# Ethiopian Nationalism: Honorary Europe?

By Ferenc Dávid Markó

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# Introduction

*"But now*
*Poseidon had gone to visit the Ethiopians worlds away,*
*Ethiopians off at the farthest limits of mankind,*
*a people split in two, one part where the Sungod sets*
*and part where the Sungod rises. There Poseidon went*
*to receive an offering, bulls and rams by the hundred–*
*far away at the feast the Sea-lord sat and took his pleasure."*
Homer – The Odyssey[1]


*"Certainly [the Ethiopians] are loved by the gods because of*
*justice. This even Homer indicates in the first book by the fact*
*that Jupiter frequently leaves heaven and feasts with then*
*because of their justice and the equity of their customs. For*
*the Ethiopians are said to be the justest men and for that*
*reason the gods leave their abode frequently to visit them."*
Lactantius Placidus, 6th century AD[2]


More than 70% of the world's population lives in developing countries. The overwhelming majority of the population of the - euphemistically said - developing world (Global South, Third World, developing world, least developed countries: all mean the same) lives in countries created after the end of the World War II and the collapse of the Soviet Union[3]. Although, in some cases the dramatic struggle for independence had its own soul-making function (Mau-Mau in Kenya, Apartheid in South Africa, red and white flag communists in Burma, Dili massacre in East Timor, armed struggle of Eritrea), the 19th century European way of nation building - that of 'nations' create states - was turned upside down, now states had to be filled up with national content. As Clifford Geertz stated, turning

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[1] Homer, *The Odyssey* (New York: Penguin Classics, 1997), 77.
[2] Cited by Frank M. Snowden. See: Frank M. Snowden, *Blacks in Antiquity: Ethiopians in the Greco-Roman Experience* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970), 148.
[3] From this point of view formerly independent Asian and African states, like Thailand (medieval kingdom of Siam), Cambodia, Ethiopia, Liberia, Haiti, and so on are like new ones.

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"populations into people[4]" is harder then securing independence on the battlefield. The cynical British colonial administrator telegrammed home bitter-precisely in 1957 from Accra: "Ghana is born, but where are the Ghanaians?[5]" Contemporary nationalism theories still seem - at least to my sense - to be Eurocentric. Old terminology – eastern and western types of nationalism, civic and ethnic ways of nation building – and old questions are still dominating the debates. But if nationalism studies fails to address the seemingly urgent questions of the developing world's nation-building puzzles it will finally erode itself into one of the complementary-sciences of European history.

I would like to cite a paragraph from Eric Hobsbawm's 1992 book – *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* – which serves as an unofficial textbook of the history of nationalism:

> All movements seeking territorial autonomy [in the late 20th century] tend to think of themselves as establishing 'nations' even when this plainly not the case; and all movements for regional, local or even sectional interest against central power and state bureaucracy will, if they possibly can, put on the national costume, preferably in its ethnic-linguistic styles. Nations and nationalism therefore appear more influential and omnipresent than they are. Aruba plans to break away from the rest of the Netherlands West Indies, because it does not like to be yoked to Curaçao. Does that make it a nation? Or Curaçao, or Suriname, which is already a member of the United Nations?[6]

According to Eric Hobsbawm Aruba, Curaçao, Suriname, and similar countries cut of the same cloth, are not nations, instead of France, Germany, Italy, Poland, or even Latvia. So we have two different leagues, on the one hand a bunch of proper, real nations, capitalist societies, which, in a Gellnerian sense, through mass education and homogenization tries to coincide national and state borders[7]. The 'real' nations of Hungarians, Italians, Spaniards, Danes, Estonians, and Germans live in Hungary, Italy, Spain, Denmark, Estonia, and

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[4] Clifford Geertz, "After the Revolution: Primordial Sentiments and Civil Politics in the New States," in *The Interpretation of Cultures*, Clifford Geertz (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 235.
[5] widespread legend in Ghana, they tell it happily
[6] Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 178.
[7] Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1983)

Germany, with some kin-minorities and diasporas scattered around the globe. On the other hand, we have the artificial states, who "put on the national costume", whose borders were drawn in smoky saloons in Berlin, where we may not find an "ethnic core"[8] of a future nation, and whose national economy is pathetic and deeply exploited by global firms. Nationalism would not reach beyond the borders of Europe; we heard the predictions after World War II. It did not happen in this way. After the mass (sometimes violent) protests in the Third World we were told that the Western educated elites of the colonies memorized and then halfly articulated the language of nationalism which was beguiling for the illiterate masses. Gandhi, U Nu, Suharno, Kenyatta, Mohammed V, and a pride of other charismatic leaders offered rapid economic development, political independence, freedom, and a better life and they only wrapped their offer into European nationalism. But it was not the nation of India, Kenya, or Burma that acted but only the population of a territory.

But even after "the Olympian days of the Bandung conference[9]" when "the sacred leaders of national struggle are either gone [...], replaced by less confident heirs or less theatralic generals, or have been diminished to mere heads of state[10]" nationalism seem to be omnipresent almost everywhere in the developing world and it is still one of the most powerful – if not the only – political forces. The escalation of violence after the fall of the Soviet Union framed in the ethnic-nationalist language (along religious lines in Yugoslavia and Sri Lanka, along recently imperative ethnic lines in Abkhazia and Karabakh, or along different understandings of history in East Timor and Eritrea) warns us, that the optimism of the late eighties that the cultural homogenization of globalization will evaporate the forces of the past – nationalism and national affiliations – proved to be wrong. And a lot of future conflicts are knocking on our doors. Nobody has to be Prophet Ezekiel to foresee the future

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[8] Anthony D. Smith argues for the historical groundness of modern ethnic-nation states. See Anthony D. Smith, *Myths and Memories of the Nation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999) and particularly Anthony D. Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1988)

[9] Geertz, *The Intepretation of Culture*, 236.

[10] Ibid.

bloodsheds in the Cabinda region of Angola, in Casamance in southern Senegal, in Ossetia and Abkhazia, Uyghur and Tibetan populated territories of China, Muslim Philippines, Chechen and Tatar Federations in Russia, Southern Sudan and so on.

I believe there is a space in the academic literature which had not been properly investigated, and been neglected for a while. The gap between the literature of nation building attempts of developing countries and the general nationalism theories seem huge. I would like to argue that the antithesis of 'proper', 'civic', 'Western', and 'European' nationalisms with the 'bloody', 'ethnic', 'Eastern', and 'Third World' nationalisms is unacceptable in the post-Soviet (and post-68') world. I do not only believe that this kind of dichotomy is utterly arbitrary – where to put Japan, Mongolia, Thailand, Ethiopia, Greenland, or South-America (not to speak of the Basques, Welsh, Kurds, Moros, or the Abkhazians) – but I also think its misleading. Is the contemporary Kazakh nation building less civic than the *fin de siècle* Italian? The creation of the Bahasa Indonesian language shortly before independence makes it more artificial than the codification processes of Modern Hebrew or Modern Romanian just because hundred years passed? Is it easier for an ordinary German plumber to define his 'national identity' than for his Cameroonian college?

This thesis aims to show that general nationalism theories – after some fine-tuning – may be applied successfully in a non-European, "alien" environment. The evolution of Ethiopian nationalism through the lens of nationalism theories will shed some light on the general processes happening in the Global South.

# Chapter One: Ethiopian Nationalism

Throughout Ethiopia, which is said to be the oldest continuously self-governing country in the world, ethnic-nationalism suddenly became an overwhelmingly powerful political force. Everything happened quickly, the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) was established in 1973 and by 1977 similar liberation movements waged wars against the communist government in at least 8 provinces from the 14. These ethnic-nationalistic political organizations strived for – in a classical Wilsonian-Leninian sense[11] – self-determination and recognition[12]. The Eritreans (Eritrean People's Liberation Front, EPLF) fought for an independent state, the Somalis (firstly the Western Somali Liberation Front, WSLF, later on the Ogaden National Liberation Front, ONLF) tried to join Siad Barre's unprophetic, bloody vision of 'Greater Somalia', while the Tigrayans (Tigrayan People's Liberation Front, TPLF), the Amharas (Ethiopian People's Democratic Movement, EPDM), and smaller ethnic armies supported the transformation of Ethiopia into an ethnic federation. Ethnicity, which is all around in Ethiopia from the mid-seventies, never earlier seemed to be the most important signifier of peoples' identities.

Lot had been written on the radical revolutions of Ethiopia but scholars – at least I think so – failed to answer the question of rapidity. Usually the revolutionary haste of changes is either portrayed as a consequence of international politics (the Soviet Union financed the communist coup) or as a direct consequence of the poverty and backwardness of the post World War II Ethiopian Empire. This thesis ought to show that the history of Ethiopia's last

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[11] For a full text of the Wilsonian *Fourteen Points* see http://web.jjay.cuny.edu/jobrien/reference/ob34.html (accessed May 29, 2010). For the most elaborate theory of Lenin see: Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, "The Right of Nations to Self-Determination," in *Collected Works: Volume 20* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1972), 393-454.
[12] Jürgen Habermas writes about democratic struggles but his theory about Liberalism 1 and Liberalism 2 may be applied in non-liberal environments also. See: Jürgen Habermas, "Struggles for Recognition in the Democratic Constitutional State," in *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*, ed. Amy Gutmann (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), 107-149., for Charles Taylor celebrated approach see: Charles Taylor, "The Politics of Recognition," In: *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*, ed. Amy Gutmann (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), 25-75.

thirty years is a logical consequence of the evolution of Ethiopian nationalism and the changes of the erratic idea of Ethiopian unity. The aim of this thesis is to reframe the already existing historical, anthropological, sociological knowledge on Ethiopia through the lens of the general nationalism literature. I know that my task is not easy, as I try to write a case study without primary sources. My aim is twofold; firstly I would like to shed some light on the evolution of Ethiopian nationalism and I also would like to experiment the general applicability of – mostly Euro- and capitalist-centric – nationalism theories in a unique Third World setting.

Benedict Anderson's powerful – so overused – phrase of nations as "imagined communities[13]" may be adopted in a wider sense. Every self-conscious human community where a member does not know personally every other member has to be imagined. Ethnic groups in this sense – with the numerous exceptions of 1-2 village ethnic communities – are similar to nations (and to churches and cities) and are "imagined communities". Why and how did it happen in Ethiopia that people started to identify themselves with their imagined ethnic group instead of their family, village, religion, Empire, or country? Was it a natural process, a logical evolutionary step answerable by Marxist theory of economic and political progress? Or is it only a consequence of dirty card tricks of the political elite who tried to strengthen their grip on power by classifying peoples and putting everybody into a previously empty ethnic drawer? I find both of the answers weak. I believe that – for example – the Rwandan genocide was not only an economic necessity and Milosevic was not able to stir up and exploit nationalist emotions because he was a cynical, chauvinist, but charismatic politician. As Doctor Conan Doyle would say, Milosevic was the symptom, not the illness.

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[13] See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983)

## *Ancient Ethiopia*

In 1974, in the year of the revolution when a bunch of communist tried to destroy history, the French archeologist Maurice Taieb found the skeletons of Lucy[14], one of the oldest known hominids, in the Afar Desert in eastern Ethiopia. Lucy was dated to be 3.2 million years old. Lucy, alongside with the 4.4 million years old Ardi, also found in the Afar Desert a couple of years later, show that humanity - at least in the biological sense - was born in nowadays Ethiopia. Agriculture was invented in the fifth-fourth millennium BC, maybe even before peoples living next to the Tigris or Indus rivers begun to raise crops. The Abyssinian Highlands was also the nursery of the Afro-Asiatic (Hamitic-Semitic) group of languages which "developed and fissured in the Sudan-Ethiopian borderlands[15]".

The first organized states on the territory of nowadays Ethiopia were founded around 1000 BC. The Aksumite Empire lasted from the 4th century BC till the 10th century AD. Axum, the capital of the Empire was the very first sizeable city in the highlands. The Aksumite Kingdom handled the commerce between Ptolemaic Egypt, the Roman Empire, and Ancient India[16]. The more than 30 meters high steles of Axum, which were erected by Aksumite Kings to glorify their reign and open an *Axis mundi*, somehow became not just the symbols of the Aksumite Empire but the steles also symbolize the continuity of Ethiopian history. The invading Italian army in 1937 looted the highest stele and, as a trophy of victorious war, transported into Rome where it was reelected in front of the Circus Maximum marking the grandeur of the New Roman Empire. After fifty years of negotiation Italy finally returned the obelisk in 2005. Melas Zenawi, prime minister of Ethiopia, alongside with the complete political elite, attended the ceremony.

