] respectively.

The Commissioner thanked the Minister of Foreign Affairs for having presented so clearly the point of view of his Government on certain points of the constitution.

The Commissioner saw his present task in the following manner. There are three types of preliminary consultations [necessary] for the preparation of the definitive text of the constitution; these are the consultations with the Ethiopian government, with the British government, and with the inhabitants of Eritrea. In order for this constitution to then go into effect, it must be approved by the Commissioner and by the Eritrean assembly and ratified by the Emperor.

The Commissioner would like to establish at this stage of the consultations his conception of the different elements contained in the resolution. This text contains fixed elements which must be incorporated in the constitution and which cannot be changed, as well as elements lending themselves to interpretation and which can be adapted to real situations.

As a judicial norm, the constitution is also a permanent element, and a living element destined to promote peace and prosperity. Eritrea, which was first a colony, then was governed by a foreign administration, will be an autonomous unity as part of the Federation. It is therefore in the interest of the Federation itself that this autonomous unity be viable.

The Commissioner finished by expressing his hope that the outcome of this problem would be seen as one of the happiest proceedings in the history of this part of the world.

He reminded [the Minister] that he did not want to infringe on the jurisdictions of others. As far as the project of a constitution is concerned, the Commissioner must establish it in consultation with the authority designated by the Administration, with the Ethiopian Government and with the inhabitants of Eritrea; but as far as the customs union and the formation of the Assembly is concerned; it is not his responsibility but that of the British Administration to take the initiative to consult the Ethiopian Government and to ask the opinion of the Commissioner. The Commissioner would like to have a general view of the question. He was of the impression that certain groups of Eritreans were anxious to go ahead and he would like to know the progress already accomplished in this direction.

AKLILOU ABTE WOLD (Minister of Foreign Affairs) repeated that the Ethiopian Government was offering to the Commissioner its greatest collaboration and that it would demonstrate a great comprehension within the scope of the resolution, while taking the realities into account.



Independent Eritrea: Economically Viable?

Araia Tseggai



While the former Italian colonies of Libya and Somalia are now independent member-nations of the United Nations, Eritrea, a former Italian colony, finds itself in an unending struggle to achieve the same rights and status for its people as did all other former European colonies of the Third World. Since many of them are much smaller in size, poorer in economic resources and less strategically located than Eritrea, it is important and timely to verify or refute the assertion that "Eritrea is almost certainly not a viable unit on its own," and that "its people have no chance" for survival if it were to attain its independence. (Gray, et al 1948:88,89).

The purpose of this paper is not to argue for the independence of Eritrea on grounds of its economic viability. The question of independence is a question of the right of the Eritrean people to self-determination as a colonized people — be they rich or poor. But the allegation of poor and non-viable Eritrea, which has persisted since the Second World War, needs to be put to the test.

The main purpose of this paper is, therefore, to investigate whether or not an independent Eritrean nation would be economically viable. What makes this issue significant is that the alleged economic nonviability of Eritrea was used at the UN in 1950 as one of the reasons to deny the Eritrean people's right to self-determination and independence. Question: Is Eritrea economically viable? How does its economy fare relative to those of other countries of the Third World? What are its economic potentials and prospects for the future?

Agricultural Potential

It has been repeatedly alleged that the Eritrean economy's weakness is its limited agricultural potential as reflected by the yearly imports of food-stuffs during the colonial era, its low rainfall, and its primitive agricultural system. But, as Sherman observed, these 'indicators' are not valid premises on which to build a case of economic non-viability:

Many analysts believe that in Eritrea the possibilities for large-scale agricultural development are limited. . . . Often cited as reasons for the low level of agricultural production are the traditional land tenure systems and the unscientific farming methods in use in the country. Should Eritrea become independent, neither of these practices will necessarily continue (under the liberation movements' economic programming. Sherman 1980:11

Furthermore, the lack of adequate rainfall can be overcome in mountainous Eritrea through a long-term program of water conservation by building dams, reservoirs, and irrigational systems, as has been successfully done in some other countries. Also the extensive potash reserves — useful as fertilizer — in the country will contribute greatly to agricultural yield in the future. "Indicators" of nonviability are, at best, only problems that can, in the long run, be solved. Thus,

The hypothesis that Eritrea cannot feed its population has been based on political and technological considerations rather than objective agricultural potential. Italian colonial policy was mainly concerned with producing cash crops for the Italian market. . . . In the past, therefore, political decisions actually determined to what extent Eritrea could feed its people. Sherman 1980:112

Agriculture is the backbone of the Eritrean economy. The viable existence of Eritrea rests largely on the development of its agricultural resources. Even its potential for industrial development is highly related to the development of its agricultural sector. The cultivable land area is com-

Table 1
Cultivated Land, Production & Average Yield of Crops, 1974/5-1975/6

Types of Crops	Cultivated Land in Hectares		Production in Tons		Average Yield in Tons/Hectare	
	1974/75	1975/76	1974/75	1975/76	1974/75	1975/76
Cereals	212,306	210,611	75,747	136,636	0.357	0.649
Pulses	13,784	24,951	5,687	6,990	0.412	0.280
Oil Seeds	24,835	15,401	6,366	5,264	0.256	0.342
Vegetables	7,134	11,937	37,789	36,644	5.297	3.070
Fruits	1,549	1,426	23,801	18,460	15,365	12.945
Fiber Crops	12,872	8,846	16,263	12,845	1,263	1.452
Other Crops	40	27	40	10	1.000	0.370
Totals	272,520	273,199	165,693	216,849	0.608	0.794

Source: Eritrea Chamber of Commerce, *Trade and Development Bulletin-Annual Report*, December 1975, and December 1976.

paratively small. Most of it is in the climatically suitable highland, where intensive farming is carried out. (See Table 1.)

Most of the cereals and vegetables is consumed locally, whereas the major part of fruit and oilseed production has always been exported to Europe and neighboring countries. The lack of large-scale irrigation projects has so far prevented the realization of higher production levels, which could have greatly improved the country's capacity to feed its growing population. The UN Commission for Eritrea recognized this problem in 1950 when it assessed the situation:

It has been estimated that if and when increases in cultivable acreage which are technically possible could be accomplished, 40,000 additional tons of grain crops could be produced. This would more than meet the existing cereal deficit... UN 1950:77

The agricultural sector consists of two parts: the traditional and the modern. The traditional has been engaged for ages in subsistence agriculture and is concentrated in the highlands, where the climate and the sedentary life-style are suitable. The traditional land-tenure system of the highlands can be broadly divided into the "risti" and the "diesa."

Risti is a form of private ownership, where land is held by a particular family, and cannot be

sold or otherwise alienated except with the consent of that family. This system of land holding is the minor one, the dominant one being the *diesa* system. This is usually described as a communal system of tenure. In principle, it is a system where land is held by the village in common and is redistributed every seven years in order to take account of changing needs of the families of the village. Barnett 1980:112

The land-tenure system and primitive farming techniques have been identified as the cause of low production levels in the traditional sector indicating the necessity for fundamental reforms in order to bring about higher levels of agricultural productivity. Recognizing this, the Eritrean Peoples Liberation Front has already instituted far-reaching land-reform programs in these areas with positive results:

The significant point that one should bear in mind here is that the extensive agricultural lands that we have liberated and put to our own use today had for too long been snatched away from our peasant masses by the colonialists and their feudal collaborators. Hence, the EPLF has returned most of this land to the poor peasants. It is also carrying essential land reform in the countryside. In many villages, the inequitable system of land ownership is being radically changed. Landless peasants have received land and a new opportunity to develop production

and improve their livelihood... Today, there are projects to establish agricultural cooperatives that will nurture the spirit of collective labor and production which are the basis for the building of our national economy. EPLF 1977:9-10

Initially part of the village lands was distributed in small plots to landless peasants by the EPLF because it was thought that ownership of the land would result in higher production. Another part was reserved for collective farming by the villagers. Large agricultural estates or plantations, if any, were run by the Front to meet its own food requirements. But the emphasis was on the development of collective farming and cooperative associations. Introduction of new equipment and methods of farming into the traditional sector greatly enhanced production potential.

Alongside the traditional agricultural sector, has existed a modern sector made up mainly of European plantations, estates and other commercial farms, mostly located in the former "domaniale" lands of the lowlands. In 1969, there were "564 agricultural concession contracts and they are given for periods ranging from 9 to 99 years." (Addis Ababa 1969:31). Most of these large estates were engaged in the production of exportable fruits, vegetable and dairy products, and they earned Ethiopia valuable foreign exchange for many years until many of them fell into the hands of the liberation fronts. Under the leadership of the fronts, production was mainly used to meet the domestic market requirements.

