Ethnic Minority Rule in Ethiopia; Causes and Challenges:

A comparative study

By

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Abstract

This thesis investigates the determinant factors that lead to the coming into power of ethnic minorities, a phenomenon that happens rarely. The research employs a comparative method to analyze three cases, Ethiopia, Syria and Rwanda. Situated in the wider field of ethnic conflict studies, it explores the conflictual relationship between the ethnic minority which is in power and the majority ethnic groups, seeking to identify the common trajectories behind the ascendance of ethnic minorities to control political power. The analysis shows that ruling ethnic minorities come to power when the majority ethnic group divests their autonomy or takes away their political dominance, in turn leading to a resistance put up by the minority that gradually brings it to power.

Acknowledgment

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I am highly indebted to my brother **Yaya**. Thank you for being by my side every step of the way.

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Introduction

Minority ethnic groups have historically been a victim of discrimination and domination and in many instances politically underrepresented compared with the majority groups in their society.[1] Increasingly, modern era and its concomitant ideals of democracy and popular sovereignty give the majority an upper hand and a secured exercise of power. This is especially the case in divided societies where ethnic cleavages have been politicized and exercise of political power comes at the expense of the exclusion of a minority ethnic group. In the words of Donald L.Horowitz, "in severely divided societies, ethnic identity provides clear lines to determine who will be included and who will be excluded. Since the lines appear unalterable, being in and being out may quickly come to look permanent"[2].

Such fear of suppression can lead a minority ethnic group to seek power but the manner of attaining such power and exercising it in the face of a majority with similar intentions of domination is increasingly becoming difficult. Difficult because mass mobilization, international pressure and lack of legitimacy are at odds with political power that subordinates a majority. But even then, very few and rare minority ethnic rule still exists in this modern era. Erik Kaufman and Oded Haklai define dominant political minorities as "those communally differentiated ruling groups who are able to govern majorities despite being demographically outnumbered"[3].

In most instances these dominant minorities are a product of colonial and post-colonial process, Sunnis in Saddam Hussein's Iraq, Tutsi in Burundi or Alawis in Syria.[4] A common feature of these dominant minorities is that political power is exercised through coercion and the narrowing

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[1] Ted Robert Gurr and Barbara Harff, ETHNIC CONFLICT IN WORLD POLITICS, Westview Press, 1994, p.6
2 Donald L.Horowitz, *Democracy in Divided Societies*, Journal of Democracy, Vol. 4, No. 4, 18-38, 1993, P. 18
3 Kaufmann, Eric P. and Haklai, O., *Dominant ethnicity: from minority to majority,* Nations and Nationalism, Vol. 14, No. 4, 2008, p.3
4 *Ibid*., p. 4

of circle of power as much as possible. Since these regimes suffer a lack of legitimacy, authoritarianism comes as a natural consequence of their rule. Lack of legitimacy added with their past history of subordination and conflict with the majority, these regimes are unlikely to take the risk of democratization which as a principle ratifies majority rule.[5]

The research question for this thesis is, what does determine such an unlikely phenomenon of an ethnic minority to come to power? The question addresses the specific historical routes that drive an ethnic minority to seek power despite its numerical disadvantage. The elites' ability to mobilize their ethnic group behind their aims of exercising political power depends much on the masses identification with their ethnic identity and the extent to which this identity can be mobilized for political action. Different theories compete to explain this phenomenon of ethno-political conflict or how and why ethnic groups mobilize for political action.[6]

The research looks at the case of Ethiopia which after more than two decades of a bloody civil war that succeeded in toppling a military regime; the initial attempts of power sharing between different ethnic factions failed and now power is exercised by elites from a minority ethnic group, the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), representing the ethnic group called Tigre.[7] The major purpose of the research is to explain in what manner such a minority has sought its way to power and retains this power for such a long period starting from 1991.

Since the coming to power of the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) with the TPLF at its core, the country has found itself in an ethnic politics vigorously pursued by the ruling party.[8] Starting from the creation of a federal structure based on ethno linguistic regionalism, the ruling party has also succeeded in making political party formation follow

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[5] Donald L.Horowitz, ETHNIC GROUPS IN CONFLICT, University of California Press, 1985, p.500
[6] *Ibid.*, p. 15
[7] Horowitz, *Supra note 2*, p.23
[8] John Abbink, *Ethnic-based federalism and ethnicity in Ethiopia: reassessing the experiment after 20 years*, Journal of Eastern African Studies, Vol. 5, No. 4, 596-618, 2011, p. 596.

ethnic lines. However it still remains to be answered how did the TPLF representing a minority ethnic group with only 10 percent of the population propagate an ethnic politics without incurring the risk of hostile reaction from other ethnic groups that are relatively bigger in size.[9]

This research proceeds by finding out the specific patterns that a minority ethnic group is mobilized for political action by critically examining the different theories and approaches to ethno political conflict. The main approaches in the field of ethnic conflict literature are primordial, instrumental, and psychological. None of these theories seems to give a comprehensive explanation to ethnic conflicts that are varied in their cause and internal complexity over how elites provide leadership and members of ethnic groups follow the leaders[10]. In light of the particular question the research addresses the author will follow both the instrumental approach that emphasizes the role of elites in directing conflicts over competition for resources and the psychological approach as propounded by Donald L.Horowitz that points to the importance of the feeling of apprehension and domination involved in ethnic conflicts.[11]

This phenomenon of a minority rule will not happen by a simple turn of events but within a context that can be analyzed as a distinct instance of patterns and sequences under specific conditions in the history of conflict in ethnically divided societies.[12] By extending upon the theoretical framework provided by Ted Robert Gurr and Barbara Harff[13] that explains the incidence of ethno-political conflicts in general and the central importance of persecution and discrimination in causing ethnic conflicts, Oded Haklai has devised a theoretical framework for both the incidence and persistence of a minority ethnic group ruling over a majority. According

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[9] Assefa Mehretu, *Ethnic Federalism and its Potential to Dismember the Ethiopian State*, Sage publications: Progress in Development Studies, Vol. 12, 113-133, 2012, p.116

[10] Rita Jalali and Seymour Martin Lipset, *Racial and Ethnic Conflicts: A Global Perspective, Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 107, No. 4, 1992-93, p. 600 ; quoted in Bojana Blagojevic*, Causes of Ethnic Conflict: A Conceptual Framework*, Journal of Global Change and Governance, Vol. 3, No. 1, 2009, p. 2.

[11] Horowitz, *Supra note 5*, p.140

[12] Oded Haklai, *A minority rule over a hostile majority: The case of Syria*, Nationalism and Ethnic Politics, Vol. 6, No. 3, 19-50, 2000, p. 20

[13] Gurr and Harff, *Supra note 1*.

to Oded Haklai's theory three stage processes bring about such a minority rule. First, group cohesion due to collective experience of persecution; second, seeking and attaining power that happens through the manipulation of colonizers; and third, the stabilization of this rule. The third condition that prolongs an ethnic minority rule according to Oded Haklai are inability of the majorities to establish group cohesion, dominance of the army by the minority, and legitimization of ethnic minority rule through emphasizing national identity and common goals that would conceal ethnic tensions.[14]

The minority rule in Ethiopia differs from the explanation that commonly regards colonization as a common feature of ethnic minority rules. Besides the present minority rule in Ethiopia, a country that has not been colonized, the case of present Tutsi regime in Rwanda proves that though colonization intensified ethnicity and supported Tutsi minority, it is long after colonization that the present regime deposed Hutu majority rule in 1994 and continues to rule in an undemocratic system. The research by focusing on the case of Ethiopia, it will explain the root causes for ascendance to power of a minority ethnic group, the way ethnicity is mobilized for political action and how the elites from such group maintain their power within a context, both national and international, that favors a majority. For the sake of inferring common causes in the phenomenon of an ethnic minority rule the research will compare different countries with ruling ethnic minorities.