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[14] In Amharic she is called *Dinkenesh* meaning "she is wonderful"

[15] Harold G. Marcus, *The History of Ethiopia* (Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1994), 3.

[16] For the most detailed monograph of the Aksumite Kingdom see: Joseph W. Michels, *Changing Settlement Patterns in the Aksum-Yeha Region of Ethiopia: 700 BC - AD 850* (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2005)

The Hellenized-Romanized elites of the Aksumite Kingdom get in touch with Christianity around the 3$^{rd}$ century AD and the kingdom officially converted to Christianity around 350, only half a century later then Armenia, the first Christian state in the world. Following the First Council of Nicea (325) and especially after the Council of Chalcedon (451) the Ethiopian Orthodox Church became part of the Coptic Orthodox Church. The Aksumite Empire began to decline in the late 6th century and dissolved around 940[17]. The next three hundred years following the collapse of the Aksumite Empire were chaotic and hardly retraceable.

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[17] Ibid.

# Chapter Two: Medieval Ethiopia

Emperor Yekuno Amlak (r. 1270-1285) restored the rule of the Solomonic dynasty in 1270. His dominion stretched on nowadays Tigray, Amhara, and Shewa provinces (northern parts of nowadays Ethiopia), stuck away in the hardly accessible Ethiopian highlands, governing almost solely Semitic (Amharic and Tigrayan) peoples. In the following 200 years, after conquering important Red Sea ports, the Empire become a regional power and a wealthy beneficiary of the Indian – European sea trade. The first act of the reinterpretation of the Ethiopian history occurred during this period. It is evident, that the Solomonic dynasty of Ethiopian rulers from the medieval times (from 1270) traced back their ancestors to Queen of Sheba through the Aksumite kings' genealogy tables[18]. The *Kebra Nagast's* (The Glory of the Kings) - the 'national script' written by six supposedly Tigrayan scholars in the 14th century - primary function was to prove the Solomonic lineage and to sound the divine election of the Ethiopian Christians[19]. The writers of the text „blended local and regional oral traditions and style and substance derived from the Old and New Testaments, various apocryphal texts, Jewish and Islamic commentaries, and Patristic writings[20]".

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[18] Marcus, *History of Ethiopia*, 17.
[19] For a detailed analysis of the *Kebra Nagast* see: Donald Nathan Levine, *Greater Ethiopia: The Evolution of a Multiethnic Society* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2000), especiallt the 7th chapter: *Tigraen Legacy: A National Script*, 92-117.
[20] Marcus, *History of Ethiopia,* 17.

**1. The Ethiopian Kingdom in the 13th century. From Tadesse Tamrat: *Church and State in Ethiopia*, p65.**

Menilek - according to the *Kebra Nagast* - was the son of Queen of Sheba and King Solomon of Israel. Sheba visited Solomon in the 10th century BC to seek advice and to learn the art of government. She was not only beguiled by Solomon but she was also converted to Judaism. The son of Solomon and Sheba was born in Jerusalem and returned at the age of 13. Menilek bested his father and during a later visit to the Holy City he took - as a sign that God replaced the Jews to the Ethiopians - the Ark of the Covenant with him to Abyssinia. As we can read in the *Kebra Nagast*:

> Assuredly, in very truth the King of Ethiopia is more exalted, and more honorable than any other king
> upon the Earth, because of the glory and greatness of the heavenly Zion. And *God loveth the people of
> Ethiopia*, for without knowing about His Law, they destroyed their idols, whereas those unto whom the

Law of God had been given made idols and worshipped the gods which God hateth. And in the later times when He was born to redeem Adam He wrought signs and wonders before them, but they did not believe in Him, neither in His preaching nor in the preaching of His fathers. *But the people of Ethiopia believed in one trustworthy disciple, and for this reason God hath loved exceedingly the people of Ethiopia*[21]. [italics mine]

The *Kebra Nagast* is the oldest written document using 'the people of Ethiopia' phrase. What is more, it also declares that after the Jews betrayed God, the Lord chose the Ethiopians to be his favored tribe. "Ethiopians became the chosen people, an honor reinforced by their acceptance of Christianity. The *Kebra Nagast* is thus a national epic that glorifies a particular monarchical line and tradition and also indelibly associates Ethiopia with the Judeo-Christian tradition[22]"

The late medieval was the times of national epics. The *Gesta Hungarum*, which tells the story of the Hungarians, a that-time relatively new kingdom in the Carpathian basin, was written in the late 12th century by anonym scholars (and later amended by Simon Kézai in the 13th century). Though we have written documents in Hungarian from this time period but the language of the text is the holy Latin. The Hungarians – according to the *Gesta Hungarum* – arrived from the vast steppes of Asia into the Carpathian basin following God's mythical deer (*Csodaszarvas*), led by great rulers, direct ascendants of the blessed Árpád-dynasty. The future territory of the Hungarian Kingdom was personally selected by the Lord and Virgin Mary blessed the land before the Hungarians occupied it[23,24].

Geoffrey of Monmouth wrote the *Historia Regum Brittania* in the first decades of the 12th century. The story of the British nation - somewhat quizzically - has begun in Troy, where a couple of Trojan warriors founded the British nation and after they conquered the

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[21] *Kebra Nagast*, chapter 95. For a full text of the Kebra Nagast see: http://www.sacred-texts.com/chr/kn/ (accessed April 18, 2010), for a modern translation and commentary see: Miguel F. Brooks (ed.), *A Modern Translation of the Kebra Nagast: The Glory of Kings* (Lawrenceville, NJ: Red Sea Press, 1996)
[22] Marcus, *History of Ethiopia,* 18.
[23] For full English translation and commentary one should see: Martyn Rady, '''The Gesta Hungarorum of Anonymus, the Anonymous Notary of King Béla': a translation," *Slavonic and East European Review* vol. 87 (2009): 681-724.
[24] See Paul Robert Magocsi, *The Shaping of a National Identity: Subcarpathian Rus', 1848-1948* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978), 107.

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God's blessed British Islands they fiercely fought against barbarians, Romans, and Vikings. King Arthur was the first king who – according to the *Historia* – unified the British peoples[25].

The 12th century *El Cantar de Mio Cid* – a story of a Spaniard prince fighting the Arabs –, the Russian *Tale of Igor's Campaign* (also from the 12th century) – God's elect Russians fighting and loosing against the unhallowed Tatars – are similar national (and later nationalized) epics. But even the more recently written (or collected) epics – *David of Sassoun* of Armenia, the *Knight in the Panther's Skin* for Georgians, the *Epic of Sundiata* in Mali – are cut of the same cloth: God's chosen people living in a given, holy homeland (the *heimat*, as Benedict Anderson named it[26]), led by dynastical rulers whose ancestors were personally empowered by God, fighting against unholy forces. These national epics create historical continuity, grounds historical rights to govern the holy land, and strengthen the collective identity through the beliefs of divine election. And I use the phrase 'historical' not in the modern, scientific sense; we know that the Anglo-Saxons are not tired Trojan warriors, the Hungarians never swopped the Carpathian basin for a white horse with the Slavic king Svatopluk, and Menilek never took the Ark of the Covenant into Ethiopia. Historical means a set of symbols; the belief in historical continuity may ground and strengthen the claims and demands of an ethnic group which helps them to survive, in a Smithian sense[27].

The pronounced national unity, which derived from the historical continuity and the belief on the divine election, was exploited by the two most prominent emperors of the period of Medieval Ethiopia: Amda Seyon (r. 1314-1344) and Zara Yaqob (r. 1434-1468). Emperor Amda Seyon declared the unity of church and state and donated huge, fertile lands to the Ethiopian Church. As he expanded the Empire further south and east he conquered Muslim inhabited territories also. The newly occupied provinces of Gojam, Hadiya, and Damot were

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[25] See Brynley F. Roberts, "Geoffrey of Monmouth and Welsh Historical Tradition," *Nottingham Medieval Studies* 20, no. 1 (1976): 29-40.
[26] For the introduction of the term 'Heimat' see: Benedict Anderson, "The New World Disorder," *New Left Review* 193 (1992): 3–13.
[27] Anthony D. Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*.

indirectly ruled through a system of strong military garrisons. Regional liege lords were selected by the Emperor either from the traditional Amharic noble families or – in a growing number – from local (non-Amharic) strong families. The *Pax Ethiopica* was maintained indirectly, with a permanently moving court and tax-collecting organization which visited every region once or twice a year. The Church has not really expanded south and eastwards, very few new monasteries were founded in the occupied territories. After a couple of years of Muslim rebellions the Emperor agreed with the Muslim population – who controlled all the ivory, coffee, slave, salt, and gold trade – that they will be left to freely practice their religion if they pay taxes after commerce. As Marcus states, Amda Seyon

> [as] the theoretical owner of all land [...] assigned gulfs, or fiefs, to worthy followers. They administered their localities, supplied soldiers and animals during wartime, demanded service from their subjects, and collected taxes in kind. The dues and *corvée* varied widely from region to region, depending on fertility, security, recency of conquest, religion, social cohesion, and whatever the emperor demanded for tribute. [...] The gulf lords enjoyed almost untrammeled local power, which they exercised in the monarch's name under the watchful eyes of the local imperial garrison. Given Ethiopia's terrain and difficulty of communications, the early Solomonic monarchs could not construct a bureaucratic empire.[28]

The 14th century Ethiopian state was a semi-feudal, Christian monarchy with a significant and privileged Muslim (and Falasha Jewish) minority governed in an indirect way. The borderline between a warlord of a surrounding vassalage and a tributary liege lord empowered by the Emperor was very week, sometimes nonexistent, so the borders of the Empire were never clear lines rather day-to-day changing, hardly definable strips around the imperial garrisons. By the end of Amda Seyon's rule Ethiopian Muslims – supported by the Sultan of Egypt – set up a considerable rebellious army against the Christian rule. First time in the history of the Ethiopian Empire the Emperor called for arms from all across the dominion. Monks traveled each (Christian) region and asked the liege lords to help the Emperor, God's chosen leader, into a holy war against the Muslims. But the Emperor rather

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[28] Marcus, *History of Ethiopia*, 20.

called for Christian (i.e. Orthodox Ethiopian) unity. In a similar vain to the Reconquista of the Iberian Peninsula (711-1492) or the Crusades (1095-1291) every Christian was called to fight the Muslim forces of Devil. Amda Seyon achieved a great victory and his rule over Abyssinian Muslims was finally acknowledged by the Sultan of Egypt. The Alexandrian bishop Abuna Yakob was delegated to Ethiopia – with the permit of the Sultan – who started organizing the Ethiopian Church. He created a kingdom inside the Empire, founded dozens of new monasteries in the non-Christian regions, and built up a blossoming economy for the church. Conversion went fairly successfully as social mobility – became a monk, a bureaucrat, a judge – was only possible for the believers of the state religion. Muslims remained traders, Falasha Jews were craftsmen, while pagans born and died as nomads or peasants.

As the Church get stronger and wealthier it alienated the overwhelming majority of impoverished Ethiopians. Abba Ewostatewos (c. 1273-1352), an abbot in Seraye Monastery, founded a new monastic ideology which tried to purify Church from state politics and preached that monks and priest should renounce all earthly goods[29]. We have no evidences, and any kind of link is rather implausible, but the Ewostatian ideology was almost identical with the Franciscan thoughts (founded in 1209): monks should live in poverty, they should never accept money or gifts for their holy services, and they should keep themselves away from politics. Although powerful bishops forced Ewostatewos into Armenian exile[30] the movement rose by leaps and bounds. By the beginning of the 15th century, during Emperor Dawit I (r. 1380-1412) rule the diversification almost drove the Empire into civil war.