The total area of large-scale farming of seven large agricultural estates or concessions alone amounts to about 40,000 hectares (988,000 acres). This leaves more than 550 other smaller modern farms, covering more than the total acreage of the large estates. Commercial farms cover more than the 780,000 acres cited by the U.N. Commission on Eritrea (See table 2).

Recent studies of potentially cultivable area in the Western Lowlands alone has revealed that the agricultural potential of Eritrea is much greater than was previously assumed:

There are a number of other plains and valleys

Table 2
UN Estimate of Land Use in Eritrea, 1950

	Areas in Acres	Percent
Cultivable Land	780,000	2.6
Forest	1,520,000	5.8
Scrub Land	1,843,000	6.0
Pasture	22,997,000	74.7
Mineral Reservations	55,000	0.2
Waste Land	3,525,000	11.5
Total	30,720,000	100.0

Source: UN, Final Report of UN Commission for Eritrea, NY, 1950, p. 76.

that can be extensively developed by drilling wells for an underground water supply or by making full use of water from nearby rivers. These areas are fertile and expansive as well. The best areas are the Tessenei-Gulluj Plain, between the Gash and Setit Rivers, comprising 120,000 hectares; Om-Hager-Gulluj (100,000 hectares); Bashis, or Bashuka (45,000 hectares); the Gash Valley (36,000 hectares); and Mansura (25,000 hectares). Sherman 1980:117¹

All in all, the cultivable area of Eritrea is nearly 6,500,000 acres. Out of these, nearly 3 million acres was in use by early 1970. Thus the portrayal of Eritrea as an agriculturally "poor farming country, short of water and short of cultivable land" does not have any basis in light of these simple facts. Its potential, in fact, lies in its agricultural productive capacity to provide not only for its own requirements but to serve as a potential exporter to neighboring Arab and African markets. Agriculture's central position in the economy is well understood by the liberation forces fighting for Eritrean independence. With proper policies and needed construction of irrigation facilities, Eritrea would be agriculturally self-sufficient.

Geographical and Locational Aspects

Eritrea, with a population of 3.5 million and an area of 124,320 sq. km. (47,754 sq. miles) is a small country; hence, its prospects for economic viability after independence is cast in doubt. Yet

Table 3
African States with Population Smaller than Eritrea, 1980

Country	Population (mill.)	Country	Population (mill.)
Benin	3.38	Lesotho	1.28
Botswana	0.73	Liberbia	1.74
Cape Verde Is.	0.31	Libya	2.75
Central Afr. R.	1.96	Mauritania	1.54
Comoros	0.32	Mauritius	0.90
Congo	1.46	Sao Tome/Prin.	0.08
Djibouti	0.11	Seychelles	0.06
Equa Guinea	0.35	Siera Leone	3.20
Gabon	0.54	Somalia	3.44
Gambia	0.57	Swaziland	0.54
Guinea Bissau	0.55	Togo	2.41

Source: United Nations *World Statistics in Brief*, New York, 1980

there are at least 62 United Nations member states whose surface areas are less than that of Eritrea. (UN 1980:2-154). More relevant is the fact that 18 of them with ostensibly viable national economies are in Africa. Similarly, 40 out of these 62 countries, have also population less than that of Eritrea. (UN 1980). With the exception of Malawi, Rwanda and Burundi, the 14 other African nations are less populated than Eritrea. More specifically, 60 UN member nations have population figures smaller than that of Eritrea. 22 of them are independent African nations as shown in Table 3:

The problems of small size can even be offset by emphasizing economic activities that can utilize the advantages of being small. Development of small trade — especially with neighbors — offers a big revenue potential for Eritrea. Tourism from scorched Arab lands across the Red Sea has a great potential. The success in this by neighboring tiny island-nation of Seychelles in the Indian Ocean is a good example.

In addition, Eritrea's location contributes to its economic viability. It is strategically located at the southern mouth of the Red Sea leading to the Suez Canal in the north, and has two excellent ports. The Eritrean coastline is 100 kms long., and at the southern tip of the country, the Red Sea narrows at the Strait of Bab-el-Mandeb (the Gate of Sorrow) to only about 18 kms. Through it pass daily at least 70 ocean-going vessels carrying mostly oil for Europe. (Kaplan 1978:519).

Eritrea's proximity to the rich Middle East and

its current status as the storm eye of the turbulent Horn of Africa offer extensive economic opportunities. On the other hand, external political pressures on its internal politics and economy could have far-reaching consequences for the unity and economic development of the country. Some Arab countries already covertly interfere in the Eritrean struggle. Though the EPLF has successfully dealt with this, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates and Iraq have not ceased using their petrodollars to support their own proteges in the country to ensure their influence in an independent Eritrea.

As the struggle progresses and independence nears, many of these nations will probably openly vie for influence in the internal affairs of Eritrea. This can seriously threaten its economic viability and independent existence.

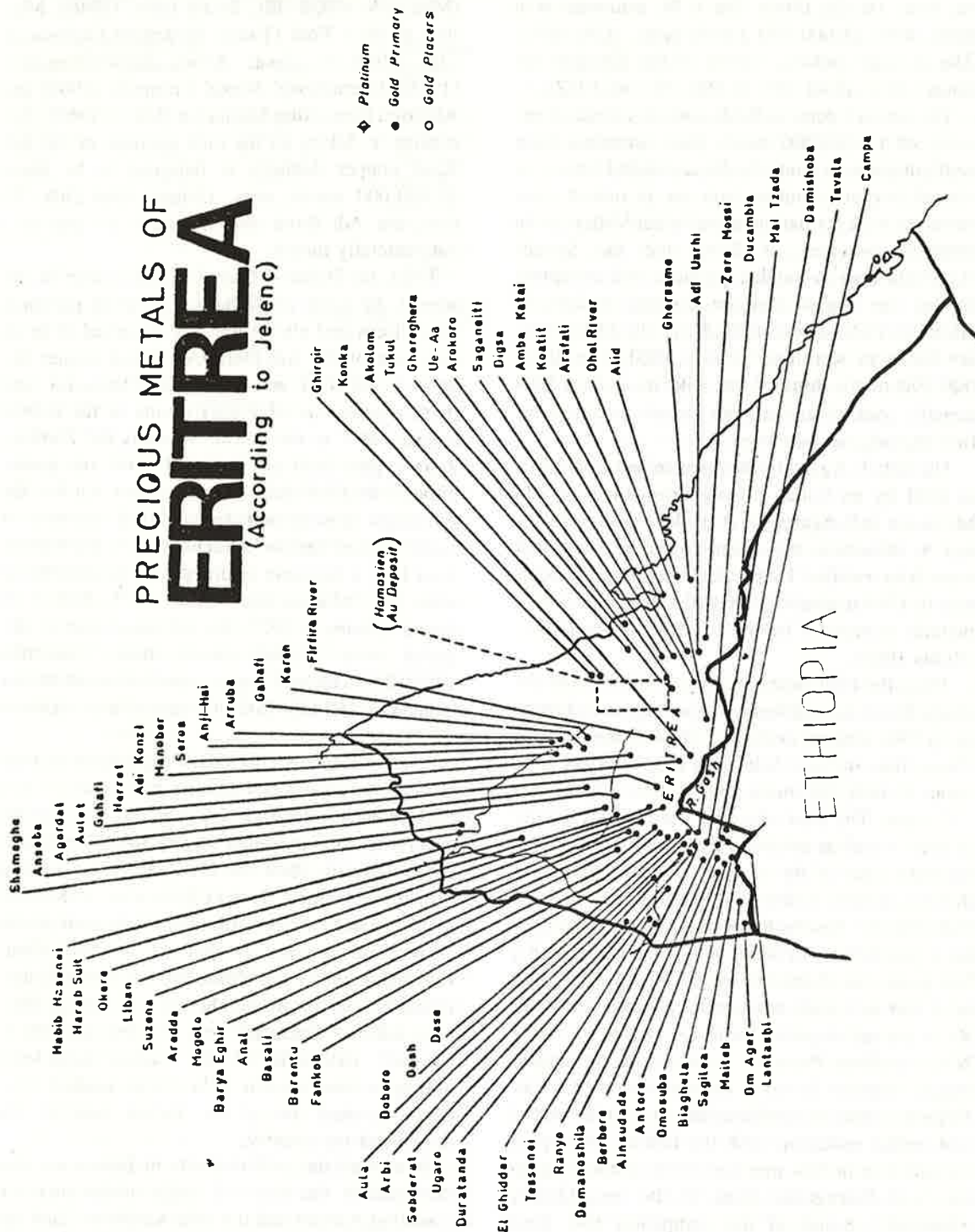
Mineral Resources of Eritrea

Generally speaking, Eritrea is endowed with a variety of mineral resources whose exploitation for commercial purposes, with the exception of salt, gold and recently copper, has not yet been fully realized. It has a long history of gold, salt and iron mining.