Hypothesis

Even though Oded Haklai's theory gives a general framework to understand the issue of ethnic minority rule, I believe the theory can still be narrowed down to explain in what conditions ethnic minorities exactly came to power and dominated the majority. According to Oded Haklai,

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[14] Haklai, *Supra note 12*, p. 23

a number of factors contribute to the emergence of ruling minorities and this takes a three stage process of, (1) identity formation or cohesive identity brought about by collective experience of persecution, (2) colonial legacy that stimulates the group to obtain power and, (3) conditions that help the minority to stay in power. In this research I make the hypothesis that *ethnic minorities come to power when an ethnic group that had a privileged status in the past faces persecution by the majority*. By such I mean that a privileged status in either having local autonomy or a political dominance that is followed by persecution leads to resistance that results in the coming to power of an ethnic minority.

Case selection and Methodology

For the purposes of this research I will use the most different systems design by comparing three different countries that are experiencing an ethnic minority rule. The countries include Ethiopia, Syria, and Tutsi minority rule in Rwanda. As mentioned in the beginning the research is interested in how ethnic minorities came to power in the modern period of bureaucratic governments and in the time of popular sovereignty and equal citizenship rather than pre modern monarchies. For this reason the Tutsi ethnic minority rule in Burundi that constituted itself as a constitutional monarchy after independence in 1962 which is a continuation of the Tutsi monarchy of pre-colonial times is not covered by this thesis. The same holds true for the Iraqi Sunni minority rule which in the same way is a continuation of the Sunni dominance during the Arab Sunni Ottoman rulers. The reason for their exclusion is that, an ethnic group that has continued its privilege from pre modern monarchies will not serve in explaining the research question, how does an ethnic minority come to power in the modern era? South Africa also had an ethnic minority rule by the white minority but this is a direct case of colonization first by the Dutch then the British. Colonization is not a result of ethnic conflict between ethnic groups that exist in the same political system or state which on account of their difference in cultural or other

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criteria that differentiates their identity enter into antagonism. If one takes outside domination or colonization as ethnic minority rule the analysis will not only miss the main ingredient of the phenomenon of ethnic minority rule, ethnic conflict, but also has to cover all countries that have been colonized.

But in comparing these countries selected for analysis part of my argument will be that it is a mistake to take colonization as the single and necessary factor that brought ruling ethnic minorities to power as Oded Haklai seems to propose. Colonization has in some cases given a status of privilege to some ethnic groups without directly contributing to their coming to power as in Syria where it was long after the French colonization the Alawi minority group succeeded to come to power. The cases in Rwanda and Burundi also reveal an even minor role played by the colonizers than in Syria in giving support to ethnic minorities and vesting them with a privileged status. The Tutsis in these countries were a privileged group of ruling classes for centuries before the Belgian colonizers came and solidified this hierarchy. What is interesting to the research question in this thesis is that the Tutsis in Rwanda lost power to the majority Hutus in 1959 only to come back and rule again in 1994. In Ethiopia, which will be the focus of the research, the ruling ethnic minority came to power after a long history of competition for power with the hegemonic majority of the Amhara ethnic group. In the case of Ethiopia there was not even a colonizer.

Besides the difference in the impact colonization had in these countries, they also differ in the ascriptive ethnic trait that is used in labeling these minorities as ethnic groups. While in the case of Ethiopia, ethnicity is basically based on the language difference between the groups, in Syria ethnicity is defined in terms of religious difference between the minority and the majority. In Rwanda, the Tutsis were ethnically different because of their racial background and the historical

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occupational role between the majority Hutus, that were peasants and the Tutsis that were herders.

The above and other differences in the ethnic relationship between the majority and minority and the types of persecution faced by the respective ethnic minorities as well as the historical role played by the majorities in these countries which are now experiencing minority rule, would show us how specific similar factors in these countries contributed to this unlikely phenomenon of minority ethnic regimes. According to the hypothesis made the prior privileged status by the ethnic minorities compounded by the later persecution of these ethnic groups by the majorities finally leads the minorities to seize power away from the majority and retain it through different means. The goal of this thesis will be one of explaining the phenomenon of ruling ethnic minorities rather than providing a general theory of how ethnic minority rules arise. Hence my choice of selecting the cases based on the dependent variable is justified in not randomly picking both positive cases and negative cases where similar instances might have occurred but did not result in ethnic minority rule.

Operationalization of Variables and Indicators

There are three variables at use in this research; privileged status (1), persecution (2), and ethnic minority rule (3). The concept of being in a privileged status for a minority ethnic group is used to differentiate these groups from the ones that are normally in a status of subordination as is usually the case with ethnic minorities. Hence to be in a privileged status means the minority ethnic group has retained a self-rule or autonomy and has managed to avoid domination by the majority. Or the ethnic group might have enjoyed a status of domination upon the majority.

Persecution can take many different forms from vivid types such as physical attacks as in the Rwandan case of genocide and systematic and legal discriminations that denies the ethnic groups

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equality in exercising their self-determination rights to promote their culture. For the purposes of this research the focus will be if the ethnic minority has been systematically denied access to political power. The basic question will be, has the majority controlled political power in a way that the ethnic minority is taken to be a subordinated class of citizens and the majority forms an ethnocratic regime?

The third variable, minority ethnic rule, identifies such a regime where members of the minority group control all or major political offices. To avoid the mistake of confusing the coincidence of a country's political leadership exhibiting disproportional number of people from an ethnic minority even though there is no real and intentional hegemony by the minority ethnic group, the research looks upon cases where there is an organized attempt to control power on the part of the minority ethnic group. Not only is an organized action by the minority ethnic group sufficient, since a political party can be formed on ethnic basis and compete for power equally and democratically with other ethnic groups, but it should also be the case that this organized ethic group tries to sustain its rule by limiting the chances of the majority gain such political leadership. Hence the basic indicator for ethnic minority rule will be whether there is such an organized group that can be identified by its basis of membership and leadership as made up of people from an ethnic minority group. Or in addition to the leadership by people form the ethnic group, this organization or political party proclaims itself as a representative of a named ethnic minority.[15]

The research basically depends on secondary sources of literature; especially the variables of privileged status and persecution will be analyzed by using historical background of the specific relationship between the ruling ethnic minority and the majority. For the third variable of

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[15] I use the term political organization interchangeably with political party because in some cases there will be an organized resistance movement or something similar that later on turns itself to political party once it becomes a government.

identifying a politically organized group as a ruling ethnic minority both primary and secondary sources will be used. Among the basic tasks will be to see the ethnic composition of such an organized group and the criteria for assuming leadership in such organization by asking who has in the past and present led such group and on what basis were selections made. What were the proclaimed objectives for the founding of such a political group? If the answers to the above questions concerning the political organization are in the affirmative then we can say there is a minority rule.