It was Emperor Zara Yaqob (r. 1434-1468), „unquestionably the greatest ruler of Ethiopia[31]", who realized that „the energetic conviction [of the Ewostatian movement] ought

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[29] See Taddesse Tamrat, Church and State in Ethiopia (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), 206.
[30] Ibid.
[31] Edward Ullendorff, *The Ethiopians: An Introduction to the Country and People* (London: Oxford University Press, 1960), 69.

to be exploited to renovate the church as a vehicle of national unity"[32]. Zara Yaqob reformed the church and pacified the two fractions in 1450. The Emperor

> continued to mold Christianity into Ethiopia's main line of internal defense. Together clergy and king created an ideology for a united state, an idea spread by the many deacons and priests newly ordained by Zara Yakob's two bishops. In the more remote areas, the emperor liberally endowed monasteries and churches, making land grants with property confiscated from defeated rulers. Even the most radical clergy and monastics were integrated into the political economy, further uniting church and state. Zara Yakob was a great leader of Ethiopia. He was remarkably consistent in working for Ethiopia's unity from Eritrea south through Shewa into Sidama country.[33]

From Zara Yaqob's time Church, state, and the notion of Ethiopian unity remained in a symbiosis till the communist takeover in 1974. Nevertheless, during the period of Medieval Ethiopia being Ethiopian first and foremost meant not being Muslim, and the next step in Smith's theory of ethnic election may be analyzed through the lens of the first European (a.k.a. Catholic) attempts to conquer Ethiopia.

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[32] Marcus, *History of Ethiopia,* 24.
[33] Ibid.

# Chapter Three: Jesuitical Ethiopia

The first Portuguese travelers, who were looking after the mythical Prester John, arrived to the country in the last years of Zara Yaqob's rule. Zara Yaqob sought European alliances against the Egyptians so in 1450 he sent out a diplomatic mission to meet the Pope and European Kings. The Sultan of Egypt kept a strict control over the Red Sea so very few Europeans reached the Solomonic Empire. Those who set a foot inside the Empire – like the renaissance painter Niccolo Brancaleone, who deeply influenced the art of Ethiopian icon painting[34] - reported about a strong and cultured civilization[35], so European leaders exaggerated the importance of Ethiopia and the mythical Prester John and they hoped that Ethiopia will stop the Muslim expansion in the Middle East. The successor of Zara Yaqob, Regent Queen Eleni of Ethiopia sent a second – much more successful – mission to Europe led by the intelligent and charming Mateus, the monk[36].

Zara Yaqob's successors were weak leaders so the Muslim rebellions intensified. The state of Adal became the most important Muslim power in the Horn of Africa. When a young and ambitious Somali imam, Ahmad ibn Ibrihim al-Ghazi, the "Left-handed" (r. 1525-1543), become the self-proclaimed Sultan of Adal, the rebellion developed into more than a regional, peripheral threat to the Empire. Al-Ghazi declared a jihad, holy war against the Christians and his superior army – Somali swordsmen, Afar cavalry, and most importantly hundreds of musketeers with Ottoman weaponry – occupied vast Christian territories. Once again, the Emperor called for Ethiopian unity and the monks convened tens of thousands of soldiers. However, in 1528 at the battle of Shimbra Kure the Christian forces lost against al-Ghazi's
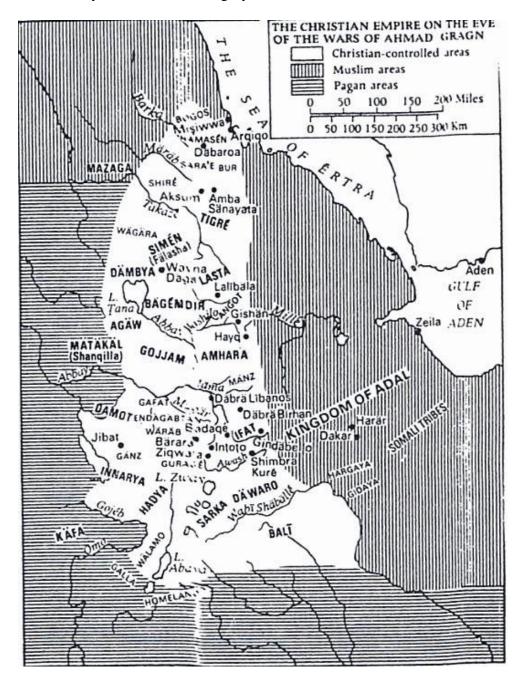
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[34] See M. N. Piechocinski, "The Iconography of Ethiopia: A Review of the Styles, Themes, Techniques, and Influences in an Historical Perspective," *Sacred Art Journal* 10, no. 3 (1989): 95–112.

[35] A couple of examples at: E. A. Wallis-Budge, *Legends of Our Lady Mary, the Perpetual Virgin and Her Mother*, (Whitefish, MT: Kessinger Publishing, 2003) xliv.

[36] For the story of Mateus and the history of the further diplomatic relations see: J. J. Hespeler-Boultbee, *A Story in Stones: Portugal's Influence on Culture and Architecture in the Highlands of Ethiopia 1493-1634* (s.l.: CCB Publishing, 2006), 178.

victorious tactics. By 1535 al-Ghazi conquered most of the Ethiopian highlands; the Empire

declined into the very core Amharic – Tigrayan territories.



**2. The Ethiopian Kingdom in the late 15<sup>th</sup> – early 16<sup>th</sup> centuries. From Tadesse Tamrat, *Church and State in Ethiopia*, p298.**

In 1535 the besieged Emperor Lebna Dengel (r. 1508-1540) cried for European help.

In his letter he asked the Europeans to save the Christian Kingdom of God in its holy war[37]. In

1541 four hundred Portuguese musketeers disembarked at the Red Sea port of Massawa under

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[37] Taddesse Tamrat, *Church and State in Ethiopia*, 301.

the leadership of Christopher da Gama[38]. The Ottomans, realizing the danger, sent another nine hundred musketeers and ten cannons for al-Ghazi. The sides fought for years until Emperor Galawedos (r. 1540-1559) achieved a great victory in 1543 killing al-Ghazi and capturing most of the modern Ottoman weaponry. But the Empire was in ruins, hundreds of thousand lives perished, churches and monasteries burnt down, complete noble families were killed, infrastructure destroyed, cities looted[39]. The mercenary Portuguese musketeers remained, as a personal army of the Emperor, granting him ultimate powers over the territory, but the Portuguese sent clerics and priests also to help rebuilding the country and to spread Catholicism.

Galawedos applied the Portuguese clergymen as judges in the courts. The short reign of Emperor Za Dengel (r 1603-1604) ended after he publicly announced his conversion into Roman Catholicism. His successor, Emperor Susneyos (r. 1607-1632) was more circumspect. On the one hand, he knighted more and more Oromos – non-Semitic, Cushitic people – expanding the previously solely Semitic (Amharic and Tigrayan) circles of nobility, and on the other hand, despite the fact that his most influential advisors were Portuguese Jesuits, he always loudly declared – through public speeches, ceremonial events, and festivals – his commitment to the Ethiopian Orthodox traditions. Pedro Sáez, the most important Jesuitical adviser at the palace, secretly converted the Emperor in 1612. After Susneyos publicly announced his conversion in 1622 the anti-Catholic rebellion immediately broke out all across the Empire. The Portuguese and the Emperor reacted aggressively and they banned male circumcision, the observance of the Sabbath, and ordered the Catholic reconsecration of churches, the eradication of "unholy altars", the rebaptization of the population, and the abandonment of the old liturgy for the Catholic one. Fasilides, the beloved son of Susneyos

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[38] For the original Portuguese report translated to English see: R.S. Whiteway, *The Portuguese Expedition to Abyssinia in 1541-1543*, (Nendeln, Liechtenstein: Kraus Reprint, 1967) (a reprint book of the 1902 original)
[39] Marcus, *History of Ethiopia,* 33-35.

led the rebellion, and Susneyos had to resign in 1632. The Ethiopian unity, fuelled by the belief of divine election, proved to be stronger then the will for modernization.

Emperor Fasilides (r. 1632-1667) in no time expelled the Jesuits and banned Catholicism in the Empire. The previous dance-card was played in a reversed order this time, now Fasilides asked the Ottomans to close the maritime borders of Ethiopia from Europeans and ordered the immediate execution of every white man who attempts to set his or her foot into the dominion. In exchange he left the Muslims to found independent or semi-independent states on the verge of his new dominion. The territory of the Empire declined to the previous core Amharic and Tigrayan regions with some southern, Oromo populated areas. During the next two hundred years the Empire was cut off from the rest of the world.

As the thesis ought to show, the population was mobilized through the myth of ethnic election twice. First time the mobilization was driven from the center, Amda Seyon and Zara Yaqob called Ethiopians into arms against the unholy Muslims, second time the mobilization was rather fragmented and uncontrolled, it arrived from the peripheries without central planning and the (Orthodox Christian) population of Ethiopia was fighting against the alien Catholics. Anthony D. Smith stated about Ethiopia:

> [A] Christian realm whose legitimacy rested on a dynastic myth of ethnic election was the Ethiopian kingdom of Aksum and its successors. The Aksumite kings may have adopted their Monophysite form of Christianity in the fourth century from Coptic sources, but it retained many Judaic features, brought perhaps from the southern Arab kingdoms. Successive Ethiopian kingdoms in the Abyssinian plateau derived their legitimacy from the symbolism of the Lion of Judah and the claim to royal descent from Solomon and the Queen of Shaba through Menilek. In the so called 'Solomonic' dynasty from the thirteenth century, the ruling Christian Amhara nobles began to participate in this royal myth of election, which inspired a cultural revival and mobilized the community for resistance to Muslim invaders and the Falashas.[40]

The problems with Anthony D. Smith's analyzes lies in the fact that it forgets that the Ethiopian nobility - and peasantry - not only consisted Amharic but Tigrayan, and later, from

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[40] Anthony D. Smith, *Myths and memories of the nation*, 133.

the 17<sup>th</sup> century, Christian Oromo, families[41]. It was the religion, not the 'ethnicity' which created the sense of togetherness but on the contrary the myth of divine election failed to forge a single ethnic group.

There are two solutions to solve the problem of the 'dual (or triple) ethnicity - one myth of ethnic election' question without contesting Anthony D. Smith's theory. The first possible answer is to see the Amharas and the Tigrayans as one ethnic group who separated later on after the Medieval and Jesuitical times, so the already existing cultural and linguistic differences between the two (three, if we take the Christian Oromo into consideration) groups were neglected and Ethiopians saw themselves as one block of people. But the Amharas and the Tigrayans not only differ in the language they speak but also in notions of common ancestry, family structure, kinship relationships, marital habits, habitual law, categories of sober sense, and general value systems[42]. We may say that due to the absolute lack of social mobility – you were born as a son of an Amharic peasant, you die as an Amharic peasant – and due to the lack of infrastructure – there were no roads in the Empire, and most parts remained inaccessible during the wet seasons – differences in language, way of life, values system, and so on naturally remained intact. This argument would stand if two separated Tigrayan (or Amharic) communities would develop different lifestyles and languages. But anthropological studies – from the sixties – showed that Tigrayan spoken in one part of the country is intelligible also a thousand kilometers away[43]. These studies are earlier then the amplification of ethnicity in Ethiopia. Even today, a culture – whatever does it mean – of an

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[41] Daniel Nathan Levine, *Greater Ethiopia*, 171-87.
[42] Ibid, chapter 2.
[43] For an anthropological account see: Lyda Favali and Roy Pateman, *Blood, Land, and Sex: Legal and Political Pluralism in Eritrea*, (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2003), 14-38.

Amharic village in the northern highlands is much more similar to another Amharic village far away in the south then to a Tigrayan village next door[44].

The other possible solution is to see the Amharas as a dominant ethnic group, so everything was Amharacized in the Empire, and the numerical minority of Tigrayans had to follow the Amharic rule in order to extend their own ethnic survival. Something similar happened in Russia, where smaller ethnic groups (the Belarus and the Ukrainains for example) converted to the state religion and shared the belief of Russophile ethnic election meanwhile maintaining their linguistic and cultural differences. But, as it can be clear from David Levine's book, the Amhara elites, though enjoyed some privileges, did not oppressed the Tigrayans as it happened in the Russian Empire[45].