Iron Ore: Documented iron ore deposits are found mostly in the hydro-thermal rock formations of Eastern Eritrea and the residual soil formations in central highlands to the south of Asmara. Specifically, nearly 1,000,000 metric tons of iron ore deposits are found in Ghedem, 15 kms south of the

PRECIOUS METALS OF ERITREA

(According to Jelenc)



Port of Massaua, and covers an area of about 100 sq. kms. (Rudis 1964). The U.N. estimated it at more than 15,000,000 metric tons. (UN:1976). The average metallic content of the Ghedem ore ranges from about 46% to 59%. (Usoni 1952).

The second iron ore field, with an estimated reserve of 15,000,000 metric tons, stretches from south of Asmara along the Serae-Akele Guzai provincial border. Another iron ore is mined from stratified rock formation in the Felkat Valley in the northern province of Sahel and the Sabub-Agametta area in Semhar province and constitute by far the largest iron ore deposits in Eritrea. (Bibolini 1921; Jelenc 1966:245). The Felkat Valley Reserves were estimated in 1920 to be about 500,000 metric tons of ore with more than 50% metallic content, and recent estimates tend to confirm the original estimate.

The Sabub-Agametta Belt was mined from 1915 to 1921 by an Italian mining firm called Societa Mineralia dell-Agametta. It made a thorough survey to determine the extent of the reserves that were later verified by the Rudis Mining Association in 1964 to about 2,226,000 metric tons with a metallic content of from 59.57% to about 62.0%. (Rudis 1964).

Thus, the total estimated reserves of iron ore deposits found in stratified rock formations in Eritrea up to 1964 amount to about 2,725,000 metric tons. These three iron-ore belts have total reserves up to about 33,000,000 metric tons. (Jalenc 1966:243).

Copper: The kind of copper ore consists mainly of ores found in stratified rock formations in the southern areas of the central highlands. There are three main belts of this copper ore: First, the Raba Belt near the Anseba River in Barca province covers a general area of about 40 kms in length with a low grade ore of about 1-1.5%. The total reserves have not yet been estimated. Second, the Addi Rassi copper deposits, near the village of Addi-Nefas in Serae Province, were by far the largest copper deposits found in the country up to 1966. Copper comes in combination with gold, nickel and sulfur minerals, and the history of copper exploitation in this area goes back to early Egyptian and Portuguese visits of the area (Jalenc 1966:243). Some of the companies that have explored the area for commercial purposes include

Miniere Aurifere Eritrea Societa Italiana Anonima (MAESIA) (1938-39), Bertie Bros. (1946), Miglietta of New York (1948), Newmont Exploration Ltd. (1956-7), Texas Africa Exploration Co. (1958), International Nickel Company (1962) and Atkinson Consulting Engineers (USA) (1963). According to Atkins on the total estimate of the Adi Rassi copper deposits is believed to be about 20,000,000 metric tons. (Jalenc 1966:230). To date, the Adi Rassi deposits have not yet been commercially mined.

Third, the Debarwa Copper fields located in and around the town of Debarwa in Serae province were discovered after 1966. It is believed to be an extension of the Adi-Nefas/Adi-Rassi copper deposits to the south and southeast of Debarwa, and (with a grade ore of 7.8%) is one of the richest copper fields in the world, whereas the Zambia-Zaire copper field has only 4.5-4.8% ore grade. Though detailed data are not given out by the Ethiopian Government for political reasons, it signed a joint venture agreement with the Nippon Koei Co., a Japanese multinational corporation to mine the Debarwa deposits in 1973. Before its forced closure in 1975, the estimated copper deposits were 17,000 metric tons. (Sherman 1980:120). The total copper metal reserves are estimated at 160,000-200,000 metric tons. (Eritrea 1975).

Gold: Another economically significant mineral resource is gold. Gold mining has a history that extends back to Pharaonic Egypt. But the relevant history for our purposes begins with the Italian colonization in 1889. In 1901, an Italian mining firm by the name "Societa Eritrea per le Miniere d'Oro" started mining at four spots in the northern outskirts of Asmara — that is, at Medri Zien, Adi-Shumaghele, Adi Konzi and Adi Nefas. Later, it was bought up by another Italian mining company called "Sindacato delle miniere aurifere di Cheren" (SMAC). SMAC started large-scale mining in these area in 1931. Other smaller companies existed during the Italian colonial era throughout the country.

Nearly all the gold deposits in Eritrea are concentrated in the stratified rocks of the area surrounding Asmara and the river valleys of Gash and Barka. More specifically, they are found in fol-

Table 4
Production of Fine Gold in Eritrea, 1931-1962

Year	Production (grams)	Year	Production (grams)
1931	3,236.0	1939	422,939.4
1932	55,764.0	1940	377,944.0
1933	124,387.4	1953-57*	66,709.5
1934	250,066.2	1958	199,973.0
1935	134,628.1	1959	208,929.8
1936	79,647.0	1960	159,978.4
1937	134,928.8	1961	166,451.9
1938	153,277.5	1962	70,396.5

*Most production halted by British Administration during 1941-52 period.

lowing seven areas: Lower Gash River basin, where the Ugaro mine is located; Basin of the Setit River; Basin of the Barka River; Watershed between the Gash and the Barka Rivers; Basin of the Anseba River; Hamasien Highlands, constituting the largest and richest goldfields with at least 110 known sites; and Basin of the River Mareb (Jelenc 1966:135-207, 344-345).

Other commercially important mineral resources are "saline deposits, mica, zinc, nickel, asbestos, kaolin, manganese, magnesium, titanium, marble, feldspar, potash and possibly oil offshore from Massaua." (Sherman 1980:119). Of these, potash and the possibility of oil reserves deserve some elaboration.

Potash, found in large quantities in the Danakil Lowlands, is an important source of national wealth. Of special economic significance is the associated hydrothermal power that can be tapped as a source of energy. The mine is found in a volcanic area known as Dallul on the border between Eritrea and Ethiopia. It covers an area 200 kms long and 30 kms wide. There are no recent estimates, but in 1966 estimates put known reserves at an annual production of 600,000 tons, as amongst the highest in the world — in an area lying on both sides of the border (Jelenc 1966:497). In 1960, Ethiopia leased the mining rights to an American company called Parsons Co. and by 1973, the expected date for fullscale operation, Ethiopia was anticipating export revenue from potash mining of more than US\$23 million (Jelenc 1966:503). But Parsons soon quit the operation due to political and organi-

zational problems, and no serious effort to exploit this resource has since been made.

Finally, the possible existence of petroleum and natural gas in Eritrea has been a subject of speculation and much controversy in the past. Indications of their presence date back to 1868 around Massaua. (Imperial 1968:225.) In 1958, Nafta-Plim, a Yugoslav petroleum exploration and production enterprise, was given a contract to explore nearly 20,000 sq. km area on the Red Sea offshore north and south of Massaua for oil. (Imperial 1968:517). Its findings were inconclusive. Then, other contracts were given to Mobil Oil and Gulf Oil in 1963; and a few years later, to Tenneco Oil Co. Although no oil or natural gas has yet been discovered, the prospects are good. Until recently exploration for oil was being undertaken on behalf of the Ethiopian government. As the 1966 Ministry of Mines report concluded,

The prospecting and exploration discussed above support the conclusion that the tertiary sediments of the Red Sea Coastal area offer enticing possibilities of petroleum and natural gas. Imperial 1968:529.

Finally, the possible existence of petroleum and natural gas in Eritrea has been a subject of speculation and much controversy in the past. Indications of their presence date back to 1868 around Massaua.

Other Natural Resources

Eritrea is also moderately endowed with several types of land resources such as forest wealth, wildlife and water resources. According to data furnished by the British Administration to the UN Commissioner for Eritrea, roughly about 5% of the country is forest. (UN 1980:76). Although this is a relatively small area, it is a source of important economic benefits as the colonial economic history of Eritrea under Italian rule shows. The dum plant along the banks of the Gash and Barca rivers have supplied the necessary raw materials for the mat-making and button manufacturing firms in Eritrea since early 1930's. Nearly all wood and paper making factories use local forest. Sisal plants gave

birth to the Cashiani Fibre Co. at the town of Elabered in 1942, and with successful diffusion of Sisal Plantations later on, several rope and sack-making firms sprang up. (Addis 1967:15). Eritrea could safely be considered as self-sufficient in wood products for building purposes, as is consistently shown by the absence of any such imports. Wood as a source of fuel in the countryside is adequate for local needs. Yet the need for a large afforestation program, especially in the denuded slopes of Eritrea, is evident if the supply of wood-related raw materials is to continue to meet the local needs.