Overview

The first introductory chapter will give the general conceptual framework for the relationship between the modern nation state and the politics of ethnicity. It is in a way an attempt to give the reader the justifications and importance of analyzing ethnicity and ethnic conflict by way of explaining the practical and conceptual significance in discussing these issues. This thesis deals with a minority ethnic group's dominance and control of power in a setting where a modern bureaucratic state exists and equal citizenship and democracy are considered the tenets of popular sovereignty as opposed to aristocratic and hierarchical regimes of pre modern states where dominant-subordinate relationship of rulers and subjects can be the norm. Hence this chapter will raise the issue and briefly discuss the relevance of ethnicity in modern state politics. It will also briefly sketch some of the contending theories that explain how ethnicity enters the realm of political action and the forms and meaning of ethnic group and ethnicity.

The second and third chapter will discuss the way ethicized politics has entered the political scene in Ethiopia by giving the background historical dynamics of majority-minority relationship between ethnic groups focusing especially on the implications of such undemocratic past upon the present dominant ethnic minority. This past relationship between the past dominant majority

and the present dominant minority group will be discussed in light of the theoretical approaches that were explained in the preceding chapter and the hypothesis posed by this thesis. Here the main focus will be on the ascendance to power of TPLF, by recounting on the particular significance ethnicity provided for the party in its struggle against the government and the mobilization of the Tigre minority ethnic group it purports to represent until now.

Chapter four will be devoted to the comparative cases the thesis utilizes to differentiate and contrast in order to reach out to the common causes of the phenomena of ethnic minority rule. The purpose of the comparison is to know the specific common aspects that have led to this similar outcome despite the different historical, political and geographical setting of these countries. Here again the focus will be to observe the relationship or constellation of political power, subordination or domination, between the majority and minority ethnic groups to explain how past privilege is decisive for the ascendance to power of ethnic minorities.

Finally the thesis will conclude by analyzing the findings over the comparative cases by drawing upon the claim of our hypothesis. This conclusion will also seek to infer the underlying implications of such regimes for the overall future of democracy and interethnic conflict and recommend the lessons from past and present scenarios.

Chapter1: Ethnicization of Politics in the Modern State

1.1 The Nation State and Ethnic Politics

Modern nation states in contrast to the pre modern empires derive their legitimacy from the sovereignty of the people defined as a people exercising its sovereign power through some form of democratic procedure and enjoying equal rights and participation not as differentiated subjects, but as citizens "undifferentiated by distinctions of honor and prestige but held together by common political destiny and shared cultural features"[16]. But the modern nation state with its main features of democracy, citizenship and equal participation was not as egalitarian and universalistic as the grand theories of modernization claimed. Rather the nation state has its logic of inclusion and exclusion of "who belongs to the people that enjoy equal rights before the law and in which name the state should be ruled, now that kings and caliphs have to be replaced by a government representing the nation".[17]

This, argues Andreas Wimmer, is what makes ethnicization of politics a direct result of modernization and not "an archaic pattern which modernity has not yet managed to wear away but rather an effect of political modernization itself"[18] or in other words "modernity itself is cast in nationalist and ethicized forms"[19]. What has replaced the former empires and kingdoms that ruled by the grace of God and governed in hierarchical manner were replaced by the new states that ruled in the name of the people and now that like should be governed by like, the identity of these people matter. Old empires that were keen in imperial expansion bringing everyone within

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[16] Andreas Wimmer, NATIONALIST EXCLUSION AND ETHNIC CONFLICT, SHADOWS OF MODERNITY, Cambridge University Press, 2002, p. 2
[17] *Ibid*., p. 3
[18] *Ibid*., p. 113
[19] *Ibid*., p. 52

their reach into their dominion without regard for their ethnic or cultural similarity, like China, Japan, Thailand, and Ethiopia reinvented themselves as nation states.[20]

The nation state was not a neutral republican universalist stage where different interest groups interact by their civic citizenship alone, rather the state was captured by a nationalist project that was defining who were to be the rightful owners of the state and as such to be endowed with the collective goods of equal citizenship, democracy, and participation. The zeal and ideological prominence that nation building and national integration received before the 1960's were later to be gravely to be put in question by what unfolded in the aftermath of the 1990's. After the cold war the certainties of a unified polity found in the nation state was put into question by the recurring ethnic conflicts in many regions of the world, as Young says "both the nation and state were now subject to relentless interrogation: the former by deepening cultural cleavages in many lands, the latter by currents of economic and political liberalization now girdling the globe. The potent force of politicized and mobilized cultural pluralism is now universally conceded"[21]. The widespread ethnic conflicts that began in the 1960's and after the cold war exploded into one of the largest heinous atrocities of genocide were among other reasons a result of the perennial tension between states that want to extend their hegemonic powers and ethnic groups that wanted to defend their self-determination rights and protect their identity.[22]

The Ethiopian state traces its roots to the Axumite civilization in the first millennium B.C, whose center is in what is now the province of Tigray.[23] The subsequent centuries that saw the expansion of Ethiopia towards the formation of a modern state in the 19th century was basically anchored upon this earlier civilization in which the competition for hegemony between the

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[20] Crawford Young (ed.) THE RISING TIDE OF CULTURAL PLURALISM, THE NATION STATE AT BAY?, The University of Wisconsin Press, 1993, p. 9
[21] *Ibid.*, p. 3
[22] Gurr and Harff, *Supra note 1*, p. 13.
[23] John Young, *Regionalism and Democracy in Ethiopia*, Third World Quarterly, V.19, No. 2, 191-204, 1998, P. 192

Amhara and Tigre language groups descending from a common Semitic linguistic ancestor and common Orthodox Christian religion also went hand in hand with this state formation project.[24] What is basically important for the subsequent analysis this thesis wants to import is that these two language groups that constituted the basic core of the Ethiopian polity from the earlier history of the country will continuously play a big hand in the drive to the ethnic and conflictual politics than the latter ethnic groups that were latter included through conquer and conquest. This significance of the two language groups and the latter antagonism between them stems from their role in the creation of the polity itself expressed in what has repeatedly been stated by historians "the Ethiopian Orthodox church, the state, the imperial dynasty, and the Amhara-Tigre culture are considered to be the great assimilators of the peripheral regions".[25]

What culminated in the final creation of the modern Ethiopian state encompassing large territories to the South and West and East saw the ascendance of the Amhara to a consolidated power over the new state. Three main actors are at the forefront of this modern state building Emperor Tewodros II of Gondar (1855 - 1868), the Tigrayan Yohannes IV (1872 - 1889) and Menelik II of Amhara (1889 - 1913). Menelik from his base in Shoa pursued a vigorous policy of expansionary conquest in all corners and within two years after defeating the Italian colonizers at Adwa the process of territorial expansion and the creation of the modern empire state had been completed.[26] This expansion by Menelik II made the Amhara, particularly those from Shoa,