Smith's analyzes of the "dynastical-imperial pattern of ethnic survival"[46] may fit for the Armenians, Persians, or Polish where we had a (more or less easily definable) single 'ethnie' who was chosen by God and led by a specific dynasty but for the Ethiopians - as I showed - we have to reinterpret Smith's theory; the belief in divine chosenness is not attached to a single ethnic group. The notion of Ethiopian unity survived – and still omnipresent in large fractions of the Ethiopian society – mainly due to the myth of divine election without creating a single 'Ethiopian ethnicity'.

> By the sixteenth century, Ethiopia was a feudal, conglomerate state centered in the northern-central highlands among people who shared cultural, economic, linguistic, and religious affinities. The core area was ringed by more or less recently conquered provinces, whose inhabitants were at least superficially Christian and whose administration resembled government in the traditional provinces. At the outer periphery were tributary states whose traditional rulers presided over people culturally, religiously, and economically different from those of the heartland and its environs. Whenever there was a crisis, or, indeed, royal instability, death, or succession, the state began to contract. Even in the

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[44] Takkele Taddese, "Do the Amhara Exist as a Distinct Ethnic Group?" in *Papers of the 12th International Conference of Ethiopian Studies*, ed. Harold G. Marcus (Addis Ababa, Ethiopia: Institution of Ethiopian Studies, 1994), 168-86.
[45] Daniel Nathan Levine, *Greater Ethiopia*, 171-87.
[46] Anthony D. Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*, 128.

heartland, political squabbling often eroded the fragile unities of religion, language, tradition, and economy[47]

After the expulsion of Jesuits and the cat-and-mouse friendship with the Ottoman Empire, the social development of Ethiopia got stuck. Feudal structures remained intact, noble families strengthened their position, the church cemented itself into palace politics, technical development bypassed the country, and cities remained week. As the independent Muslim states pocketed the incomes of commerce the Empire had very few resources and the overpopulated highlands rapidly fall into poverty. Famines, civil wars, banditry, religious zealot movements detained development. Although, one thing is obvious, the notion of *Ethiopia irredenta* replaced the myth of ethnic election and became the only political ideology to mobilize Ethiopian liege lords (and through them the whole population). *Ethiopia irredenta* was the craving after the glorious past, when the Empire controlled vast territories from the Red Sea to the Indian Ocean[48].

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[47] Marcus, *History of Ethiopia,* 28.
[48] For the general history of the chaotic centuries see: Mordechai Abir, The Era of the Princes: the Challenge of Islam and the Re-unification of the Christian Empire, 1769-1855 (London: Longmans, 1968). For the importance of the idea of *Ethiopia irredenta* see Marcus, *History of Ethiopia,* 103.

# Chapter Four: Imperial Ethiopia

Three important events happened in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, which reversed the decline. First of all, the Scramble for Africa arrived to the neighborhood of the Empire, secondly the power of the Ottoman Empire – the sick man of Europe – over the Red Sea evaporated rapidly, and most importantly, a young and ambitious new Emperor – Kassa Hailu, later Tewodros II – was crowned in 1855.

In 1839 Kassa Hailu, the son of a regional governor finished his formal religious education. The young student was under a cloud by his masters because of his passionate interest in Ancient and Modern European history. He spared no effort and money on European books smuggled by Armenian and Greek mercenaries. After graduation he returned to the province of Kwara but he was not welcomed by local feudal lords so he founded his own *shifta* – professional mugger company – on the anarchic lowlands. In the first months he only had twenty followers. He was fuelled by religious conviction and by the belief in Ethiopian unity and equality, so he redistributed almost all the looted goods among local peasants[49]; acting like an Abyssinian Robin Hood. Kassa quickly became popular among the general Ethiopian population especially after he defeated Emperor Yohannes III and beguiled Tewabetch, the granddaughter of the Emperor in 1846. He was appointed as a regional governor at the Sudanese border, and after a mismanaged campaign against Muhammad Ali's Sudanese forces he realized the importance of modern weaponry and tactics. He denied to pay the annual imperial taxes and spent all the incomes on European weapons (Thomson machine guns, cannons, automatic rifles). After a victorious civil war he became the undeniable ruler

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[49] For the history of the rise of Tewodros see Paul B. Henze, "The Empire from Atrophy to Revival: The Era of the Princes and Tewodros II" in *Layers of Time: A History of Ethiopia* Paul B. Henze (New York: Palgrave, 2000) 119-33.

of Ethiopia in 1854 and this act was sanctified with his coronation as Tewodros II, Negus Negast, King of Kings.

After securing victory at the battlefields Tewodros implemented important nation-building steps. He unified the state and the church once again, named himself as the ultimate head of the church, so he was able to remove untrustworthy clergymen and appoint loyal bishops. Tewodros also created the historical continuity by declaring himself a direct descendant of the Solomonic dynasty (in reality he was only a collateral relative of the family). The Emperor also replaced regional feudal lords with his loyal men; sometimes knighting bandits from his previous life. He began transforming the traditions of provincial politics into national themes, since he fully believed that he was destined to revive the empire. The intentional shift from indirect to direct rule also started during his rule, as he ordered the construction of military garrisons into every considerable sized village, so the presence of the state became visible for ordinary Ethiopians first time during the history of Abyssinia. But, as it will happen many times in the next 200 years – the too radical reforms alienated the elites and continuous warfare swallowed his visionary nation-building attempts. His state was not working, so he tried to save time for himself:

> In 1861, finally understanding his conundrum, he decided to win over his people through the application of a bold foreign policy conceived to gain Western technological assistance and to transform Ethiopia into a modern state. He sought technical assistance from Protestant missionaries, mostly because they were not associated with the Catholic Church. Tewodros and also Abuna Salama made clear that Ethiopia did not need religious instruction, already plentiful, but wanted craftsmen, technicians, and secular teachers. The chosen instruments, from the Saint Chrischona Institute of Basel, were skilled worker-missionaries, whose method combined quiet instruction in spiritual matters with education in the trades[50]

Tewodros sought European alliances so he sent letters to the Prussian, Russian, French, and British heads of states. After he received no answer from Queen Victoria he imprisoned two British officers which provoked a punitive British military campaign, "one of the most

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[50] Marcus, *History of Ethiopia,* 69.

expensive affairs of honour in history"[51], in 1868. After Tewodros realized that he can not beat the 25.000 men strong British-Indian army he committed suicide. The British granted all the military equipment to Liy Kassai Mercha, future Emperor Yohannes IV (r. 1872-1889), creating the first numerous and very well equipped Imperial army[52]. Yohannes, and especially his successor Menilek II (r. 1889-1913) realized that to contend the European colonizers they have to expand the Empire, demarcate the borders, modernize the society, reform and capitalize the economy, develop the infrastructure, organize the public education, widen the possibilities for general social mobility, and continuously train and equip the army.

The Scramble for Africa arrived to the borders of Ethiopia. The British Empire set up colonial administration in the Northern Sudan in the 1870s and the Mahdist State of Southern Sudan threatened the Ethiopian Empire from 1881. The British also started to organize their East African colonies (Tanganyika, Kenya) in the middle of the century, while Imperial Germany established a protectorate over the Sultanate of Zanzibar in 1885, a long-standing business partner of Ethiopia. The French founded their first harbor in the Eastern African shores at Obock (nowadays Djibouti) in 1862, a stone's throw from the walled city of Harar. But the most potent threat against Ethiopia arrived from the north, when Italy conquered Assab (1869) and Massawa (1885), the most important Ottoman ports in the Red Sea. Italy quickly organized the colony and sent a strong and modern force of 100.000 men in 1890, while tens of thousands of penniless Italian settlers from the south of Italy arrived to the fertile territory[53]. The Imperial Army beat the invading Italians at the Battle of Adwa. Monks traveled again throughout Ethiopia and called for troops from every liege lord[54].

[51] Harold G. Marcus, *The Life and Times of Menilek II: Ethiopia 1844-1913* (Lawrenceville, NJ: Red Sea Press, 1995), 32.
[52] Ibid 34.
[53] For a detailed history of the Scramble for Africa one should see Thomas Pakenham, *The Scramble for Africa, 1876-1912* (New York : Random House, 1991)
[54] Paulos Milkias and Getachew Metaferia Marcus, The Battle of Adwa: Reflections on Ethiopia's Historic Victory against European Colonialism (New York: Algora Publishing, 2005)

The emperors needed manpower and a blossoming economy to fight the Europeans, so they tried to push out Ethiopia's borders as far as possible. By 1906 the country reached its modern borders, which are still in force today. After the international recognition and internal consolidation of their power, the Emperors had to find the place of the new citizens in the corpus of the Empire. The rule of Semitic groups (Amharas and Tigrayans) over the others worked smoothly until the majority of the population was Christian.

Notwithstanding the above analyzed powerful sentiment of Ethiopian unity, derived from the myth of ethnic election and victorious cultural struggles against Muslim, Jesuitical, and Italian colonial threats, nationalism bypassed Ethiopia. In order to answer the question that why and how did Ethiopia avoided the spread of ethnic nationalism; I call Eric Hobsbawm's theory. Eric Hobsbawm argues that the apogee of nationalism was right after the *fin de siècle* when the historic, multi-ethnic empires dissolved, due to the rise of ethnic-linguistic nationalisms[55]. He compared the downfall of the Russian, the Austro-Hungarian, and the Ottoman empires. Hobsbawm stated, that

> [i]f there was a moment when the nineteenth century 'principle of nationality' triumphed it was at the end of World War I, even though it was neither predictable, nor the intention of the future victors. In fact, it was the result of […] the collapse of the great multinational empires of central and eastern Europe[56]

The Ottoman Empire fall apart after various ethnic groups started to demand ethnic recognition and self-determination in the Balkans (and to a lesser extent in the Middle-East, under the green flag of Pan-Arabism) and when the Young Turkish Movement, fuelled by the idea of Turkish nationalism, started to destroy the Ottoman idea from Istanbul, from the core of the Empire[57]. The Bulgarian nationalist awakening crystallized around four intellectuals, writer Georgi Rakovski, orthodox monk Vasil Levski, ethnographer Lyuben Karavelov, and revolutionary poet Hristo Botev. As Georgiev stresses it out, the romantic-nationalistic ideas

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[55] Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780*, 131-62.
[56] Ibid 131.
[57] See Şükrü M. Hanioğlu, *A Brief History of the Late Ottoman Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 150-67.

of the four were enthused by the French revolution and the successful Greek separation. The creation of a Bulgarian National Church and a unified Bulgarian language became the ideological cornerstones of the movement[58]. In 1878 eighty influential clan chiefs, led by the Frashëri brothers met in the city of Prizren, Kosovo, and founded the League of Prizren, which became the advocate of Albanian self-determination and following the Balkan Wars established the independent Albania in 1912[59]. Hussein bin Ali, Sharif of Mecca proclaimed himself Caliph of all Muslims (a.k.a. Arabs) and called for a unified Arabic state from Mecca till Morocco which culminated in the Arab Revolt against the Ottoman rule between 1916 and 1918[60].

The downfall of the Habsburg Empire had started earlier, but finalized almost at the same moment with the Ottoman Empire's. As Barany pointed out, the French Revolution, followed by the Napoleonic rhetoric, and the rise of Frenchness as a driving force made its sudden impact on Hungarian, and to a lesser extent Croatian elites. In Hungary during the 1830s' (the so called Period of Reforms) a strong ideological coalition was formed by some progressive elements of the Hungarian royalty, wealthy citizenry, and liberal Jewry. They consciously tried to create a Hungarian national culture, invent and reinvent Hungarian traditions[61] and unify and 'Magyaricize' the language. The wealthiest royal of his time, Count István Széchenyi, and his father Count Ferenc Széchényi, not just invested in infrastructure development, like the first permanent bridge over the Danube, the first railway in Hungary, or the regulation of the lower Danube and the Tisza basin, but they also founded and financed

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[58] See Vladimir Georgiev, *The Bulgarian Exarchate: Church Policy and Balkan Nationalism (1870-1913)* [CEU Master Thesis], 1997.
[59] See Noel Malcolm, *Kosovo: A Short History* (London: Macmillan, 1999), 217-38.
[60] For a wonderfully researched history of the early Arabic nationalism and especially the Arab Revolt one should see: Joshua Teitelbaum, *The Rise and Fall of the Hashimite Kingdom of Arabia* (London: C. Hurst & Co. Publishers, 2001) 74-151.
[61] See Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (eds.), *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992)

the Hungarian National Academy of Sciences and the Hungarian National Library[62]. A group of penniless-royals, educated petit-bourgeoisie, and Jewish intelligentsia, led by Ferenc Kazincy and Ferenc Kölcsey, created thousands of new Hungarian words in order to replace German and Latin expressions. Important national symbols, first and foremost the National Anthem, which is still in force today, was also written during the 1830s'. The same patterns of national awakening are studied in Croatia and in Czech populated Moravia. After the national revolution in 1848-49 Hungarian nationalism was recognized officially by Vienna with the signing of the Austro-Hungarian Compromise in 1867. The Austro-Hungarian Empire also gave the official recognition – in a Taylorian sense[63] – for smaller ethnic groups living across her territory.