The importance of the availability and use of water-resources in Eritrea is great. Not only is drinking water in the semi-desert lowlands a scarce resource, but the erosion-producing flow of rivers and streams from the highlands is not yet adequately controlled to irrigate the numerous valleys and flatlands for the desired economic benefits. Some of the rivers have been dammed and used to support irrigated agriculture, especially in the eastern lowlands of Semenawi Bahri and the Tessenei-Ali Ghider areas of western lowlands. (UN 1980:76) The rainfall pattern in the highlands is an extension of the same pattern of the Ethiopian highlands and with a range of 250 mm/year to 875 mm/year is considered adequate. But in the lowlands, rainfall is inadequate, and the potential for greater agricultural output there lies in the extensive development of irrigation.

Another natural resource with great economic significance is the sea. During Italian rule, the fishing of sardines and mother-of-pearl had some commercial value but, according to Ethiopian sources, the Red Sea abounds with other commercially important fish like "... Red Sea sprat, Red Sea anchovy, Pink bream, lizard fish, red snapper, queenfish or jack, grey mullet, grouper, rock-cod, sea-bass, barracudas, sharks... some shrimp, cuttle fish, cray-fish and lobsters." (Addis Ababa 1968:46) By 1969, there were about 15 firms engaged in the fishing industry producing dry fish and fish-meal products, mostly for the export market. The largest corporation at the time, the Red Sea Development Corporation, "exports 4,000 tons of fish-meal and 6,000 tons of fresh fish annually and the international demand for these products is considered high."

The fish-meal produced in Eritrea is of high quality and is in great demand. It is used as food for livestock and poultry... and it is an important export item. Fishmeal is exported to countries like United Kingdom, Italy, Switzerland, USA, Greece, Singapore and Ceylon. (Addis Abeba 1968:47)

Although the export market may have considerably shrunk in recent years due to war conditions, the potential for its future exploitation is there.

Salt is another marine resource in Eritrea. It is extracted by evaporating the highly-saline waters of the Red Sea. Major extracting activities were undertaken by the Italians in the port towns of Uokiro and Massawa. Le Saline di Massaua, the largest firm established in 1905, had an annual production of about 100,000 tons, (Sherman 1980:121) part of which was being exported to the Far East and neighboring African countries. However, the scale of production has been drastically reduced because of the war.

Finally, Eritrea's animal wealth is economically significant. Since the country is basically agricultural, livestock is a crucial economic resource. Even though there is a serious lack of data about the different types of livestock, there are millions of cattle, sheep and goats. In addition, there are hundreds of thousands of camels, donkeys, horses and mules. (See Table 5)

Some efforts by the Italians to control animal diseases in Eritrea contributed positively to the growth of livestock. These services deteriorated during the Ethiopian rule, but efforts by the liberation movements to undertake widespread vaccination campaigns against such animal diseases as rinder-pest, anthrax, and trichinosis and the active training of veterinary technicians are steps in the right direction. (EPLF 1977b:16-20)

Infrastructure and Institutions

The Eritrean infrastructure was established primarily by the Italians. Extensive construction was undertaken to develop the 'crown colony' for the purpose of permanent resettlement of millions of Italians and as a springboard for further expansion into Africa.

Table 5
Livestock in Eritrea, Selected Years

Year	Cattle	Goats and Sheep	Camels	Horses, Mules and Donkeys
1928	749,000	1,897,000	79,000	59,000
1938	591,000	1,491,000	68,000	51,000
1946	1,200,000	2,200,000	105,000	83,000
1973*	2,500,000	5,000,000	NA	NA

Source: UN Final Report, *op. cit.*, p. 74.

*Chamber of Commerce estimate quoted by Sherman *op. cit.*, p. 118.

The Italians set out to connect every part of the colony by roads, railways and telephone systems. The construction of the railway system, started in 1887, had by 1932 succeeded in connecting major urban centers of Massawa, Ghinda, Nefasit, Asmara, Keren, Agordat and Biscia. Its total length was 352 kms. Similarly, the road system initially consisted of 550 kms of all weather roads and about 2,411 kms of seasonal roads. A 71 km. ropeway was constructed in joining the port of Massawa with Asmara on the highlands, making it the longest in the world at the time. Extensive improvement of the port facilities was also undertaken. But under the British administration, the port facilities began to deteriorate, and no substantial improvement of the transport facilities were made.

The main preoccupation of the Ethiopian rule, on the other hand, was to maintain the Italian-built transportation network without any additions. This persisted until about the mid-70's, when the escalation of the conflict led to wide-spread deterioration of the roads. The rails in the railroad system were pulled out for use in fortification of garrisons and many bridges were blown up by both sides at the height of the war. The result is that, a major reconstruction of the railway system would be necessary if service is to resume once again. One exception to this was the building effort by the liberation fronts, particularly the EPLF, in the areas under their control. Of special significance is a 1,500-km long highway called "Liberation Road" constructed by the EPLF in 1977, and many others like the famous "challenge Road" with 37 switchbacks in only 12 kms., in the country (EPLF 1977b:10).² The development of relatively large

numbers of urban centers in the country with adequate municipal services is another factor that can positively contribute to its viability.

In most of the cities and towns built by the Italians, services such as water supply, electricity, telephone service, sewage disposal, mail services and mass transportation systems were instituted. Necessary social services such as public education, police protection and medical services were introduced. When the Italians left in 1941, the British made some improvements in these public services, especially education. Many of the "Italian schools" had by then been instrumental in bringing about an *intelligenza* that later became active in the political struggle for independence. Many former students became the bureaucrats and technocrats of the Eritrean Government which briefly functioned from 1952 to 1962. Some even migrated into Ethiopia to become prominent emigre bureaucrats in the feudal kingdom. Similarly, the Italian instituted health facilities were expanded under the British rule. Rural clinics were opened and the federal era saw an expansion of health personnel, especially nurses, midwives, dressers and health officers.

At present, nearly all the cities are under Ethiopian control, and because Ethiopia has made the war its primary concern, most of the services mentioned above, are in bad condition. Schools are closed for most of the year, with the only significant schooling taking place in the countryside where the guerrilla forces are in control. Roads are in disrepair and heavy tanks and armored cars roam city streets in the major towns. The "economic warfare" being waged between the contending

forces in the conflict has resulted in the destruction of communication lines, and mail distribution services and even the occasional loss of electric power services. Therefore, even though the major work in the institutionalization of basic city services was undertaken by the European colonizers, the Ethio-Eritrea conflict has inflicted heavy damages on these services, making future rebuilding efforts imperative.

Lastly, the colonizers initiated important financial and governmental institutions, such as banking and finance services, and insurance facilities that are essential components at an orderly functioning government and economy. Though the British were notorious for their deliberate suppression of economic development by making "any large-scale development impossible by restricting the freedom of the banks to issue loans, (Travaskis 1960:77) the Ethiopians relaxed some of these restrictions. Several Ethiopian and foreign banks became active financial institutions once again. Yet at the same time, a few institutions unique to Eritrea's colonial heritage, like the 'Banda' Sanitation and Vaccination teams, Forest Guard Service (Corpo del Guardie Forestali) and the experimental farm networks were slowly disbanded by Ethiopia, even though their presence served to fulfill special needs emanating from the agricultural characteristics of Eritrea.

In the liberated zones; the EPLF is in the process of building the necessary institutional requirements to run the economy under its control. (Houtart 1982:99) A de facto government in exile with all the bureaucracies, rules and regulations defining the relationship between the various institutions and the means to enforce them already exists in the EPLF. Mini-governments have been set up in villages to carry out the various governmental functions in running local affairs. Monetary transactions are minimized to overcome the obvious inconveniences due to the absence of banks and a national currency. In general, efforts are being made by the guerilla forces to establish "model" systems of governmental institutions that will be needed in an independent Eritrea.

No economic plans or development projects can attain the desired goals without the appropriate infrastructure and institutions. Thus, the initiation

and upkeep of the necessary institutions and infrastructure in Eritrea are very important for future growth. It is the author's judgment that relatively well developed infrastructure necessary for the viable functioning of the Eritrean economy already exists. The liberation forces' commitment to further development and improvement of existing infrastructure and their present activities is an indication of future plans for the development and reconstruction of the damaged or nonexistent infrastructures or institutions.