> the beneficiaries over the control of resources and exercise of power over these new regions while the nobility from Tigray served as junior partners…competing directly but unequally with their Amhara counterparts for positions and status within the central state [and] the peasants increasingly felt the impact of state centralization in the deteriorating authority of their traditional regional rulers and the

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[24] Sarah Vaughan, ETHNICITY AND POWER IN ETHIOPIA, PhD thesis, The University of Edinburgh, 2003, p. 105
[25] Solomon Gashaw, NATIONALISM AND ETHNIC CONFLICT IN ETHIOPIA, Cited in Crawford Young (ed), Supra note 20, p. 143.
[26] Sarah Vaughan, *Supra note 24*, p.104

imposition of Amharigna (derivative of the term Amhara depicting the language). As a result most Tigrayans concluded that the general decline of their province was caused by the Amhara and specifically the rise to power of Menelik II.[27]

The above historicity of competition for hegemony between the Amhara and Tigre has been the driving force in the conflictual history of the modern state and in the following chapters the thesis will make the central point that the present minority rule is a product of a historical antagonism by a minority ethnic group that insists in securing its privileged status. The successful mobilization of the masses by the elites of their ethic group was not only grounded on the undemocratic and extractive governance pursued by the state, but also the loss of the historical privilege and status that instilled a sense of injustice. But for the present it is essential to make the point clear that the bureaucratic state that was consolidated in the twentieth century had the seeds of the potential for ethnic conflict since throughout the course of the nationalist integration of the state, the culture of the empire builders was taken as an imposition by the others and its potential for conflict was based in its ethnocratic arrangement.[28]

The elites that dramatically changed this modern state arrangement through a successful revolution they led from their home base of the Tigre region, organized under the TPLF, and presently govern an ethno federal state, were among the few that got the chance to join the only university the country had by then in the 1960's. Their reaction to what was then termed as the 'national question' by the student movement against the Hailesellassie regime (1930-74) was to dwell on the ethno nationalist segment of the deep division that exercised the participants of the student movement over whether the question was one of class in a multi ethnic empire or over the autonomy of independent ethno national groups.[29] This preference for ethno national mobilization by the TPLF rebellion aside from the fact that it might be for mere ideological

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[27] John Young , *Supra note 23*, p. 192

[28] Sarah Vaughan, *Supra note 24*, p.103

[29] Bahru Zewde (ed) ,DOCUMENTING THE ETHIOPIAN STUDENT MOVEMENT: AN EXERCISE IN ORAL HISTORY, Forum for Social Studies, 2010, p. 105

persuasion or for instrumental reasons to seize power[30], it was also led by practical considerations as one member and founder of TPLF made clear saying:

> Nationality was the primary contradiction in the sense of being in the forefront of people's minds in Tigray, such that they couldn't get beyond it to consider any other basis for mobilization. It is in people's minds and you have to focus on it because they are not going to be mobilized without it being addressed. It occupies them in a fundamental manner; it was the primary concern of the majority of the population: it was easily felt as a main slogan amongst ordinary people, much more than the class issue[31]

TPLF after toppling the military regime of the Derg (1974-1991) and controlling the government and state, it has sought the allegiance of different ethnic based parties which in most cases are its own creation. The Tigre comprising less than 10 percent of the population creates a dilemma as to how TPLF still controls power and at the same time it chooses to propound an ethnic based party formation and competition. Part of the answer lies in what has been said above that TPLF runs a coalition party, or the ruling party EPRDF, which co-opts elites of other ethnic groups but sustaining a huge political power for itself. As one German observer of Ethiopian politics describes:

> the Tigre make up only 7% of the Ethiopian people, whereas Amhara comprise possibly 25% and the Oromo 30 to 40%. To avoid being shoved aside as a powerless minority, the TPLF, during the last years of the war against the military regime of Mengistu Hailemariam, organized prisoners of war from other ethnic groups into new parties. The most important to arise from this process were the Oromo People's Democratic Organization (OPDO) and the Amhara National Democratic Movement (ANDM)[32].

The TPLF rules the country no matter how its numerical minority can compromise its appeal to govern democratically stems from the primordial and psychological status relevance it gave to ethnicity. As will be shown in the later chapters TPLF after its takeover of power has structured Ethiopia in ethnic terms unequalled even by other African countries that face the same problems

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[30] *Ibid*, p. 106
[31] Sarah Vaughan, *Supra note 24*, interview, (TPLF founder member, Mekelle, 8 October 1998), p. 164
[32] Siegfried Pausewang, *Ethiopia: Political View From Below*, South African Journal of International Affairs, Vol. 16, No. 1, 69-85, 2009, p. 71.

of ethnic conflict and tribalism in their politics.[33] Creating such an ethicized polity, one can say did not come naturally but with the heavy hand of the victorious rebellions which as Pausewang says was "a process accompanied by a tortuous and to many people a painful rhetoric of ethnicization that declared Ethiopians first and foremost as member of their 'ethnic group' and only second as Ethiopian citizens".[34] This tendency of exclusively controlling political power was already visible, as Andreas Wimmer, whose account of the roots of ethnic politics in the modern state this introductory section referred to pointed out his concern that the Tigre rebels despite their claim of building a consociational and federal system they "hardly seem interested in division of power and have framed branch organizations (also called satellite political parties) in all regions intended to prevent the development of political dynamics independent of the new center".[35]

Before delving into the process of how ethicized politics entered the scene of competition and opposition against the state in Ethiopia ,and in how TPLF resting on a minority platform used ethnicity for its rebellion to succeeded and seize power to the demise of not only the regime it toppled but the majority and other minority ethnic groups that now face a fierce and relentless grip on power of an elite from such a minority ethnic group, next will be a short summary of some of the theories that deal with the question, in what sense ethnicity becomes relevant for political action?

1.2 Theorizing Ethnicity

The explosion of ethnic conflicts since the 1960's and the lack of theoretical frameworks that explain these conflicts has given rise to a new interest in explaining this empirical reality and the need for theoretical tools. Such an interest in the scholarly literature in the conflict engendering

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[33] John Young, *Ethnicity and Power in Ethiopia*, Review of African Political Economy, No 70, 531-42, 1996, p.531
[34] Jon Abbink, *Supra note 8*, p.597
[35] Andreas Wimmer, *Supra note 16*, p. 110

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aspect of ethnicity was began against a backdrop of modernization theories that rather predicted the fading away of the relevance of ethnic identity in the social and political relations of people as modernization would replace the irrational ethnic identity by a rational methodological individualism. This approach to the study of ethnicity as a phenomenon subject to transformation by the forces of economic modernization traces its roots to the writings of Karl Marx and Emile Durkheim. For Marx, religion, ethnicity, and nationalism are used by the dominant classes as a way of masking the underlying exploitation by tying these groups under a false consciousness. Ethnic nationalism as any other form of class domination would disappear through the process of modernization and the culmination of exploitation of the proletariat.[36]

Durkheim on the other hand argued that "modernization leads to a division of labor which has the potential to replace a mechanically integrated society with an organically integrated society".[37] The basis of this theory is that, economic modernization requires individuals to transcend their immediate kinship and ethnic loyalty and depend on every other citizen on the basis of contract and individual autonomy. Such contractual relationships that are the qualities of organically interrelated societies in a modern world will render "a mechanically integrated society …united by a collective conscience created by a series of primordial identifications" unimportant and dysfunctional.[38]