In order to apply the Hobsbawmian theory to Ethiopia I have to investigate if Imperial Ethiopia is comparable with the Ottoman, Austro-Hungarian, and (to a lesser extent) Russian empires. If we read Hobsbawm's theory thoroughly we may separate three points of similarities in his analyzed empires. These are the (1) state religions and religious commitments, (2) historical and historicized dynasties, and (3) beneficiary (feudal) systems of nobility.

(1) All of the Euro-Asian empires had their own moral principles based on religious, holy textbooks which were the cornerstones of legal and moral obligations forced upon their citizens. What is more, the church and the state were never separated in the modern sense, all the rulers of these Empires acted in the name of divine powers. The head of the autocephalous Russian Orthodox Church, by the nature of Eastern Orthodoxy, was the all-time Tsar. The Ottoman Sultan, although not considered himself to be a direct descendant of Mohamed, but as he ruled Mecca and Medina (from 1517 till 1915), was able to act in the name of Allah. The Sultan was not simply the political head of the Empire, but also the main religious leader

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[62] See George Barany, *Stephen Széchenyi and the Awakening of Hungarian Nationalism*, 1791-1841 (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1968)
[63] Taylor, '*The Politics of Recognition*'.

whose words decided about wars and whose *fatwās* sealed longstanding spiritual controversies. The Hapsburg Monarch of the Austro-Hungarian Empire was obviously not the head of the Catholic Church, but the overarching influence of Catholicism in the daily life in the Empire is undeniable.

The role and structure of the church in Ethiopia was similar to the Ottoman and Russian empires'. As Levine stated, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, the state religion of the Empire, offered salvation on a non-ethnic basis[64]. The highway to heaven was open for everyone who joined the Church and was ruled by the Emperor. The clergy of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church claimed that after the people of Israel have betrayed God they were chosen by the Lord to replace the Jews, so each and every newcomer in the faith became a member in the tribe of God's chosen-people[65]. The Russian, the Austro-Hungarian, and the Ottoman Empires ruled peoples not sharing the state religion, Bosniaks under Austrian control, Tatars in Russia, or Armenians in the Ottoman Empire. Likewise in Ethiopia, many non-Christians were governed by the Emperor, but being Ethiopian – as the thesis demonstrated earlier – meant being Orthodox Christian till the beginning of the 20th century[66].

(2) All of the above mentioned multi-ethnic empires were led by historical dynasties till the point of the dissolution. The first Tsar from the House of Romanov (more precisely, from the Holstein-Gottorp-Romanov Dynasty), Michael of Russia (r. 1613-1645), came into power in 1613. He tried to construct the historical continuity by emphasizing his family's matrilineal descent from Peter the Great, through Anna Petrovna, Peter I's elder daughter by his second wife. The Ottoman dynasty was founded in 1299 and the Royal House continuously governed the Empire till their deposition in 1922. The Habsburg-family ruled the Austrian (from 1867 – as a sign of the growing Hungarian nationalism – Austro-Hungarian) Empire from 1526. Historians count Emperor Yekuno Amlak (r. 1270-1285) to be

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[64] Levine, *Greater Ethiopia*, 27-91.
[65] Levine, *Greater Ethiopa*, chapter 10.
[66] Marcus, *History of Ethiopia,* 17-29.; Levine, *Greater Ethiopia*, 27-91.

the (re)founder of the Solomonic dynasty[67], and the House mastered Ethiopia till the communist *coup d'état* against Hailé Selassie in 1974.

(3) A bourgeois class of nobility inherited and distributed material and non-material goods (regional governorship, land ownership, tax-free status, and military positions) through a beneficiary feudal system in the Hobsbawmiam empires. Despite a widening capitalist economy, most land was owned and inherited by feudal families in the Austro-Hungarian Empire. In the Russian Empire Alexander II only emancipated the serfs in 1861[68] and one only has to read Gogol's brilliant Dead Souls to ascertain the power of feudal ties of the Russian society. Despite the reforms in Istanbul following the lost Greek War of Independence the beneficiary system of political positions remained intact. But may we speak about feudalism in Ethiopia? May we use the very phrase 'feudalism' to describe non-European phenomena without falling into the trap of Eurocentrism?

Agreeing with the great Byzantine historian John Haldon, I think it may be very rewarding to drop a previously Eurocentric phrase – like 'feudalism', 'industrial revolution', or, most importantly for us 'nationalism' – which was used by "European historians [and social scientists] attempting to understand the essence of European culture[69]" into a previously unknown field and apply it to non-European societies.

> A re-working of concepts such as feudalism, in which Europe no longer figures as the empirical focus and the measure of other social and cultural systems, but in which sets of social and economic relationships have a value for the analysis of other societies and histories, have been one of the obvious results of the expansion of European historical awareness to non-European social formations.[70]

So if we separate the term in a non-empirical but analytical way from Europe and we try to explain certain cultural patterns spread around the world then we can claim that feudalism

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[67] See earlier
[68] About the detailed story of the Russian serfdom one see: Boris B. Gorshkov, *A Life Under Russian Serfdom: Memoirs of Savva Dmitrievich Purlevskii* (Budapest - New York: CEU Press, 2005)
[69] See John Haldon, *The State & the Tributary Mode of Production* (Verso, London, 1993), 64.
[70] Ibid.

was not a purely European phenomenon. In this sense we may claim that pre-British India[71] or

the Tokugawa Japan[72] were feudal societies. Jack Goody's 1963 article denounced the

widespread anthropological practice of searching for – and an anthropologist will find what

he or she is after – feudal-type African societies[73]. He argued that feudalism in itself is a too

wide, non-operational concept, and social science should differentiate clientship from

feudalism. In his later articles though he had to acknowledge that Ethiopia is the exception:

> It is highly significant that only in Ethiopia, which had the plough, was there any landlordism in Africa;
> here in true medieval fashions, estates in land supported a nobility that filled the important offices of
> state in both the staff and line organization, a nobility that was at the same time a leisure class in
> Veblen's sense. Besides the nobility one also found ecclesiastical landlordism – functionaries whose
> time was devoted to the glory of God (though individual commitment to the monastic life was often
> temporary rather then permanent in character) derived their 'living' from the church with which God had
> been endowed[74]

So Ethiopia was a multinational, feudal Empire[75] with a state religion, ruled by a

historical dynasty, similarly to the Hobsbawmian empires. After demonstrating the

similarities of Ethiopia and the great Euro-Asian empires I will thoroughly investigate the

differences and seek the answer of the missing Ethiopian nationalism. As I showed earlier[76]

that after Ethiopia expelled the Jesuits during Emperor Fasilides (r. 1632-1667) reign it closed

itself into the Abyssinian Highlands and the economic and historical development of the

territory get stuck. Until that point Ethiopia's feudal, beneficiary structure of social mobility,

bureaucratic state-administration, and economic organization was pretty on the pair with 15th

century Europe, Japan, or China. However, during the next 200 years of goose-step, early

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[71] For an attempt to adopt the concept feudalism to India see: R.S. Sharma, *Indian Feudalism* (Delhi: Macmillan Publishers India Ltd., 2005)

[72] Although not entirely about feudalism, but the concept is partly used in: Conrad Totman, *Politics in the Tokugawa Bakufu, 1600-1843* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967)

[73] Jack Goody, "Feudalism in Africa?," *Journal of African History* 4, no. 1 (1963) 1-18. Thanks for Adrian Grama to shed some light on this aspect during our conversations

[74] Jack Goody, "Economy and Feudalism in Africa" *The Economic History Review, New Series*, 22, no. 3 (1969), 393-405.

[75] To make certain about Ethiopian feudalism one should see Donald Crummey, Land and Society in the Christian Kingdom of Ethiopia: From the Thirteenth to the Twentieth Century (London: James Currey, 2000). The whole book, but especially the 2nd chapter ('Man is free - Land is tributary' 50-73.), proves that Ethiopian feudalism was very similar to the European phenomena.

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capitalist progress and the industrial revolution by-passed Ethiopia. So the commercial market-towns failed to develop into powerful and autonomous cities, the wealthy merchants did not transformed into the class of bourgeoisie, and due to the missing heavy-industry no self-conscious working class evolved. Life in the 1850's in Ethiopia was almost identical with the 1630's.

The connection between nationalism and capitalism is a scientific axiom; Ernest Gellner stresses the importance of industrialization[77], Eric Hobsbawm speaks about the capital markets[78], and Benedict Anderson declares the significance of print-capitalism[79]. Capitalist way of producing needs large masses of mobile, linguistically and culturally homogenous peoples. Without contesting this theory – which, like the reality of Indianapolis, is an obvious fact – I would like to add one point and then apply it to Ethiopia. There were European cases where nationalism turned into a powerful political force well beyond capitalism transformed the society of the territory. The birth of modern Albanian nationalism is usually to be dated to 1878 when the Frashëri brothers founded the Leauge of Prizren in the small, unimportant Ottoman town of Prizren (nowadays Kosovo). In 1878 Prizren had no heavy-industry, the Kosovo Vilayet was the main grain and other cereal producing region in the Ottoman Balkan, there were only elementary educational institution in Prizren, and there were no newspapers and print-machines in the city[80]. The first Albanian nationalist journal, the Drifta, and Albanian books were secretly printed in Istanbul and smuggled into Albanian populated regions. The undeniable rise of ethnic nationalism[81] cannot be construed neither with Albanian industrialization, capital-markets, nor print-capitalism. In this sense, *fin de siècle* Albania was very similar to particular Ethiopian regions. Then why did the rise of ethnic

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[77] Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism.*
[78] Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1870.*
[79] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities.*
[80] See Noel Malcolm, *The Short History of Kosovo.*
[81] Albania became independent in 1912, for the history fits into the thesis' framework see: Piro Misha, "The Invention of a Nationalism: Myth and Amnesia" in *Albanian Identities: Myth and History,* eds. Stephanie Schwandner-Sievers and Bernd Jürgen Fischer (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 33-48.

nationalism resulted the secession of Albania from the Ottoman Empire in 1912 and why did it by-passed Ethiopia's ethnic groups?

Sami Frashëri (1850-1904) finished Greek gymnasium in Ioannina, western Greece. After graduation he moved to Istanbul and worked as a state bureaucrat. His elder brother, Naim Frashëri (1846-1900) also worked in Istanbul, as a state censor. The eldest of the three brothers, Abdyl Frashëri (1839-1892) was even a member of the Second Ottoman Parlament and befriended the future leaders of the Young Turkish Movement. Other leaders of the League of Prizren were educated also in Istanbul or even in Paris[82]. In Ethiopia, as education was strictly controlled by the watchful eyes of the Emperor through the Chruch-run monastery-school system, no similar elite developed. It was the late Haile Selassie (between 1941 and 1974) who created the environment for the rise of Ethiopian nationalism.

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[82] About the role of the Istanbul educated elites see: Isa Blumi, "The Role of Education in the Formation of Albanian Identity and its Myths" in *Albanian Identities: Myth and History,* eds. Stephanie Schwandner-Sievers and Bernd Jürgen Fischer (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 49-59.