Conclusion

We have analyzed in detail the major economic factors that directly deal with the potential for viability of an independent Eritrean national economy. The historical background behind the allegation of a non-viable economy reveals a strong political motive on the part of the powers that ruled Eritrea. Not only are Eritrea's economic resources sufficient to provide a sustainable economic growth for the 3.5 million inhabitants, but that there exists a strong possibility of a healthy export-market to other countries. Of special economic significance for such a potential is the existence of rich mineral deposits and the necessary infrastructural requirements for its exploitation.

In conclusion, it is important to note that final assessment of the situation strongly indicates a viable Eritrean economy for an independent country. The economic resources of the country and its infrastructural maturity will enable an independent Eritrean economy to function viably. Thus, the allegation of a weak, nonviable Eritrean economy is just that — an allegation concocted by Ethiopia and its allies in the 1940s and early 1950s for purely political reasons. In fact, with adequate long-range projects on irrigation, mining and industrial rehabilitation, Eritrea, could potentially supply various products and services to neighboring countries.

Notes

1. The ironic point that validates Sherman's correct assessment is that the so-called 'union' of Eritrea and Ethiopia, which was supposed to have benefited the economically weak Eritrea, has only resulted in further impoverishing it. Most trade and

output statistics indicate this. On the other hand, the 'union' between did not hurt the Ethiopian economy. Not only did it result in the total control over Eritrean economy by Ethiopia, but it also greatly diversified the Ethiopian manufacturing sector. The export market expanded greatly. Ethiopia's trade position after the 1952 "federal" arrangement with Eritrea testify to this:

A rough estimate of the province's (Eritrea) contributions to the overall economy of the Federation may be seen in the comparison of the export figures before and after 1952. In the seven years prior to the Federation, the value of Ethiopia's exports averaged Eth. \$81.5 million—and it should be added that prior to 1952, Eritrea was a major destination for Ethiopian exports. In the first three years of Federation, average balance of trade surplus rose from Eth. \$12 million in 1951 to Eth. \$32 million (nearly 175% increase) in 1953.

2. Road construction by the E.P.L.F. has continued since then, especially after E.P.L.F. consolidated its hold on Eritrea in 1980 as the sole fighting force inside the country.

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850 meters, were declared government lands (L.T.D. 1969:42)

In addition to this, almost all meadows were government-owned. In specific areas "lands lying within 50 meters of both banks of a river are also claimed as government land." (L.T.D. 1969:42). Traditionally tribal lands between Ghinda and Massawa also became Crown land. According to Araia (1977), in the final analysis, at least one-half of the entire Eritrean area was under the legal control of the Italian government, especially fertile land. And it was exclusively placed under Italian control and distributed among Italian settlers. Italian alienation of land in the highland plateau created such a scarcity that the government was forced to increase the *diesa* land tenure system in this region (Nadel 1946; L.T.D. 1969; Zakarias 1966; Trevaskis 1960). The peasant population was being increasingly affected. The lack of land to cultivate, or the severe scarcity of land, led many peasants to seek employment elsewhere. Land owned by the Coptic Church was also affected. Prior to Italian rule, the church was one of the most powerful land-owning institutions in the highlands. Favored by seasonal rains, the most fertile land in Eritrea, the Bahre Medri area, was owned by the church. The Italians converted it into Crown land, thereby reducing the material strength of the Coptic Church. Some of it was leased to peasants and to Italian settlers. In effect, the church as an economic power was destroyed. The impact on rural social life and class structure was tremendous. As Trevaskis notes, during the British rule (1941-1952), the church petitioned the new administrator in vain for the return of its land. "Only union with Ethiopia and the favor of its traditional protector, the Emperor of Ethiopia, could now restore its property to the church" (Trevaskis 1960:59-60). The church became one of the major advocates of the union with Ethiopia (FPC 1948; Ellengson 1977) and the Ethiopian Crown supported it in this venture. But this contradiction, set into motion by Italian colonialism, was such that the rural areas became the scene of armed uprisings against the return of the old social structure and feudal social formations (Halliday 1971; Kramer 1969; Lobban 1972).

With the creation of Crown land, large-scale

mechanized agriculture was introduced with seasonal labor in demand. Commercial cash crops were introduced. In the Baraka lowlands, an agriculture enterprise employing 1,000 regular workers and 6,000 seasonal workers was set up in the 1920s (E.L.F., n.d.). Products such as tobacco were then exported to the Congo, Italy, and Britain. Some nomad peasants were forced to supplement their incomes by becoming wage earners while others were forced to earn their living by permanent employment. Thus, capitalist agriculture in the rural areas created new forms of social living and brought new experiences to rural life. This was far from being a smooth process. Resistance against the Italian rule of rural life continued. But what was in the making was the decay and disintegration of old forms of production and social relations and, in its place, colonial forms of capitalist production and socio-economic relations. The resistance against this change shaped peasant experiences in the countryside.

In addition to creating a demand for agricultural labor, the Italians introduced new crops and improved the condition of the old ones. Raising livestock was the greatest wealth of the Eritrean economy in the field of agriculture. The Italians increased the potential for economic exploitation by introducing veterinary services and increased livestock was the greatest wealth of the Eritrean Commission Report (1950:74; Trevaskis 1960:39) gives us the following data:

Year	Cattle	Goats and Sheep	Camels
1905	296,000	736,000	47,000
1940	591,000	1,491,000	68,000
1946	1,200,000	2,220,000	105,000

Even though this increase primarily benefited the Italian settlers, its influence on the rural life was apparent. The commercialization of agriculture, including livestock and the introduction of scientific methods to improve the health and productivity potentials of the livestock, was a new experience for the Eritrean peasantry at large. In the lowlands of Eritrea bordering the Sudan, 5,000 acres were planted with cotton and coffee plantations were introduced. By 1950, thousands of acres were given to the Italian market gardeners. Not only did agricultural production increase, but the

import of agricultural products was made possible (Four Power 1952; Trevaskis 1960:40). Both the conversion of alienated land into Crown land and the introduction of commercialized agriculture and important consequences for the rural economy and rural social structure. These and other changes hastened the disintegration of traditional Beni-Amer socio-economic structure in the lowlands and the feudal social structure in the highlands.

Infrastructural Growth in Eritrea

By 1920 "the colony of Eritrea possesses more wagon roads than all other Red Sea political divisions combined" (Southard 1920:30). All-weather roads and additional dry-weather roads stretching out from Asmara connected several areas in Eritrea. This not only made Eritrea an increasingly unified economic and political unit, but facilitated potential external trade and commercial intercourse. Along these roads and railroads new towns were created or old villages transformed into important commercial towns. In addition to railroads and roads, two important modern airports — one in Asmara and the other in the newly-founded company town of Gura — were built. The construction of schools throughout the country must also be mentioned. The urban population prior to the Italian colonialism was negligible, yet, by 1941, one-fifth of the Eritrean population was urbanized. Massawa became one of the most important and busiest ports in the Red Sea area.

These developments created an unprecedented demand for labor. Prior to the Italian occupation, the Eritrean population was predominantly rural. In the lowlands areas almost all the people were nomadic whereas, in the highland, the population was predominantly rural peasantry. Between 1890 and 1941 was the era of urbanization, industrialization, and commercialization of agriculture. Italy introduced a forced labor law to meet the demand of labor created by Italian capital (Araia 1978). Although no documented history of Eritrean labor participation in the building of this infrastructure is available, we can conclude that many peasants were involved in such a venture. The alienation of land and its conversion into Crown land had a double purpose: it safeguarded

Italian interests in settlement and, by making land a scarce commodity, it forced landless peasants to seek employment in the new job market created by Italian capital.

Military Buildup

Italy was involved in at least two major wars while administering Eritrea. The first, with the newly founded Empire of Ethiopia, ended in its defeat at the Battle of Adowa in 1896. Menelik, who led the Ethiopian contingent, had amassed about 200,000 soldiers. The Italian war preparation was also massive, involving thousands of Eritrean soldiers in the colonial armies (Dilebo 1974). As early as 1893, the Italians were preparing for war with Ethiopia, and an intensive militarization of the Eritrean population took place (Baer 1967:244).