The above melting pot modernization theories were replaced by other theories that now reconstituted ethnicity at the center of their analysis in the face of empirical reality of ethnic conflicts. And the beginning of this reverse theorizing was started with the so called conflictual modernization theories. These modernization theories of ethnicity argue that economic modernization rather than neutralizing the effect of ethnic identities through creating material

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[36] Saul Newman*, Does Modernization Breed Ethnic Political Conflict?* Cambridge University Press, World Politics Vol. 43, No. 3, 451-478, 1991, p. 451
[37] *Ibid*., p. 454
[38] *Ibid*., p. 454

interest based interactions, it invigorates ethnic divisions. Ethnic groups that existed in isolation will be brought together in the competition for the same economic resources. These theories that relate modernization to ethnic conflict rest on either of two premises, by emphasizing the role of elites and the differential and incongruent modernization of ethnic groups.[39] These arguments especially the one that points to the role of elites is most captured by what are called instrumental ethnic theories.

1.2.1   Instrumental Theories of Ethnicity

Instrumental theories of ethnicity propose that the elites in the bureaucratic state who are unable to get job positions in accordance with their educational background will return to their ethnic group and mobilize the people in ethnic terms. In this argument the basic premise is that ethnicity is not something primordial and traditional that has no room in the rational, interest driven interaction of people in a modern society but rather an instrument of political and material goals. This formulation of ethnic mobilization in terms of economic interest views ethnicity not as a fixed identity tied to cultural, religious, racial and ancestral markers but as something malleable and changeable created and recreated according to circumstances.[40]

A prominent proponent of this instrumental approach to ethnic conflict and politics, Abner Cohen, explicitly puts this view by saying that members of an interest group that cannot organize themselves in a formal way will, rather unconsciously, make use of the available cultural markers as a means of articulating their interests and the organization of their group. And in this way ethnicity as a relevant factor in political action comes into being.[41] By holding this view Cohen wants to also criticize other primordial theories of ethnicity of their incapacity to explain

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[39] Horowitz, *Supra note 5*, p. 101
[40] Saul Newman, *Supra note 36*, p. 456
[41] Abner Cohen, in Werner Sollors (ed.) , THEORIES OF ETHNICITY; A CLASSICAL READER, New york University Press 1996, p. 378

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ethnic identities in their relevance for politics. According to Cohen, ethnic identity, culture, religion and such things provide a dual purpose of both extending meaning to the questions of origin, and destiny and also a utility for political action. As Thomas H. Eriksen says, for Cohen, it is this aspect that can explain the salience of some ethnic identifications and the silence of others, the basic argument being that "ethnicity is an instrument for competition over scarce resources, which is nevertheless circumscribed by ideologies of shared culture, shared origins and metaphoric kinship".[42]

However, instrumental theories have been criticized for their insistence on the role of elites and being unable to give a sufficient explanation of why it is then the masses follow the elite even if there will be no economic gain for them. The question is, even if ethnic identities can be created and recreated suited to the circumstances to promote the economic interest of the elites, how can the masses of supporters blindly follow? One of the most widely held criticism has also been that instrumental theories taking mobilization of politics along ethnic lines as a result of the calculating and strategic interest promotion of the actors, fail to give enough reason for the intense and exuberant passion that accompanies ethnic conflicts. [43] Eriksen says, while Cohen argues that ethnic identities are a result of functional and contemporary needs of organization and in this way criticizes the primordial theories of ethnicity that take ethnic identities as immutable and imperative "what Cohen does not discuss is the nature of the stuff the groups feed"[44] or the emotional strength ethnic movements depend upon.

Remarking that ethnic groups are not just trade unions, Horowitz claims, the intense passions that elicit ethnic allegiances cannot be properly explained by material benefits alone. So, such and other criticisms have led others to propose other approaches, one of them which is more

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[42] Thomas H.Eriksen, ETHNICITY AND NATIONALISM: ANTHROPOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES, 1993, p.45
[43] Andreas Wimmer, *Supra Note 16*, p. 45
[44] Eriksen, *Supra note 42,* p. 55

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congruent to the hypothesis made by this thesis, the psychological approach proposed by Horowitz, and the primordial approach which seems a direct opposite to the instrumental theories. Because the two strands, instrumentalism and primordialism could not be blended in one single theory some have chosen to make a compatible argument holding, "primordialism usefully completes instrumentalism by explaining the force of 'affective tie' through which interest is instrumentally pursued"[45] or by saying that leaders obtain followers by using primordial symbols for political strategy[46]. As a way of making the dispute between these theories clear and also emphasize what exactly is at stake in the discussion of mobilization of politics in ethnic terms, I will in the following look upon the primordial theory and quickly move on to the psychological approach propounded by Horowitz whose arguments this thesis will be using without necessarily importing the whole theoretical framework.

1.2.2 Primordial Theories of Ethnicity

The strength of the instrumental theories lies in their recognition of the fact that ethnic identities are mutable and that ethnicity does not always become salient but ethnic identities have been created and recreated in different circumstances. In the opposite, primordialism while suffering from this strength of instrumental theories, it gains its strength in explaining the salience of ethnic identities and ideological and ethnic markers in determining the strength and depth of ethnic movements.[47] Before they moved to include other categories of ethnic markers and categories, primordial theories first explained ethnicity in its natural and biological coerciveness in solidifying ethnic identities. The first person to propound this concept of primordialism was Edward Shills who wrote that:

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[45] Crawford Young, *Supra note 20,* p. 23
[46] Eriksen, *Supra note 42*, p. 55
[47] Saul Newman, *Supra note 36*, p. 467

> As one thought about the strengths and tensions in family attachments, it became apparent that the attachment was not only to the other family member merely as a person but as a possessor of certain especially significant relational qualities which could only be described as *primordial.* The attachment to another member of one's kinship group is not just a function of interaction…. It is because a certain *ineffable* significance is attributed to the tie of blood.[48]

Such a view of ethnicity as underived and naturally given preceding any social interaction emphasizes three qualities in explaining ethnic ties, that they are apriori, affective and ineffable. Apriori means that ethnic ties are naturally given preceding all interaction and by being natural they are ascriptive and immutable. Ineffable, as the term indicates takes ethnic ties to be unaccountable, innate and irreducible and overpowering over individual members of a group. The third quality primordialism endows to ethnicity, affectivity, according to Eller and Coughlan, while it correctly acknowledges the emotional element in social interactions beyond its mere rational instrumental aspect, wrongly assumes they are natural and fixed.[49]

On two grounds this view of immutability and naturalness of ethnic attachments has been criticized. First, the fact that ethnic identities are called upon in different times and situations in response to changing circumstances makes this view questionable to explain the changing nature of ethnic attachments, some arguing that a constant cannot explain a variable.[50] The second criticism is that by taking ethnic attachments to be primordial and the resulting conflicts to be in the natural order of things it prevents the institutional amelioration of ethnic conflicts.