# Chapter Five: Selassie's Ethiopia

Hailé Selassie's reign is usually divided into three, very different periods by historians. The first epoch is the so called regency, from 1916 to 1930, when Hailé Selassie ruled as a regent. The second era is dated to be between the enthronement of the young Emperor and the years of exile after the Fascist invasion (1930-1936). The last period is obviously between Hailé Selassie's return to his throne till the communist *coup d'état* (1941-1974). Ras Tafari Makonnen (the birth name of Hailé Selassié) was born into one of the most modern and affluent noble families in its time[83]. Ras Makonnen Wolde Mikael, Selassie's father, was not only part of the Solomonic family (as a first cousin of Emperor Menilek II), but he was also the governor of Harar from 1887 till 1906 and he served as the unofficial Foreign Minister of Emperor Menilek II. Harar was a wealthy, majority Muslim, and multiculturalist hub of commerce, where slaves, ivory, coffee, and Thomson machine guns were bought and sold by Arabic, Amharic, Oromo, Tigrayan, and European merchants – just think about Arthur Rimbaud, who lived in the city as a weapon smuggler from 1880 till 1891 and became a close friend of Governor Ras Makonnen[84]. As an unofficial Foreign Minister, Makonnen was the first Ethiopian royal who visited Europe after the 15th-16th century emissaries sent out by Emperor Zara Yaqob and his successors[85]. Ras Makonnen not just prayed in Jerusalem, but attended the coronation of King Edward VII in London, received the Star of the Ottoman Order of Osmania in Istanbul, ride a tram in Paris, and even saw a modern military parade in Berlin[86]. In his later life he was one of the most influential and louder advocates of the construction of the Addis Ababa – Djibouti railway line. We know

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[83] See Haile Selassie I, *My Life and Ethiopia's Progress: The Autobiography of Emperor Haile Sellassie I* (New York: Frontline Books, 1999), Chapter I.
[84] See Charles Nicholl, *Somebody Else: Arthur Rimbaud in Africa, 1880-91* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 231.
[85] See earlier in this thesis, p---
[86] Haile Selassie I, *My Life and Ethiopia's Progress*.

that he was amazed by European modernity and we may assume that his son inherited these ideas[87].

Ras Tafari became regent at the age of 24 after the deposition of Isayu V. in 1916. His first period ended in 1930 when he was crowned Emperor Hailé Selassie. His first and second period (1916-1936) is portrayed by historians as a continuous struggle to grip and strengthen power. Ras Tafari had to concentrate on rebellions and insurgencies, and historical evidences show that he was more interested in the development of Addis Ababa and foreign affairs then nation-building[88], though he implemented some crucial reforms, namely the first post and telegram service between the capital and regional centers, and the shift from traditional fees to monthly salaries for state administrative officials, two steps obviously centralizing state power[89]. He tried to break down regional warlords' power by developing a large Imperial Army but due to the weapon embargo forced on Ethiopia by the Italians and the lack of resources, Selassie's attempts failed this time. He had to – from compromise to compromise – continuously balance between local strong men and the palace, between centralization and indirect rule. But the old system was unchangeable in a traditional way, and Hailé Selassie was not interested in a revolution. Ironically enough, from this point of view, the Italian invasion in 1935 lent a hand to Selassie to turn Ethiopia into a centralized, absolute monarchy.

Ethiopia formally became a member state of the League of Nations in 1923. Despite the 1928 Italo-Ethiopian Treaty of Friendship[90] border skirmishes drove the countries into a full-scale war in 1935. Although the League of Nations declared Italy the aggressor and agreed on sanctions practically nothing happened. The invading and superior Italian forces

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[87] Ibid first chapters

[88] "So, from the beginning of the new government, Tafari outlined the nature of his long career: he would concentrate on Addis Abeba, Shewa, and foreign affairs, around which he would build his authority." Marcus, *History of Ethiopia,* 118.

[89] Marcus, *History of Ethiopia,* 119.

[90] A brief summary and semi-academic analysis of the treaty may be found at: Fascist New Year, Time, 1928. Nov 05. http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,723532,00.html (accessed May 23, 2010)

were unstoppable[91]; though some battles were won by the Ethiopians, the war was unwinnable, especially after Fascist Italy deployed illegal mustard and phosgene gases[92]. Haile Selassie fled into exile, he first arrived to Jerusalem and after some weeks of praying he settled in Great Britain. On the 30st of June, 1936 Haile Selassie arrived to Geneva and gave a far-famed and later widely cited speech warning other countries against Fascist propaganda. His famous opening words – "It is us today. It will be you tomorrow" – circuited the newspapers. The country fall into the hands of the Italians who rapidly tried to pacify the territory, so they accumulated all the weapons and disbanded all the armies under regional lords' control. When Haile Selassie regained his throne in 1941, after a successful British East-African campaign, the Emperor controlled the only sizeable army in the country and he had the historical possibility to rebuild Ethiopia almost from scratch.

I would like to introduce here a new concept, the *environment of nationalism*[93]. Nationalism, as a socio-political force, not only needs economical development – a certain level of capitalist production, a print-capitalism, and industrialization – but a very basic technical, infrastructural development. Eugen Weber accentuated the importance of the transmission of the national culture. In his celebrated book[94] he differentiated the project of France-building and the processes of the creation of the imagined community. He argues that 'Frenchness' – the idea of being French, the affiliation with the modern nation state, the willingness to fight and even die for your mother country, the voluntary participation in the

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[91] For the most detailed monograph of the war see: Anthony Mockler, *Haile Selassie's War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984). For a reader-friendly, popular summary of the war see: David Nicolle and Raffaele Ruggeri, *The Italian Invasion of Abyssinia 1935-1936* (Westminster, MD: Osprey Publishing, 1997).
[92] About the deployment of chemical weaponry by the Italian see: A. J. Barker, *Rape of Ethiopia, 1936* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1971) 56.
[93] George McTurnan Kahin classic on Indonesian history, the *Nationalism and Revolution in Indonesia* (Kahin's PhD research, first published in 1952) begins with a chapter called "The Social Environment of Indonesian Nationalism" (1-36.) but he is analyzing the social and not the technical dimensions of the necessary environment. See George McTurnan Kahin, *Nationalism and Revolution in Indonesia* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Studies on East Asia Program Publications, 2003).
[94] See Eugen Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen: the modernization of rural France, 1870-1914* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1992)

"everyday plebiscite[95]" – was mostly a paltry idea in rural France during and after the revolutionary years. The gallant dreams of French national unity derived from the '*Liberté, égalité, fraternité, ou la mort!*' slogan meant almost nothing in the provinces and France was turned into a community of Frenchmen only after the infrastructural environment of nationalism was built, when the "agencies of change[96]" transmitted the national culture from Paris to the provinces during the Third Republic (1870-1940). The most important fields of direct nation building were the creation of the French army through conscriptions[97], the organization and desecularization of the mass education[98], the development of public infrastructure[99] (roads and railways) which created the possibility for social mobility, the foundation of nationwide telegram and postal services which transmitted news and orders from the center to the provinces in seconds, and symbolic nationalist projects (national sports[100], theatres, anthems, flags, public holidays, feasts, and so on). Even the very foundation of folklore studies and the growing interest in the life of the romanticized peasant communities may have helped the transmission of the national culture[101].

> Despite evidence to the contrary, inhabitants of the hexagon in 1870 generally knew themselves to be French subjects, but to many this status was no more than an abstraction. The people of whole regions felt little identity with the state or with people of other regions. Before this changed, before the inhabitants of France could come to feel a significant community, they had to share significant experiences with each other. Roads, railroads, schools, markets, military service, and the circulation of money, goods and printed matter provided those experiences, swept away old commitments, instilled a national view of things in regional minds, and confirmed the power of that view by offering advancement to those who adopted it. The national ideology was still diffuse and amorphous around the middle of the nineteenth century. French culture became truly national only in the last years of the century.[102]

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[95] Ernest Renan, "Qu'est-ce qu'une nation?" in *Conférence Faite en Sorbonne* (Paris: Calman Lévy, 1882).
[96] Eugen Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen*, 193.
[97] Ibid, chapter 17. (Migration of another sort: Military service) 292-301.
[98] Ibid, chapter 18. (Civilizing in earnest: Schools and Schooling) 302-38.
[99] Ibid, chapter 12. (Roads, roads, and still more roads) 195-220.
[100] Eugen Weber, "Gymnastics and Sports in Fin-de-Siècle France: Opium of the Classes?" *American Historical Review* 76 (1971): 70-98.
[101] Eugen Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen*, chapter 28. (Wring out the old) 471-84.
[102] Ibid, p486

A similar process, the conscious development of the environment of nationalism took place in Ethiopia after the return of Hailé Selassie (1941-1974). We know that the Emperor was amazed by European modernity and he was dreaming about building a modern, self-conscious nation-state, similarly what he experienced in patriotic Great Britain[103]. Selassie not just allied his country with the Western world, and let capitalism prevail but he tried to designate every social process as part of the general nation-building course. As we know from Ryszard Kapuściński's fascinating piece of journalism[104] Hailé Selassie was amazed by the phrase 'development' and everything was subordinated to the catchy slogan of national development. Hailé Selassie's first government nationalized the Bank of Ethiopia (founded in 1906 by Menilek II to fund the construction of the Addis Ababa – Djibouti railway line) in 1931 but it was only turned into the National Bank of Ethiopia in 1963. The new currency, the Ethiopian Birr, with watermarked national symbols (endemic birds, animals, historical monuments, and Hailé Selassie's face), was introduced in 1945. The national currency was circulated after a regular salary-system was inaugurated for the army officers and public servant. Although Ethiopia remained one of the least developed countries – even by African standards –, a large segment of the scarce resources was spent on new roads and airports, and private and state-owned public transportation companies mushroomed everywhere, creating the technical conditions for social mobility.

Other agencies of the transmission of the national culture were also founded. The radio started its Amharic broadcasting regularly in the 50's, days of national celebrations and mourning were set (the day of Independence, the anniversary of the Battle of Adwa, and so on), the country adopted a national anthem, a flag, and a coat of arms, newspapers and publishing houses – under strict governmental censorship – flourished, the National Theater

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[103] Haile Selassie I, *My Life and Ethiopia's Progress*, 3rd-6th chapters.
[104] The Polish journalist traveled to Ethiopia weeks after the communist coup d'état. He interviewed servants and ministers who where close to the Emperor. His analyzis is sometimes misleading (or missing at all) but the book provide an elaborate insight into Selassie's views on Ethiopia. See Ryszard Kapuscinski, *The Emperor* (London: Picador, 1984)

and the National Museum was founded, and the film industry was subsidized by the state. One of the most important places of collective action and soul-making was at the Imperial Army. Although conscription was non-mandatory in Ethiopia (due to the lack of census data, identification documents, and infrastructure) the 40.000 strong Imperial Army offered a great carrier opportunity for rural, underclass youngsters. Forty percentages of the national budget was spent on the Imperial Army[105], and Ethiopia even sent three battalions (the so called Kagnew Battalion), roughly 3500 soldiers, to Korea[106]. The 50's and the 60's are celebrated as the Golden Age of Ethiopian Jazz (musicians like Mahmoud Ahmed, Alemayehu Eshete, Ali Birra, Muluken Melesse, and most importantly Tilahun Gessesse and Mulatu Astatke mark this glorious period[107]), when music clubs and orchestras were heavily subsidized by the state, and they played the recently invented, though traditionalized Ethio-Jazz music. Hailé Selassie also exploited the possibilities of nationalist mobilization of sports. He was encouraged to have a strong football team, as football was by far the most popular sport in the country. The team collected one silver and one bronze medal in the first two African Cup of Nations, and Ethiopia hosted and won the 1962 African Cup of Nations, still the biggest football success of the country[108]. Abede Bikila became the very first black African athlete to win an Olympic gold medal with his memorable barefooted Marathon run in Rome in 1960.

What is even more important, the organization of public education also commenced under Hailé Selassie's years. Although the student enrollment rates remained very low (well under 20% in 1974) significant changes occurred during this period. The public education became partly separated from the Church, more and more children (mostly boys) accessed

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[105] Ibid, 121.

[106] For a brief history of the Kagnew Battalion see: Elizabeth Schafer, "Ethiopian Battalion" in *The Korean War: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Stanley Sandler (New York: Taylor & Francis, 1995), 108-10.