The more important war occurred during World War II. Here, the Italians made massive preparations using Eritrea as a base for their militaristic venture. Italian strength before 1935 included "air strength of 300-500 aeroplanes, besides 100,000 natives to be mobilized in two colonies, about 50,000 from each" (Badoglio 1937:11). The two colonies were Somalia and Eritrea. Four Eritrean divisions were established. One Eritrean brigade with 20 battalions and 89 field guns was formed to attack Ethiopia (Badoglio 1937:29-30). Badoglio underestimated the number of Eritreans who died in action (Boca 1965:75), the number of defections in the Italian army during the war (Boca 1965:122, 197; Dilebo 1974; Steer 1937; 174-5) and the number of Eritreans in the colonial army (Badoglio 1937:11). It was only by using Eritrea as a base and employing thousands of Eritrean soldiers that Italy was able to succeed in colonizing Ethiopia for a brief period (Barker 1968). Conscripted into the Italian army meant special privileges for the Eritrean soldiers — tax exemption, exemption from traditional dues and obligations. Scarcity of land and lack of employment was a factor which encouraged Eritreans into military service. (Trevaskis 1960). In addition, there were certain rewards for military service, such as pensions or promotions to chief officers. When the war was over for Italy in 1941,

the disbandment offered the gravest threat to law and order since the Italians had first pacified the country. Eritrea was overrun with ex-soldiers, who were either without work or found civilian life uncongenial and unrewarding. Many had returned home with rifles, ammunition, and hand-grenades, which they hoarded against the future. Arms lay abandoned on the battlefields and concealed in a variety of widely dispersed stores and caches. The balance was tipped dangerously in favor of disorder (Trevaskis 1960:105).

Peasant insubordination and revolts increased in the lowland and the Gash-Setet area. Well-armed raids became common, occurring in the highlands, especially those bordering Ethiopia (Trevaskis 1960:105). The ex-soldiers affected the rural economics in other ways. Rural agricultural production increased, sometimes tremendously after 1941. Rural labor, scarce during the war, now increased because of the end of the war.

The most effective stimuli to production... were the return of thousands of ex-soldiers to the land... By 1946, 640,000 acres were under cultivation as against 141,000 acres in 1939; the grain crop being 118,000 tons as against 28,500 tons (Trevaskis 1960:40).

The impact of Italian colonialism in Eritrea and the transformation of the Eritrean rural life in general was felt by the end of the war. After 50 years of Italian rule, the material base of the rural life was undergoing a profound change. The 1941-1952 period, therefore, was crucial for Eritrea as its fate was being decided by the United Nations. On the one hand, there was the Eritrean people's desire to determine their own destiny and, on the other, there was the imperial Ethiopian Crown's desire to annex and colonize Eritrea. Although the former was the backing of the masses, the latter also had support in the lowlands and highlands of Eritrea. This contradiction is most vivid in the countryside among the peasants and is the basic change that has taken place in these areas. We will cite examples from Beni-Amer and Kebessa society. From 1941 to 1951, a war was being fought in

the rural areas to destroy the old forms of socio-economic relations.

1941-1952 Period

General: Kebessa and Western Provinces

The provinces of Hamsien, Serai and Akele-Guzai comprise the Kebessa area. The people in these regions speak Tigrinya and are Coptic Christians. According to a British administrative census of 1952, out of the total population of 524,000, 487,000 are Christians and 37,000 Moslems. Out of the total population, 101,000 Christians and 28,000 Moslems lived in the urban centers, principally Asmara, Adi, Uqri, Adi Quala, Adi-Kerk, Senafe (Trevaskis 1960:1932).

The Fabian Report (Gray and Siberman, eds., 1948) cites that the population in the Kebessa area totaled 448,000. Out of this, the Moslem population numbered 58,000, the rest Coptic Christians. Out of the total population, 35,000 lived, according to this report, in Asmara alone (Gray and Silberman, eds., 1948:12). Discrepancies in population counts are frequent for this period. The point of agreement, however, is that the Moslem population in this area was insignificant, especially in the rural areas since most of them lived in urban areas. The rural dwellers of Hamsien, Serai and Akele-Guzai are hence followers of the Coptic Church.

The reverse is true in the Western provinces of Sahel and the Baraka lowlands. The British census estimated a total population of 329,000. Of this, 322,000 and 7,000, respectively, were Moslems and Christians. The total urban population was 42,000 (Trevaskis 1960:132). According to the Fabian Report, the total population was 367,000, with 336,000 Moslems and 31,000 Christians (Gray and Silberman 1948:12-13). The Baraka lowlands were almost totally Moslem as was the case in the Sahel province.

In the Western provinces, the people were pastoral nomads and urbanism was less developed. Here, the center of social, political, and economic division was not territorial but descent and kinship. By tradition the management of tribal affairs was bestowed upon the council of elders and hereditary chiefs. The serf population made up 90 percent of

the population. They were subject to customary dues and obligations to the ruling caste who, in turn, gave the necessary protection and leadership to them.

In the highland plateau social, political and economic organization centered around *resti* and the *enda*. Territorial organization and village centers were the focal points of social living in these sedentary agriculturalist Coptic Christian communities. The manner in which the villagers went about conducting their socio-economic affairs was democratic in form.

Although the manner in which the plateau villagers manage their affairs is democratic, in that parochial powers are customarily vested in elected council of elders and not in hereditary chiefs, the passage of time has brought with it a sharp class distinction between those who, having no connection with the landowning, are regarded as tenants (Gray and Silberman 1948:13).

Among the most powerful groups we have mentioned are the Coptic Church and some *balabats*. In general, we have discussed how the Italian policy of forced labor and confiscation of land deprived the traditional landowning class of their power base. Here we have to be more specific. The Italians were specifically very hard on the Coptic Church and some traditional feudal lords in the Kebessa region for reasons we will explain below. But since the Italian policy was geared toward exploiting Eritrea and to demanding "colonial areas in which to settle its (Italian) surplus population" (Gray and Silberman 1948:22) both the method of direct and indirect rule were used. The Fabian Report summarizes this process.

The powers and functions of these 'chiefs' remained unchanged throughout the period of Italian rule. Apart from exercising limited judicial powers with regard to the simpler types of civil disputes and collecting the annual tribute, they did nothing but obey orders and submit reports. No attempt was made to train chiefs in the exercise of greater administrative responsibilities and no additional responsibilities were

placed upon them. At the same time, for the supposed purpose of respecting sacrosanct native custom, chiefs were allowed a free rein as regards the exercise of traditional privileges. In the tribes of the west, the chiefs and aristocratic classes continued to levy feudal dues from their serfs, and to enjoy many of the privileges. In the tribes of the east, the chiefs and aristocratic classes continued to levy feudal dues from their serfs, and to enjoy many of the privileges which they had enjoyed before the Italian occupation. On the plateau the old customary privileges with which local rulers had been endowed were inherited by their less powerful successors (Gray and Silberman, eds. 1948:20).

The Kebessa Region

In 1935, the population of Asmara was a mere 15,000. In 1941, it rose to 90,000. Most of the increase was due to the immigration of peasants seeking employment in the cities. The increase was also due to the return of the ex-soldiers after the end of the war in 1941. In addition, Ethiopians, Italians, and Arabs came to settle in Asmara during this period.

The rural population of the Southern plateau, which was 123,000 in 1910, is 400,000 in 1948. The apparent paradox has risen because landless groups, often immigrants from Ethiopia, were sometimes accepted by village communities to make good the loss of manpower caused by military conscription and exodus to the towns (Gray and Silberman 1948:24).

The immigration was mostly from Tigre province of northern Ethiopia. These immigrants belonged to the Coptic Church and spoke basically the same language as the people of Kebessa. By and large, they — *makelai-aleit* — were at the bottom of the rural class structure.

The British, as the new ruler, felt that they had no right or jurisdiction over the Crown land. It remained the property of the state and the Italian farmers (Trevaskis 1960:54). In most cases where there was extra land at the disposal of the British,

they allocated, not to the Eritreans, but "to those best qualified and equipped to use it," namely, the Italians (Trevaskis 1960:54). In this case, the contradiction between the Eritrean peasantry and the Italian rural bourgeoisie became acute. Between 1942 and 1944 many stances of actual conflict between them were recorded. In 1942 a fruit garden cultivated by the Italians was destroyed by the peasants. In 1944 two Italian farmers were killed. Italophobia became vivid in the rural areas during this period (Trevaskis 1060:55).