> Not only will there be limits to the capacity effectively to challenge patterns of mutual antagonism founded upon ethnicity and race, but also those benefiting from the resultant inequalities will have a powerful ideological excuse for their oppression of others.[51]

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[48] Edward A. Shills (1957, p. 122) Cited in George M. Scott, Jr, *A resynthesis of the primordial and circumstantial approaches to ethnic group solidarity: towards and explanatory mode*l, Ethnic and Racial Studies, Vol. 13, No. 2 1990, p. 150

[49] Jack David Eller and Reed M. Coughlan, *The Poverty of Primordialism: the demystification of ethnic attachments*, Ethnic and Racial Studies, Vol. 16, Issue. 2, 183-202, 1993, p. 191

[50] George M. Scot, *Supra Note 48,* 149

[51] Eller and Coughlan, *Supra note 49*, p. 186

Even though the fact remains that ethnic groups are changeable as it has been seen in Africa, with the redrawing of territories ethnic identities also changing as well and in some cases new identities being formed and in others old affinities reclaimed, the claim by instrumentalists attributing the creation of these identities to elite interests is unconvincing. This has led some to deemphasize the natural given-ness of primordial attachments and cultural content of ethnic identities and shift to the salience of the boundaries which demarcate ethnic groups. This is a view propounded by Fredrick Barth that takes ethnic identities as enclaves of relevant cultural boundaries that serve ethnic groups in differentiating between them and others rather than objective givens that are natural in and of themselves. Barth's view is nearly taken as being instrumentalist taking ethnic groups as social organizations and cultures as packages that serve in the dichotomization or bordering of members and non- members. But his argument that the identities sustained by these cultural boundaries have a constraining strength upon members of the group ascribed in them and such ethnic identifications cannot be set aside temporarily, places him in opposition to the instrumentalist view, such as held by Cohen cited above.[52]

1.2.3   The Psychological Dynamic of Ethnic Conflicts

Because of the weaknesses in the approaches discussed above in explaining the congruence between the role of leaders to incite ethnic identities for political action and the grassroots support that ethnic conflicts envisage, Donald L.Horowitz looks at the psychological dynamic of ethnic conflicts. For him it is the psychological component of ethnicity that makes it to overwhelm the rational and economic interests of both the leaders and the followers.[53] This view is regarded by many as a balance between the primordial and instrumental theories taking them

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[52] Sarah Vaughan, *Supra note 24*, p. 48
[53] *Ibid.*, p. 464

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as poles rather than opposites.[54] Horowitz takes the view that ethnic identities are created and recreated as the range of interactions widened and contracted. His view regarding this point of flexibility or immutability of ethnic identities can be summarized in his own words:

> In general therefore, leaders cannot call into play an identity that is not founded on judgments of relative likeness and difference. If the perceptual context changes so as to reactivate some higher or lower level of group or subgroup identity formerly regarded as highly salient, such changes in identity may happen quickly. But, for the rest, the process of sifting and sorting takes time. Wholly new ethnic groups do not come into being overnight. There can be no 'big bang' theory of ethnogenesis.[55]

Saying such, he suggests:

> The processes of boundary changes are important to proper understanding of ethnic conflict and the prospects for accommodation. Group boundaries are made of neither stone nor putty…. what is necessary therefore is a sense of the mutability of group boundaries and yet their dependence on antecedent affinities that are not easily manipulated. To over emphasize the one is to mistake the basis of conflict, to over emphasize the other is to miss opportunities for policy innovation. [56]

This is a blending of the different theories, but more on the side of primordialism, since for him ethnic affiliations are extended interactions based on kinship ties albeit without the necessary blood consanguinity of the members. In this view, ethnicity is just another form of kinship relations where the reach of blood ties is no more commensurate with the changed and wider field of interactions ethnicity takes over. In short, ethnicity will still have to depend on the emotional solidarity that blood relationships entail using a kinship idiom.[57] This understanding of ethnic groups is similar to the one taken by Max Weber in which he says ethnic groups rest on the subjective belief among their members in common dissent even though there is no necessary blood relationship. Weber says dissimilarities in habits of life that arise between social groups, cloth styles, eating habit etc., can be turned into differences of custom and shared value and

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[54] Eller and Coughlan, *Supra note 49,* p.191
[55] Horowitz, *Supra note 5,* p. 70
[56] *Ibid.,* p. 66
[57] *Ibid.,* p. 78

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induce a sense of affinity and disaffinity between groups leading to comparisons of group worth and sense of honor and dignity. As such, Weber says ethnic identity is different from kinship in "precisely by being a presumed identity, not a group with a concrete social action like the later…it does not constitute a group but facilitates the formation of any kind particularly in the political sphere".[58]

But in addition to this blending of theories as such, Horowitz's main assertion lies in his description of the differing types of ethnic conflict and, add insight to the one aspect which has been a point of argument in the theories sketched above, which is the emotional aspect of ethnic conflicts.

Horowitz classifies between types of ethnic conflict in accordance with the social composition of the ethnic groups in conflict. The utility of this classification is that it differentiates between ethnic conflicts with regard to the nature of these conflicts and the goals perused by the groups in conflict. These two ideal types are ranked and unranked ethnic group systems. The basic difference is the coincidence or non-coincidence of social class with ethnic identities, where class distinctions coincide ethnic origins one can speak of ranked ethnic groups and where the groups are cross-class it is unranked ethnic group system.[59] The situation where ethnic conflicts overwhelm economic interests and in some cases conflicts are pursued even when they can be against the economic interest of the participants is the conflict that occurs within the unranked ethnic group systems. On the other hand, ethnic conflicts that occur among ranked ethnic group systems they take the form of social revolutions.[60]

This distinction serves to capture the psychological dimension of ethnic conflicts by differentiating the type of relationship between the groups, the causes of conflict and the purpose

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[58] Max Weber, in *Supra note 41,* pp. 55-56
[59] Horowitz, *Supra note 5*, P. 22
[60] *Ibid.*, p. 30

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that goes with these conflicts. This relationship between the ethnic groups in ranked systems is characterized as one in which "the domination lends itself to the establishment of upper and lower ranks, clientage relations and an ideology of inferiority".[61] Inequality is ingrained in the relationships between ethnic groups in ranked systems in a way that the political, economic and social status of the one as opposed to the others is inherently acknowledged. But in unranked ethnic systems this relationship is one where there lacks "a sufficient authority to establish a high level of reciprocity premised on inequality".[62]

Because of such difference, the cause and direction of the conflicts that arise between ethnic groups among these two systems is also different. While in ranked ethnic systems conflicts take the form social revolutions expressed in terms of ideological division of class, in unranked systems the conflict is explicitly one of ethnicity with the unique character these conflicts take by overwhelming interest considerations that involve the participants with emotion.[63] In this way Horowitz claims that in conflicts that arise in unranked ethnic group systems, power is not sought as a means to other economic goods and resources but in and of itself as an end. Power as a tool of "confirming status and averting threat usually entails an effort to dominate the environment, to suppress differences, as well as to prevent domination and suppression by others".[64]

This type of ethnic conflict between unranked ethnic groups is the basis of the hypothesis made by this thesis that 'ruling ethnic minorities that dominate the majorities seek power to protect their privileged statuses. In the following chapters, it will be shown how the specific ruling ethnic minorities in the case studies had a privileged status in their relationship with the majority ethnic group that led them to counter majority domination by controlling power. It will also be

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[61] *Ibid*., p. 29
[62] *Ibid*., p. 28
[63] Saul Newman, *Supra note 36*, p. 465
[64] Horowitz, *Supra note 5*, p. 187

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shown even if there existed a relationship of subordination of the minority ethnic group how this ranked ethnic relationship passed to unranked ethnic group system through colonialism that altered the dominant-subordinate relationship as Horowitz argues has happened in some cases.[65] Thus point will be made that the changed circumstances where the majority exercised power in a centralized bureaucratic state that increasingly controls the whole fabric of society putting the relationship of coexistence that is typical of unranked ethnic groups in threat, leads the minority ethnic group to react with a sense of dominating the state and retaining its rule for fear of the exclusive power democracy endows the majority in such divided societies.