[107] For a detailed story of modern Ethiopian music one should see Falceto's rare coffee-table book: Francis Falceto, *Abyssinia Swing: A Pictorial History of Modern Ethiopian Music* (Addis Ababa: Shama Books, 2001). The Paris-based world music record label Buda Musique released a 23 volume collection of Ethiopian classical and jazz music (Ethiopiques – The Collection).

[108] The victory was celebrated throughout the Empire, and the players, especially the Vassalo brothers (Luciano and Italo, two white Italo-Ethiopians) and Mengistu Worku were treated as national heroes and became close friends of Hailé Selassie himself.

free education, and the most talented ones received state scholarships to continue their training in the best Western universities[109]. Thousands graduated from the top European and American universities, creating a Western-minded, independent intelligentsia, who later obviously became the leaders of communist and ethnic nationalist movements. The University of Addis Ababa – that time: Hailé Selassie University – was founded in 1962. The university, hand in hand with the army, was the nursery and engine of early communist and ethnic nationalist resistance movements.

By the 70's the necessary environment of nationalism, which made the rise of radical social movements (communists and nationalist) possible, was created by the Emperor. He tried to modernize his decrepit, battered Empire by strengthening and spreading the notion of Ethiopian unity but this modernization engendered his own downfall. After new states were born in the ruins of former colonies surrounding Ethiopia (Sudan became independent in 1956, Somalia in 1960, and Kenya, after the bloody Mau-Mau rebellion, in 1963) the backwardness of the Empire became incontrovertible any more for the educated elites of Ethiopia. The fluid and magnetic language of anti-colonialism also flew over the borders and radicalized non-Amharic and non-Tigrinya elites. The Western educated elites of the single largest ethnic group of Ethiopia, the non-Semitic Oromo founded the Oromo Liberation Front in 1973 to "to promote self-determination for the Oromo people against Abyssinian colonial rule[110]". But the radical communist movement in Addis Ababa was stronger in the early seventies, and they jeopardized the Emperor's power first and foremost. Though the 1960 communist-military coup attempt was easily struck down by the Emperor[111], he was unable to forestall the 1974 communist takeover.

[109] See Randi R. Balsvik, *Haile Sellassie's Students: The Intellectual and Social Background to Revolution, 1952-1977* (East Lansing, MI: African Studies Center, Michigan State University & Norwegian Council of Science and the Humanities, 1985).
[110] See Oromo Liberation Front "Mission Statement" at http://www.oromoliberationfront.org/PrOLFMission.htm
[111] Christopher Clapham, "The Ethiopian Coup d'Etat of December 1960," *Journal of Modern African Studies* 6 (1968), 498 - 500.

# Chapter Six: Modern Ethiopia

## *Communist Ethiopia*

The Derg[112] (Coordinating Committee of the Armed Forces, Police, and Territorial Army), a committee of communist military officers, led by Mengistu Haile Mariam took over power after a mismanaged famine broke out in the northern Wello province in a bloody putsch in 1974. Mengistu, who came from the lowest segments of society (his father was a former slave, while his mother was a house maid), was one of those thousands who proved their talent and were sent to Western countries to continue their education. Mengistu finished the military college in Ethiopia in 1966 and then spent a couple of years in the best military academies in the United States. After he faced racial segregation in the United States – a black student in a top military academy in the 60's America was still quite unusual – he became a radical anti-American and started to read Stalin and Lenin[113]. After his return he allied himself with the group of the most radical university students in Addis Ababa. After the Derg took over power they implemented a series of radical reforms to tackle and fight the inequalities of the overthrown Ethiopian Empire. But these radical reforms – I would like to argue – were logically seen as a continuous and intensified politics of Hailé Selassie by the rural masses. The communist government, on behalf of justifiable (what is more: just) class-struggle, penetrated into every aspect of individual and collective life of the Ethiopians, the demonstrated evolution of the centralization of power began in the 13th century reached its peak during the Derg regime. The Derg used the same agencies to transmit the culture of class-struggle throughout Ethiopia but without the earlier nationalistic tone. No other legitimate language of resistance remained for the alienated segments of the Ethiopian society

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[112] The Derg ruled the country from 1974 till 1989 when a Soviet-style constitution was adopted and the Workers' Party of Ethiopia, led by Mengistu, became the state-party, but I will refer the whole communist period as the Derg-period.

[113] Paul B. Henze, *Layers of Time*, 290.

that the previously unexploited language of ethnicity. "If we are not Ethiopians because Hailé Selassie's government betrayed us but we do not believe in class struggle and in our historical exploitation either then who we are?" – peoples asked in throughout the country in the last years of the 70's. The obvious answer flow over the borders from Kenya and particularly from Somalia: Ethiopia is nothing more then a colonial power, a prison house of peoples and the communist government, similarly to the big brother Soviets, is only a remake of the old Empire to keep the territory in one block[114]. So ethnicity was "invented" in these particular years and the elites of the rebellious ethnic groups used the Hailé Selassie deployed agencies of nationalism to transmit the imagined ethnic culture. But what were the reforms of the communist government which alienated the peoples and provoked the birth and rise of ethnic nationalistic liberation movements?

First and foremost the Derg government implemented a radical land reform[115]. The previous beneficiary tenure system was abolished by the new government and all land was nationalized in 1975. Twenty thousand peasant associates were drafted throughout the country, each controlling 800 acres of land, and each and every Ethiopian farmer had to join his local peasant associate to maintain his family[116]. But the land tenure system was – as usual – more complex than the Derg imagined. They thought that the nationalization and redistribution of land will be ultimately successful and celebrated among penniless peasants.

[114] The Ethiopian region of Eritrea started its liberation war earlier, in the 1960's. But Eritrea, a previous Italian colony, was annexed by Ethiopia only in 1952, after the international community gave it, as a gift for Hailé Selassie, to Ethiopia. In Eritrea the colonial rule had its own soul-making function and the Eritrean identity developed earlier then the ethnic identities in other Ethiopian regions, but even in Eritrea, the whole movement was only framed into the national liberation language after the EPLF defeated the ELF in the late 70's. See: Ruth Iyob, *The Eritrean Struggle for Independence: Domination, Resistance, Nationalism, 1941-1993* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 123-135.

[115] My analysis is based upon the monumental work of Professor Donald Crummey. See Donald Crummey, *Land and society in the Christian Kingdom of Ethiopia*, 246-60.

[116] The effects and brutal consequences of the land reform were extensively studied after the fall of the Derg. For a detailed research among the Oromo see: Tadesse Berisso, "Modernist Dreams & Human Suffering: Villagization among the Guji Oromo," in *Remapping Ethiopia*, ed. Wendy James et al. (London: James Currey, 2002), 116-32. For a case study (mostly about the new government's policies but it also touches the Derg's reforms) in the northern Highlands, among Amhara see: Svein Ege, "Peasant Participation in Land Reform. The Amhara Land Redistribution 1997," in *Ethiopia: The Challenge of Democracy from Below*, eds. Bahru Zewde and Siegfried Pausewang (Stockholm: Nordiska Afrikaninstitutet and Forum for Social Studies, 2002), 71-86.

But in the traditional northern Highlands, in the core of the Empire, land tenure became extremely complex during previous centuries and almost each and every peasant owned or inherited at least a small fraction of arable land[117]. In the southern and western parts of Ethiopia land reformed was usually greeted by agriculturalist groups as these territories were only conquered by the Emperors less then a century ago so. We also know that land reform have minimally affected nomadic peoples[118].

Another radical reform which penetrated into peoples life was the forced education and organization of the population. This process was called *encadrement* by Christopher Clapham:

> "It amounted to a project of *encadrement,* or incorporation into structures of control, which was pursued with remarkable speed and ruthlessness. It sought to intensify the longstanding trajectory of centralized state formation by removing the perceived sources of peripheral discontent and espousing and ideal of nation-statehood in which citizens would equally be associated with, and subjected to, an omnipotent state.[119]

All university and high school students from Addis Ababa were "sent out to the bush", to rural, underdeveloped territories for a couple of years to educate and organize the people. These young cadres lacked cultural sensitivity and they saw backwardness in every element of traditional Ethiopian life which obviously created a series of conflicts throughout the country[120].

The land reform, the Soviet-style planned agriculture, and the lack of rainfall resulted persistent famines in Ethiopia. The famines especially the 1984-1985 Gojjam Famine, brake through into Western news and as a consequence aid started to flow into the country. But even the access to aid was controlled by the state (identification cards were issued first time in the history of Ethiopia, the very first census was carried out in 1984). Even the markets were

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[117] For a detailed description see Crummey and especially the books bibliography
[118] See Tadesse Wolde, "Evading the Revolutionary State: The Hor under the Derg," in *Remapping Ethiopia*, ed. Wendy James et al. (London: James Currey, 2002), 37-58.
[119] See Christopher Clapham, "Controlling Space in Ethiopia," in *Remapping Ethiopia*, ed. Wendy James et al. (London: James Currey, 2002), 9-32.
[120] The yokes about the cultural sensitivity of 'young cadres' are still extremely popular in Ethiopia

closed and reorganized by the Derg. Hailé Selassie swelled the headcount of the Ethiopian Army to 40.000 in the 60's and 71's. The Ethiopian Army, with Cuban and Soviet advices, and due to the forced conscriptions, quickly reached the 200.000 soldiers. In the neighboring Somalia, President Siad Barre tried to forestall the evaporation of his power by importing nationalism. He called for the unification of the Somali population, for the creation of Greater Somalia (Somalia, northern Kenya, Ogaden Region of Ethiopia, southern Djibouti). In July 13, 1977 Siad Barre ordered his Soviet-trained troops to march into the Ogaden area to help the "oppressed Somalis" to achieve "self-determination"[121]. At the point of the outbreak of the conflict both of the countries were supported by the Soviet Union, but the communist superpower quickly dropped Somalia and allied with the "more ideological" Mengistu. The civil war in Eritrea, after the EPLF overrun the ELF and reorganized the struggle also intensified[122]. The rebels controlled almost the whole region and successfully organized a quasi-state[123]. And the Derg not just waged his two fronted wars against Somalia and the Eritreans but Mengistu launched the infamous *Qey Shibir* (Red Terror) campaign, a radical and brutal operation to exterminate all the enemies of the communist revolution[124]. The death toll of the campaign can be as high as 500.000[125].

Ordinary Ethiopians felt the central authority penetrated into every aspect of their daily life[126] and the revolution, which was waged on behalf of them, only caused suffering

[121] See Gebru Tareke, "The Ethiopia-Somalia War of 1977 Revisited," *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 33 (2000): 635-67.
[122] Ruth Iyob, *The Eritrean Struggle for Independence*, 123-35.
[123] Ibid.
[124] "Mengistu officially began his campaign with a speech in Revolution Square in the heart of Addis Ababa, which included the words "Death to counterrevolutionaries! Death to the EPRP!" When he delivered these words, he produced three bottles of what appeared to be blood and smashed them to the ground to show what the revolution would do to its enemies" (see: Human Right Watch Backgrounders: Ethiopian Dictator Mengistu Haile Mariam, 1999 (http://www.hrw.org/english/docs/1999/11/29/ethiop5495.htm) accessed on May 23th, 2010)
[125] For the pure number see: Stéphane Courtois, *The Black Book of Communism: Crimes, Terror, Repression* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999).
[126] For anthropological cases see Tadesse Wolde, "Evading the Revolutionary State: The Hor under the Derg,", Alexander Naty, "Memory & the Humiliation of Men: The Revolution in Aari,", Ahmed Hassan Omer, "Close yet Far: Northern Shewa under the Derg,", Tadesse Berisso, "Modernist Dreams & Human Suffering:

and obscurity[127]. Traditional lifestyles were diminished or even banned, centuries old working systems (land tenure, commerce, cattle marketing, controlled migration) were lighting fast changed and most parts of the country was a continuous battlefield. The state penetration into everywhere in a couple of years, not just alienated the people and generated revolts and rebellions against the communist government, but also grounded for the rise of ethnic nationalism. The only legitimate language you (collective you) could formulate your assertions was the cultural-nationalistic one. We want our traditional lifestyle back (which was usually invited during Hailé Selassie's years) and we want the state to respect and recognize our culture. Ethiopia fell into a civil war, which was obviously, and most importantly a physical war where 250.000 people died, but also an ideological war about the definition of Ethiopia. The communist imagined Ethiopia as a battlefield of class struggle where the Party, on behalf of the poorest, is waging a justifiable war against the forces of the past. The liberation fronts, on the other hand, imagined that the ethnic groups have the right to self determination and the communist government is nothing more then a bloody prolongation of the Amharic-dominated, oppressive Empire which always subjugated ethnic groups. Not surprisingly, the language of these ethnic armies was almost exactly identical with the language of the new chauvinist elites in Yugoslavian and Soviet Union (the Croats, the Bosniaks, the Kazakhs, the Uzbeks, the Armenians, the Georgians and so on). After the liberation movements in Ethiopia (TPLF, EPLF, OLF, WSLF, ALF) started to cooperate and the Soviet Union collapsed they easily took over power in 1991. Robert Mugabe's Zimbabwe offered a safe heaven for Colonel Mengistu, who is still living in Harare as an advisory for the President of Zimbabwe.