As we have frequently mentioned, the Kebessa people were primarily Christians and agriculturalists. Since by custom, only Christians were entitled to land rights (with a few exceptions), professions other than tilling the land were regarded as occupations for outsiders. The money-lenders, the shop-owners, the traders, in short, the financial wizards of the rural areas, were Moslems — especially the Jiberti Moslems. During this critical period the peasantry had become heavily indebted to these traders: "... by 1944, whole villages had mortgaged their crops before they had been sown" (Trevaskis 1960:55). Further, where the peasants had ventured westward in search of grazing and farming land, they were met by angry Moslem tribes of the Tigray, namely, the Beni-Amer and the Shalio Assaorta. It is in light of these contradictions in the countryside that Ethiopian intervention in Eritrea and the role played by the Ethiopian Crown can be appreciated between 1941 and 1952.

Ethiopian Crown and the Kebassa

It must be noted that the same historical imperialist trends that made possible the formation of the African states also made possible the creation of the Ethiopian Empire state. The only difference is in specific details. In the other African countries the imperialists ruled directly through the device of colonialism. With the exception of a brief period (1935-1941) they ruled Ethiopia indirectly by what is now known as neocolonialism. Given this difference, the formation of the Ethiopian empire and the imperial state coincides with the period of the scramble for Africa in the Berlin Conference (Hiwet 1975). The argument that Eritrea was part

of Ethiopia for centuries has, therefore, to be viewed as a mystification because Ethiopia has, in fact, existed in its present form only since the 1890s. In this instance the development of a global capitalist system is essential to the comprehension of the point under discussion.

This is not to deny the existence of cultural, linguistic and religious affinities between the Kebessa and the Ethiopian highlands, especially in the Tigre region. Before the Italians, the Kebessa was under the diocese of the *Abuna* (Bishop) of Tigray for ecclesiastical purposes (Trevaskis 1960:13). The Coptic Church was the carrier of the high culture. Each village in Kebessa had 20 to 30 priests and the church in local villages transmitted the same teachings. It was the only school where government officials and other functionaries of the ruling class came from in traditional times. It was the single most powerful ideological institution, whose influence was felt in every village of the highlands of Kebessa. Under Italian order, the Coptic Church in Eritrea was forced to sever its ties to the Ethiopian Coptic Church. Furthermore, as we have noted, the Italians broke the economic power of the church by confiscating church land and converting it to Crown land. The Ethiopian Crown exploited this situation to the fullest. By promising the return of church lands taken by the Italians, the Emperor made the Coptic Church the center of Ethiopian ambitions.

By 1942 every priest had become a propagandist in the Ethiopian cause, every village church had become a centre of Ethiopian nationalism, and popular religious feast days such as 'Maskal' (the Feast of the Cross) had become occasions for open displays of Ethiopian patriotism. The cathedral, monasteries, and village churches would be festooned with Ethiopian flags and the sermons and prayers would be delivered in unequivocal political language (Trevaskis 1960:60).

To begin with, the *makelai-aleit*, the Tigrain serfs who settled in Eritrea and who were the most affected class in the rural area, strongly supported the Ethiopian cause through the church. Further, the peasantry developed an even more intense

hatred of foreigners, especially money-lenders. In 1942 this feeling became solid under the influence of the church. Rural peasant discontent became unified in religion. Peasants, facing economic distress, found temporary salvation in religious unity. The unity increasingly took on an anti-Moslem coloration. Brilliantly cultivating the fears and aspirations of the Eritrean rural population, the Ethiopian Crown gained a foothold in the Kebessa. However, it could only be a temporary victory because by emphasizing such a retrograde idea, the Crown created a contradiction it was incapable of resolving.

The Western Lowlands

The rule of Italian capital in Eritrea had an unequal character and differed in influence from region to region. Relatively speaking, the western lowlands were not as heavily penetrated as those of the Kebessa regions. Although not as pervasive, nevertheless, the colonial rule unleashed an irreversible process that was shaking the caste structure so prevalent in the lowlands and northern highlands of Eritrea from its foundation. The Italian policy of combined direct and indirect rule was designed to expedite the rape of the peasantry by means of modern and traditional fetters.

To this end, Italians worked to conserve the rural class structure and social organization so as to use the nobility to safeguard their interests. While in the highlands this was somewhat successful, such a method was difficult to apply in the lowlands because of differing social and economic circumstances. Nevertheless, the Italians attempted to implement it.

The lowland areas were predominantly dominated by a livestock economy. Because of the introduction of modern and scientific techniques of livestock breeding and health care, we have seen that the number of livestock increased considerably in the 1940s. This had a tremendous impact on the rural society, especially among serfs, since the serf had an absolute right over grazing land and his property, including livestock. Indeed, they allowed the serf to increase his wealth and some serfs did exactly that. Since the obligation of the serf to the chief was defined and since "dues or

services exacted from the serf are fixed and not proportional," the serf's potential to accumulate wealth was not restricted by tradition or custom (Nadel 1945:82-83). Furthermore, the role once played by the nobility as the protector and guarantor of safety of the serfs was increasingly being taken over by the Italian administrators. Hence, as far as the serf was concerned, the traditional office of the nobility was becoming obsolete. As a result, the role of the chiefs was eclipsed by the new rulers and the serf's "incentives to strict observance of the feudal observance disappeared with it" (Nadel 1945:85).

The serf also began to occupy positions opened up by the colonial modes of production. The nobility became the victim of its own traditional pride and "the caste-proud *Nabtab* made use of these new opportunities than the serfs, just as the tribal noble was less prepared to develop his own — his property and wealth" (Nadel 1945:83). Nor could the nobility fall back to the traditional ways of accumulating wealth. With the presence of the colonial police apparatus, the infrequent raids by the feudal nobility became difficult if not impossible. It is against all these odds that the Italian colonialists sought so hard to preserve the influence of the traditional chiefs in the rural community.

While the economic base of the nobility was destroyed, the Italians worked hard to preserve its political influence because they wanted to rule the peasantry through this caste. By 1934, the Italians went as far as paying some of the influential nobility with a "fixed salary" and preserved the chief's position by "transforming feudal rule into a responsible political office" (Nadel 1945:86). The same policy was applied in the northern highlands (Massawa region) and other Tigre-speaking tribes whose social structures were similar to those of the Beni-Amer society. By 1941 the Italian defeat cut short Italy's political experiment in the rural areas of the northern highlands and the western lowlands. The influx of ex-soldiers returning to their homes further exacerbated the situation.

From 1942 to 1945 there was sporadic and protracted warfare, raids and counterraiding involving the Beni-Amer, the Nadendown of Sudan, and the tribes around the Gash-Setit areas. Here a legendary Beni-Amer leader was born. Ali Mohammed

Idris, nicknamed Ali Muntaz or Ali the Corporal, was an ex-soldier of the Italian army. The influence of Ali Muntaz became widespread, his power multiplied and he had a steady flow of arms and ammunition. Encouraged by Ali Muntaz's exploits, armed rebellion and warlordism flourished in the lowlands as far south as the borders of Ethiopia and north to the Sahel and Masawa provinces (Trevaskis 1960:71).

Peasant discontent and insubordination engulfed the western areas. In the northern coastlines, the Tigray serfs of Ad Taklais initiated a serf resistance that was to influence the serf population throughout the Tigray-speaking population. The Ad Taklais serfs challenged the traditional system and the ruling socio-economic structure by refusing to pay customary dues or taxes to the nobility in 1942. By 1946 the British administration "found itself faced with a situation where nine-tenths of the Tigray population were in resistance to the remaining aristocratic tenth" (Trevaskis 1960:72). Noting that the serfs were united behind this cause, the British suggested a compromise solution. They ruled that the nobility "should retain their political authority, but might not enjoy dues and services from the serfs unless these were voluntarily conceded" (Trevaskis 1960:71). It must be noted that unlike the Italian solution of 1935, the British did not convert the traditional feudal positions into recognized and salaried political offices. In the final analysis, this solution was not a compromise but an outright surrender, since to deprive the nobility "of their right to dues was to strike at the foundation of aristocratic and chiefly authority" (Trevaskis 1960:71). It is precisely these contradictions that encouraged the Ethiopian government in its mobilization efforts to attract and win converts to the Ethiopian cause.