Chapter 2: Tigray, Coexistence and Autonomy in Multi-Ethnic Ethiopia

This and the next chapter will be devoted to three main aspects of the Ethiopian ethnic minority rule following the hypothesis set out in the beginning. In line with the theoretical approaches that have been discussed in the first chapter and particularly the one this thesis has adopted, the psychological approach propounded by Donald L.Horowitz, this chapter will discuss the history of ethnic conflict in Ethiopia.

Thus, the first part covered by this chapter will highlight the historical background of ethnic relations in Ethiopia targeted at answering how the Tigray ethnic minority group represented by the ruling ethnic party, TPLF, has in the past coexisted within and among the multiethnic polity of Ethiopia in a relationship of autonomy and at times dominance. It will be shown that this relationship of coexistence in autonomy and dominance has bestowed the ethnic group under discussion a privileged status. Faced with domination by the majority Amhara ethnic group it has sought to defend this privileged status by mobilizing an ethno nationalist resistance. This part will be limited to the historical relationship between the dominant ethnic group of the Amhara

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[65] *Ibid.*, p. 34

the present regime has dispelled and replaced with its ethnic minority rule of the Tigray ethnic group.

The next chapter will then focus on the role played by the TPLF in leading, organizing and shaping the Tigray people's revolution by capitalizing upon the ethno national sentiment of the Tigray people. This will be followed by a discussion of the successful revolution led by the TPLF in toppling the socialist military regime of the Derg (1974-91) and move on to look at the creation of an ethnic minority rule. This discussion will focus upon how ethnic regionalism and political formation have been invigorated by the TPLF and how in such arena of ethnic politics, the TPLF by claiming to represent a minority ethnic group pursues its strategy of domination. The main goal of this discussion will be to answer if the TPLF that works within an umbrella coalition party of 'Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front', EPRDF, can be said to be exercising political power to the exclusion of the other ethnic parties within this coalition. By arguing that TPLF is the de facto ruling party of the regime and by showing that it does so by coopting and/or repressing the genuine and autonomous political participation of its affiliate ethnic parties, this section will argue for the existence of an ethnic minority rule.

2.1 Tigray, Ascendance and Decline

One of the basic features of Horowitz's unranked ethnic groups is the autonomous coexistence of ethnic groups under a single polity without a complete domination of one by the other. Understood in this way, unranked ethnic groups are the anti-thesis of M.G. Smith and J.S. Furnivall's pluralist theory that holds, plural societies are composed of multiple and culturally discrete groups that are integrated by the domination of one group as it happens in the case of colonialism.[66] Horowitz has argued that this is not always the case and Smith's theory that posits

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[66] Andreas Wimmer, *Supra note 16*, p. 49

the inevitable domination of one cultural group in a plural society treating unranked systems of ethnic coexistence "as a null category and apparently a logical impossibility"[67] to be untenable.

Ethiopia is one of the most ethnically diverse countries aptly described by a 20th century Italian historian Carlo Conti Rosini as the museum of people.[68] But building up to such a multiethnic society was accompanied by successive wars and invasion in a manner that makes Ethiopia a prime example of the dictum 'war makes the state'. The Persian prophet Mani (216 - 276) has been quoted as writing "there are four kingdoms on earth: the first is the kingdom of Babylon and Persia; the second is the kingdom of Rome; the third is the kingdom of Axumites; the fourth is the kingdom of the Chinese"[69]. This Axumite kingdom was found in the present region of Tigray from which its civilization flourished through its trade that extended up to Persia, India, Greece and Rome, and its territories extended as far as Arabia. Among other things that bestows it to be called a cradle of civilization is also its use of script called Ge'ez and a number system known as 'Kutr' and its own calendar that are still in use at present.[70]

But the much contested history of Ethiopia begins with the southward expansion of the kingdom from its center in the province of Tigray or Axum in a process that continued until the final borders that gave Ethiopia its present shape were included into its territories by Menelik II in the twentieth century. This gradual expansion to the South has not only seen the passing of political power to the hands of the Amhara, but also it brought within Ethiopia a multiple of tribes and ethnic groups which according to John Markakis sowed the seeds of future conflict.[71] The Axum dynasty, which civilization was anchored in Orthodox Christianity adopted by King Ezana in 340

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[67] Horowitz, *Supra note 5*, p. 137
[68] Donald N. Levine, GREATER ETHIOPIA: THE EVOLUTION OF MULTIETHNIC SOCIETY, The University of Chicago Press, 1974, p. 20
[69] Persian prophet Mani (216-276) quoted by the historian Kobishchanov (1979: 59) as cited in Aregawi Berhe, A POLITICAL HISTORY OF THE TIGRAY PEOPLE'S LIBERATION FRONT (1975-1991): REVOLT, IDEOLOGY AND MOBILIZATION IN ETHIOPIA, 2008, p. 51
[70] Aregawi Berhe, A POLITICAL HISTORY OF THE TIGRAY PEOPLE'S LIBERATION FRONT FRONT (1975-1991): REVOLT IDEOLOGY AND MOBILIZATION IN ETHIPIA, 2008, p. 51
[71] Sarah Vaughan, *Supra note 24,* p. 110

AD, and its region of influence circumscribed in the highlands of present day Ethiopia, of what is known Abissinia, came to an end in the 10th century.

The spread of Islam in the region in the 7th century and the destruction of the port of Adulis in the eighth century by closing Axum's northern Red Sea door to the world brought about the initial process in the shift of political gravity towards the South. Nothing but the emergence in the political scene of a pagan Agaw Queen by the name Yodit in the 10th century has proven the demise of Axum, a history that will continue to recur in the ensuing protracted struggles of the Tigrayans as a sentimental glorification of their place in Ethiopia's history.[72] The non Semetic Zagwe dynasty of the Agaw ended around 1270 by the joint collaboration of the Amhara and Tigray.[73] John Young a historian of the TPLF summarizes this truncated history by saying "historically as part of the Abissinian core Tigrayans have held a privileged position in society. However, from the tenth century state power generally shifted Southward from Tigray, briefly to the Agaw, and then to the Amhara lands, culminating in Shoa in the late nineteenth century".[74]

In such a manner power rested in the hands of successive kings of Amhara rulers who affirmed their power in a Solomonic myth and thereby also castigating the last dynasty of Zagwe as usurpers of their rightful claim to the throne. The *Kibre Negest*, a fourteenth century Ethiopic script that ascribes the origin of Menelik I to the union of king Solomon of Israel and queen Sheba of Ethiopia sanctified, and legitimized the Amhara rulers. But, says Donald Levine, "even though the principal beneficiaries of this covenant were the kings of Amhara, the fact remains that those who drafted its terms were Tigreans" and their contest for the throne considered as

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[72] Aragawi Berehe, *The Origins of the Tigray People's Liberation Front, African Affairs,* 103/413, 569-92, 2004, p. 576
[73] Solomon Gashaw in Supra note 20, p. 141
[74] John Young, PEASANT REVOLUTION IN ETHIOPIA: THE TIGRAY PEOPLE'S LIBERATION FRONT (1975-1991), Addis Ababa University: Cambridge University Press, 1997, p. 38

legitimate.[75]   This Solomonic narrative of hereditary ruler-ship that has equally followed the transplantation of center of power from the Axum in Tigray to the Amhara dominated south and its kings, has in the words of John Young "also marked the beginning of competition for dominance between Amhara and Tigrean elites"[76].