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Villigization among the Guji Oromo,", and Alula Pankhurst, "Surviving Resettlement in Wellegga: The Qeto Experience," all in *Remapping Ethiopia*, ed. Wendy James et al. (London: James Currey, 2002).
[127] Although the Revolution achieved some great scores on some fields (for example the student enrollment rates skyrocketed between 1974 and 1991), the overwhelming majority of the Ethiopian society turned against the Revolution

## *Federal Ethiopia*

The coalition of the liberation armies, led by the TPLF, turned into a political party (the EPRDF). After a series of longstanding negotiations the Eritrea, led by the EPLF, organized a referendum and after the overwhelming majority of the population voted for sovereignty the country declared its independence which was acknowledged by the new rulers of Ethiopia and the international community in 1993. The new government of Ethiopia carried out a new census and drafted a new constitution which redrew the regional borders of the country. Three distinct ethnic categories were created: 'nations', 'nationalities', and 'peoples' for the approximately one hundred ethnic groups. Ethnicity is identical with language; according to the new constitution language constitutes a nation, nationality, or people. Each of the 'nations' – the six most numerous ethnic groups – became a clear majority in their own region and the official language(s) of the region became the language(s) of the local majority. Every region (kilil in Amharic) is divided into separate administrative zones. Although most of the zones are not designed along ethnic lines, there are some autonomous zones - like the Oromo zone in the Amhara Region - which enjoy political-cultural autonomy and their budget is independent from the region's budget. Each and every zone is further divided into districts (woreda), and each and every ethnicity ('nationalities' and 'peoples' by the Constitution) controls at least one autonomous woreda. The regions and autonomous woredas - at least constitutionally - enjoy a high level of autonomy, self-government, and they can decide about the language of education and bureaucracy.

Ethiopia was turned into a federation with autonomous regions and sub-units. Citizens vote for territorial nominees in each district. Winner takes all, like in the Anglo-Saxon electoral system. In the government's original plans ethnic parties should fight for votes in ethnically defined territories. Some opposition parties, such as the Oromo People's Congress, is organized along ethnic lines, while others, like the Ethiopian Social Democratic Party (the

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successor of the Communist Party) are ideological parties aiming urban populations. Not surprisingly the inter-ethnic parties gather votes in urban districts (mostly in Addis Abeba), while the ethnic parties enjoy almost ultimate support in rural areas. The academic thesis do not supposed to give predictions, and it won't. To few time have passed and no clear directions (and self-imaginations of Ethiopia) developed so far. On the hand, we can experience a process of decentralization[128] at least a decrease of state-presence from everyday life, but on the other hand, we can see a very strong coalition of governing parties whose commissars are holding ultimate power in the provinces. The last election, on May, 2010, showed that multi-party democracy and the imagined federal idea of the EPRDF can not live alongside.

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[128] See Mehret Ayenew, "Decentralization in Ethiopia: Two Case Studies on Devolution of Power and Responsibilities to Local Authorities," in *Ethiopia: The Challenge of Democracy from Below*, eds. Bahru Zewde and Siegfried Pausewang (Stockholm: Nordiska Afrikaninstitutet and Forum for Social Studies, 2002), 130-48.

# Conclusion

My thesis ought to show that Europe-oriented nationalism literature may be successfully applied in an 'alien' environment to investigate longstanding societal forces. The idea of Ethiopian unity is a similar force. The following tables show the multiple dimensions of the evolution of Ethiopian nationalism.

| Historical period | Medieval Ethiopia | Jesuitical Ethiopia | Imperial Ethiopia |
|---|---|---|---|
| Timeframe | 1270-1490 | 1490-1633 | 1855-1936 |
| Emblematic ruler(s) | Amda Seyon & Zara Yaqob | Susneyos & Fasilides | Tewodros II & Menilek II |
| Role of rule | Indirect, no clear center, peripheries act independently, Emperors' authority is weak, moving courts represent the state | Indirect, fixed capital, peripheries act independently, center's authority is still weak, but attempts to centralize taxation and monetary politics | Indirect, with some centralization (roads, railway, early capitalist attempts), the formation of palace-independent wealthy elites |
| Army | No permanent army, in the case of war warlords decide to send troops or not. No central training, no central authority, no central planning | No permanent army, Portuguese mercenaries as bodyguards of the Emperor. In the case of wars: summoning of the liege lords' regional armies | No significant permanent army, but the modern weaponry is owned by the Emperor. Before the Battle of Adwa the Emperor was able to gather 100.000 men. First professional military experts in the palace |
| Meaning of Ethiopia | We are God's elect Christians and not Muslims | We are not Muslims and not Catholics | Ethiopia irredenta |

Two 13<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> century attempts to reinterpret and invent Ethiopian history mark the first signs of the idea of Ethiopian unity in the period of Medieval Ethiopia. Emperor Yekuno Amlak (r. 1270-1285) derived his legitimacy from the House of Solomon while his successor's chroniclers established the historical continuity with the inditation of the *Kebra Nagast*, the national epic of the Empire. The *Kebra Nagast* proved for centuries for the peoples of Ethiopia their historical right to rule the Northern Highlands and it reasoned the divine election of the Ethiopian Christians. The *Kebra Nagast* and the Ethiopian Church

thought to the believers that they are part of God's chosen tribe as the Lord replaced the Jews with the Ethiopians after the Jews, by brutally massacring his son, have betrayed him. In this sense Anthony D. Smith's theory of ethnic survival derived from the divine election proves to be right in the case of Ethiopia, with one major unique element, which may be seen as a critical footnote to Smith's hypothesis: in the case of Ethiopia the notion of godly election failed to create a single ethnicity, and Tigrayans, Amharas, and Oromo remained unquestionably separate ethnic groups. Nevertheless, the idea of divine election was exploited by Amda Seyon and Zara Yaqob fighting invading Muslim forces. They were able to mobilize regional liege lords (and warlords) along the expressed idea of 'Ethiopian unity', which resulted the Emperors' military victory over the Muslim forces backed by the Egyptian Sultan. The Empire had no clear center, as the Emperors were in constant move. The army of the Empire was nothing more then a voluntarily gathering of the warlords' troops and the Emperor was one of the – in fortunate situations the strongest – warlords.

The bureaucratic organization of the Empire began after Emperor Lebna Dengel (r. 1508-1540) called the Portugues to help his battered and threatened Empire. The Portuguese sent a considerable and modern army of 400 musketeers, which granted the Emperor not just the victory over the Somali Adal Kingdom, but the ultimate rule over Highland Abyssinia. But the Portuguese also sent hundreds of Jesuit monks to convert the nobility (and the people with them) of the Empire. My thesis showed that the idea of Ethiopian unity derived from the myth of divine election proved to be so strong and deeply grounded that the whole nobility and peasantry revolted against the new Catholic religion. But the short Portuguese-influenced reign have not disappeared without changing the Empire forever; Gonder, the permanent capital city was founded north of the Lake Tana (the source of the Blue Nile), the criminal code and taxation rules were codified and Portuguese masons and engineers constructed roads and bridges which eased the transmission of central orders and news. The bureaucratic

organization of the Empire began during the Jesuitical period. This two chapters of the thesis also contributed a critical footnote to Anthony D. Smith's theory of ethnic survival[129], as Ethiopia proved that the myth of divine election does not coincide automatically with the creation of a single ethnicity; two, almost equally important ethnic groups (Amharaa and Tigrayans) can maintain their cultural difference and belong to the same tribe of God.

After 200 years of civil wars (the so called Era of the Princes) three historic events shook the Empire in the middle of the 19th century: the European colonizers arrived to the borders of Ethiopia, the Ottoman Empire rapidly lost its sovereignty over the Red Sea, and Emperor Tewodros II was enthroned. Tewodros and his successors were able to resist European colonial attempts through a partial modernization and centralization of their power. They exploited the changed concept of Ethiopian unity, which partly was still derived from the belief of divine election, but the feudal nobility also developed the idea of *Ethiopia irredenta*, the yearning for the Golden Age of the Ethiopian Empire when the Empire controlled vast territories and ruled hundreds of groups from the Red Sea to the Sahara Desert. The Emperors needed a vast territory to build up a blossoming economy to resist Europeans and the feudal nobility was mobilized with the slogans of *Ethiopia irredenta*. The 100.000 men strong Imperial Army (by far the largest pre-1960's African army in the history) not just beat the invading superior Italian forces, but also conquered vast tribal territories to the south and west of the Highlands. Although, some steps were taken towards central rule (Addis Ababa – Djibouti railway, construction of roads, early capitalist companies (European financed coffee plantations around Gambela for example) the Empire was still indirectly controlled, rural liege lords' (though usually loyal to the Emperor) hold ultimate power over their territories. Ethiopia, as the thesis proved, was a feudal Empire comparable with the

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[129] Smith survival

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empires analyzed by Eric Hobsbawm. But despite the structural similarities nationalism, which eradicated the Austro-Hungarian, and the Ottoman empires, by-passed Ethiopia.

| Historical period | Selassie's Ethiopia | Communist Ethiopia | Federal Ethiopia |
|---|---|---|---|
| Timeframe | 1941-1974 | 1974-1991 | 1991- |
| Emblematic ruler(s) | Hailé Selassié | Mengistu Haile Mariam | Meles Zenawi |
| Role of rule | Somewhat indirect, with centralizing attempts to transmit and strengthen the idea of Ethiopian unity. The development of the environment of nationalism | Direct rule, state authority penetrates into every aspect of daily life (markets, schools, family life). The process of *encadrement* and land reforms. Census, ID | Constitutionally indirect rule, but state, through the governing party, directly rules the population. Some indirect elements, Soviet-style cultural autonomy |
| Army | 40.000 strong permanent army, no conscriptions, but being a soldier meant social advancement. Centrally led by professional military experts trained in the US and Europe. International missions (Korea) | 200.000 strong permanent army, forced conscriptions, continuous warfare (rebels and Somalia), 17.000 Cuban and 2000 Soviet advisors led the army | 250.000 strong permanent army, no conscriptions, only voluntary military service, some wars (Eritrea 1998-2002, Somalia 2006-2009). During warfare conscription is mandatory |
| Meaning of Ethiopia | Modern, self-conscious nation-state | Class-struggle driven society MEANWHILE ethnic-nationalistic liberation armies | Rainbow nation, Ethiopia is a kaleidoscope of ethnic groups |

My thesis introduced a new concept, the environment of nationalism to understand the spread of nationalism in underdeveloped territories. I argued that Hailé Selassie enforced a series of modernizing steps to spread the notion of Ethiopian unity. These steps – national currency, radio, sport successes, infrastructure, radio, capitalist mode of production, mass education, partial secularization, the foundation and sponsorship of National Theatre, National Museum, film industry, Ethio-Jazz and so on – crated the densely woven net of the environment of nationalism. These agencies transmitted the imagined national culture from the centers to the provinces. Ironically, but logically enough, these agencies created a new, independent, Western (and Soviet Union) minded intelligentsia who associated to overthrow the Empire.

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The communist government, which took over power in 1974, penetrated into every aspect of communities' life. Continuous warfare resulted the forced conscriptions, land reform and villagization programs ruined the agriculture, farfetched educational programs destroyed traditional 'wisdom', and abolition of established, centuries-old ways of commerce and marketing busted the livelihood of millions which resulted in the rise of ethnic nationalisms.

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