This region, however, was unlike the Kebessa. In the highland plateau Ethiopia had used "historical" reasons, exploited religious sentiments, and cultural affinity to rally support to its "union with Ethiopia" cause. To this end, the ruling class of Ethiopia recruited the Coptic Church to their cause. But there was no "Great Tradition" or "small tradition" to speak of in the lowlands. The serfs, Moslem only by name (Nadel 1943:1945), made up 90 percent of the society; they were not

primarily fighting outside enemies but local ruling classes. By 1946 the little support Ethiopia had in the highlands was slowly fragmenting. It was essential, therefore, to augment these losses by influencing and winning adherents to the unionist cause in the lowlands. In the absence of conducive conditions, the Ethiopian envoy in Eritrea, "the Colonial Negga Haile-Selassie, found time to tour the Moslem areas and make personal contact with most of the chiefs and *shumagles* of the Tigray tribes" (Trevaskis 1960:75). Through a combination of direct bribes and future promises, the Ethiopian Crown was able to win the lowland nobility to its cause. The prospect that the Crown would reintroduce and enforce feudal obligations and a caste structure in the rural areas greatly appealed to the nobility of Tigray. By 1946 the Ethiopians had led and sponsored a party which had been founded in 1942 and changed its name from Mahber Hager Fikree (Association of Love of a Country) to Eritrean-Ethiopian Union Party (to be known as the Unionist Party). The Unionist Party attracted ex-feudal lords from western Eritrea. Though predominantly Christian at the leadership level, the party attracted the ex-ruling classes of Eritrea who had lost or were in the process of losing their privileged status with the "development of underdevelopment" during the Italian era. The church hierarchy and the nobility of the highlands and lowlands, basically those who exploited and appropriated the peasant surplus — in labor or in kind — congealed themselves as a force and began to support the process of the return of feudalism with the full support of Ethiopia.

Kebessa and Lowlands: Assessment

The British period (1941–1945) was crucial for Eritrea as a political unit, for it is then that Ethiopia, supported by the U.S., began to meddle in the internal affairs of the country. Yet British colonial administrators and their apologists have saluted England for successfully politicizing Eritrea and initiating liberal democratic paraphernalia (Trevaskis 1960; Nadel 1943, 1945, 1946). This is debatable, since the fact remains that England, weakened by World War II and confronted with the rise of nationalism in its colonies, neither had

the capacity, the strength, nor the necessary class ideology to think in terms of the welfare of its "natives" in Eritrea. The point is that Eritrean political agitation for change was inevitable and was objectively necessitated by both Italian internal colonial contradictions and the sudden collapse of fascist Italian imperialism.

By the time Italy was defeated, its nationals living in Eritrea totaled 70,000. British power did little to alter Italian-created-and-run administrative institutions in Eritrea. The Italians still controlled them. Further, the enlisted Eritreans, fighting the fascist war abroad were returning in thousands and were fully armed. Worse, the Italian defeat signaled the termination of the war-related economy in the country. By 1941 one-fifth of the total Eritrean population had been urbanized while the job market was negligible. The rural peasants who had been grafted into a metropolis economy were understandably affected. The situation in 1941 was, to say the least, desperate and volcanic. With these contradictions, the radicalization of Eritreans seemed imminent.

The Peasant Revolutionary Transformation

In seven of the eight provinces in Eritrea, where more than 95 percent of the population lived, Italian capital precipitated profound economic and social changes. In the first place, it is important to note that in Eritrea, feudalism in its classical form, or its Ethiopian variant, had never developed. In the Christian highlands, however, the Coptic Church owned very valuable lands and demanded and got free peasant labor time for its cultivation. In the lowlands, chiefs owned serfs and the status of the serfs was abhorrent. In both the Christian highlands and the Moslem lowlands, Italian colonialism had altered this "nascent feudalism" by direct intervention and by the impact of capital transformation.

In the highlands the church land was confiscated and converted to Italian Crown land. Some land was leased to expectant peasant villages and others were given to Italian settlers. The church as an economic force was totally destroyed.

In the lowlands the great serf revolts of the 1940s brought to an end serf-subordination and serf-obligations to the chiefs. This was a funda-

mental revolutionary experience in "a country where society has always been divided against itself by feuds and conflicting interests, there now emerged a real union embracing all the Tigray serfs. Seeing this, the Baria of the Gush-Setit, who resented paying dues to their chiefs, and the Samber clans, who feared domination by Na'ib of Massawa, soon hastened to ally themselves with the Tigray (serfs)" (Trevaskis 1960:73).

However, in the highlands the church, no longer an economic power, still exerted superstructural influence, i. e., the ideology of the masses still remained that of Coptic Christian. In the lowlands the tradition was quite different. Here, infant feudalism existed primarily as an economic force. With the emancipation of the serfs, the political and economic power of the lowland chiefs was made inoperative. In both cases, with the peasants freed from economic bondage, the power of the church and that of the chiefs was virtually destroyed. But it is true neither the ruling class nor their ideas die that quickly. With the political chaos of 1941, the temporary comeback of these ruling interests and the strengthening of feudalism was possible.

Immediately after the Italian defeat, a clandestine organization, which became an official political party in December 1947, made every effort to reverse history. It is known as the Patriotic Association for the Union of Eritrea with Ethiopia (Unionist Party). It was initiated and sponsored by the Ethiopian government's cultivated allies, namely the depossessed Coptic Church and the chiefs of the Moslem lowlands. The party's founding fathers and active members had already secured, by the early forties, important high offices in the Addis Ababa-based Ethiopian government, namely Vice-Governor of Addis Ababa, Director of the Ethiopian Post and Telegraph, and His Majesty's Minister of Pen. The main objective of the Unionist Party, a conspiracy of old and the emerging ruling classes, was to cultivate support among the masses for its unionist cause. In return, Ethiopia promised to restore to the church and chiefs their lost economic and political power, and through royal intermarriage, etc., make them part of the Shoan Amhara feudal ruling class.

The Eritrean Coptic Church was the agent for this conspiracy. It began intimidating the peasants,

threatening to excommunicate them, refuse them holy services to baptism and burial if they did not support the Unionist cause. But the more the conspiracy took shape and the more it became exposed, the heads of the church increasingly relied on anti-Moslem paranoia and hysteria to gain support for a union with Ethiopia. With this, the fragile and "unholy" alliance created between the chiefs and the heads of the Unionist Party collapsed. And the church temporarily succeeded in forming anti-Moslem Christian solidarity for the Unionist cause.

With the partial success of the Unionist cause, a counter-party articulating the interest of the lowlands, the Moslem League (1946) was formed. Although the founding fathers of this party were composed of merchants, ex-serfs, and past functionaries of the Italian government, and at the beginning articulated the interests of the serfs, their political goal increasingly became definable relative to the Unionist Party. Earlier, spurred on by the successful revolts of the serfs, the political organ of the Moslem League categorized the Ethiopian government as composed of "the old worn-out 'feudal' system" and subsequently blamed the government for neglecting the welfare of its nationals who "are in such a state of disorganization, ignorance and backwardness that they have had chronic poverty despite fertility of the land and the privilege of independence" (FPCR 1949:103). The party's political goal was to secure independence for the lowland provinces. It increasingly became a sectarian political organization, allowing the chiefs who had defected from the Unionist party to infiltrate into the party organization. Finally, in the summer of 1946, the hostility between the ruling class of the Unionist party and the new rulers of the Moslem League erupted into the worst political war in the history of both Asmara and Eritrea.

Temporarily, the Ethiopian government was able to divide the Eritrean people and especially the peasants by setting fire amid the ruling classes, and by appealing to the "sanctity" of the Ethiopians' official religion.

CONCLUSION

After sixty years of basic change that had taken

place in Eritrea, the conditions for the emancipation of the peasantry were generated. To say the same thing differently, as a result of capitalist colonialism the affairs of the nation were no longer under the direct control of the traditional rulers. The material base of pre-colonial production relation had changed. In little more than six decades the old reality of master/serf, aristocracy/peasant subordination that had existed for centuries came to an historical halt. With the generalization of commodity production and the commoditization of a segment of African labor, the process of forming a collective national identity due to the common colonial experience had taken root in the country.

Revolution, Marx noted, is a qualitative change from one mode of production to another. The disintegration of pre-colonial class relation was indeed a revolutionary experience for Eritreans. Capitalists induced transformation became the base out of which Eritrea was to unfold as an ideopolitical unit. The elite politics of the Eritrean petit-bourgeoisie failed to appreciate this. Though beyond the scope of this essay (and we have shown elsewhere, Gebre-Medhin:1984) it can easily be documented that one of the major weaknesses of the Eritrean Liberation Front was its inability to handle the peasant question properly. The E.P.L.F., on the other hand, not only understood the profound transformation that had taken place in the rural area but went one step further to guarantee the peasants rights achieved in the 1940s and introduced new ones which solidified peasant support for the independence and liberation struggle of the nation. Without rural mass support no revolution can succeed in Eritrea. It is for this reason that the understanding of the social basis of the revolution, namely the profound transformation that has taken place in Eritrea during colonial capitalism, is so central to Eritrean development and politics.

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