This competition for dominance especially reached its apex during what is historically termed as the "Era of Princes" where the power of the Shoa Amhara kings was greatly diminished. This was, among other reasons, due to the invasion in 1527 by Ahmed the Gragn who lead a Moslem army from the south east with the help of coreligionists in Arabia and Turkey. This invasion saw the weakening of the medieval Shoan rule and the shift of political center to Gondar in the North. Though Ahmed was eventually defeated with the assistance of the Portuguese, it left a legacy of provincialism and a fierce competition between war lords or princes.

During this era where every feudal lord claimed the throne of kingship to himself, the Tigre were the major players in this saga. In 1789, Tigrayan prince Ras Michael Sehul overthrown the Gondar based king and replaced him with his own puppet king and this was to last until the final days of this era by the total centralization of power in 1855 by King Tewodros II and the early beginnings of modern empire building. But if anything this treacherous era where the ordinary people of Ethiopia suffered the brunt of endless feud and war has left behind, it has markedly shown the resolve by the Tigrayans not to loose their influence in the country's politics. It has also left "Tigray to become virtually independent, its rulers wielding power comparable to that exercised by emperors of former times".[77]

Kassa Hailu, an Amhara 'bandit' of humble origin defeated all the contending feudal lords in the north ending the era of princes and renamed himself Emperor Tewodros II in 1855. He is known

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[75] Donald Levine, *Supra note 68*, p. 108
[76] Young, *Supra note 74*, p. 42
[77] *Ibid.*, p. 43

for being the harbinger of modernity in his attempt to unite the country into one central rule, bureaucratizing state administration, forming a salaried army, and reducing the power of the church. But his self-inflicted death in 1868 brought about the ascendance to power of Kahsai Mircha from Tigray who ruled until 1889 in the name of Emperor Yohannes IV. Yohannes continued the centralizing of state power began by Tewodros and his approach to such was more diplomatic than the sheer use of power which was Tewodros's insignia as well as nemesis. Yohannes forged an alliance or a pact of sorts with his Shoan contender Menelik, by Yohannes' recognition of Menelik as king of Shoa while Yohannes retains the title of king of kings. But the exercise of power though in the hands of a Tigrayan, and the rivalry of the two sorted out amicably, the competition and mistrust between the rulers of the Amahara and Tigray has not diminished.[78]

2.2 Modernization and State Dominance in Multiethnic Ethiopia

The death of Emperor Yohannes IV in 1889 and his ally and war general Ras Alula's inability to protect the Tigrayan hegemony from the Shoan dominance and finally his willingness to cooperate with the Shoan Emperor Menelik II strengthened the latter's power. [79] Menelik is a king that reigned over the creation of modern Ethiopia with its vast territory and a multitude of ethnic groups. His vigorous expansion that he pursued even before his being proclaimed as King of Ethiopia after the death of Yohannes IV, who died fighting with the Mahadists in Sudan, has completely changed the social composition of the Ethiopian polity. From its Orthodox Christian core in the Abyssinian core of Tigre-Amhara base in the northern highlands now its territories extended to include "a dozen Semetic languages, twenty two Cushitic, eighteen Omotic and

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[78] *Ibid*., p 44
[79] Vaughan, *Supra note 24*, p. 108

eighteen Nilo Sharan" and a religion of four categories "animism/paganism, Judaism, Islam and Christianity".[80]

This expansion by Menelik has set the stone for a mosaic multiethnic Ethiopia but also became a point of contention and battle ground in an ideological split within the future elites that embarked on a revolutionary struggle both against the state and between themselves. The contention is over the question whether Menelik's expansion was one of the reclaiming of lost territories of Ethiopia as Menelik himself once proclaimed to his European contenders, or if it is the colonization of alien and autonomous people.[81] Against the view that holds Ethiopia's expansion to having taken place in the same way and parallel with Europe's expansion in Africa that coincided with it, Donald Levine has argued that Ethiopia existed as a single cultural society even before the conquest by Menelik II. Whether colonialism or not, the inequality and exploitation by the ruling class of the Shoan Amharas that subordinated the conquered people by subjugating them both culturally and economically was opposed by the intelligentsia of the 1960's in terms of self -determination.

The domination of the Shoa Amhara over the newly annexed lands in the south brought about a political dynamics under which ethnic divisions between dominant and subordinate corresponded with class divisions, entailing future conflictual dynamics in the state.[82] These annexed territories rich in resources became a site of economic exploitation and cultural domination.

> Between 1868 and 1876, Menelik succeeded in conquering Wollo, then he turned his attention south and west, by 1882 having conquered Somali and Oromo territories to the south and east. By the end of 1887, Menelik had added Gurage, Arusi and Harar to his possession. These latter conquests enabled him to control the most significant south-easterly trade route and gave him outlets to the sea which were independent of Yohannes's sphere

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[80] *Ibid.*, p. 105
[81] John Markakis, ETHIOPIA, ANATOMY OF A TRADITIONAL POLITY, ADDIS ABABA: Oxford University Press, 1974, p. 23 cited in Vaughan, *Supra note 24*, p. 115
[82] Vaughan, *Supra note 24,* p. 106

of influence. With this route under his influence, he was able to exploit the vast wealth of gold, ivory and coffee obtained in his southern and western holdings…. By 1890 and 1906, he added the Ogaden, Bale, Sidamo, Wollamo, Kaffa and Illubabor to his holdings, thus stretching the state of Ethiopia to its present configuration, Except for Eritrea.[83]

Besides contributing to the military strength of Menelik, the annexed territories' lands were distributed to Menelik's generals. These predatory tendencies were widely practiced where the ruling class and soldiers coming from the north and mostly from the Shoa Amhara created lord-tenant relationship and also extracted labor. This was accompanied by 'Amharization' of the diverse ethnic and religious groups under subordination where by their elites who wanted to join the ranks of the new rulers were required to assimilate and adopt the cultural set up of their rulers. "These included fluency in the Amharic language, adherence to Orthodox Christianity and adoption of a set of norms of Abyssinian codes and styles".[84]

Such a dominant subordinate relationship characterizes the ranked systems that Horowitz finds to "lend itself to the establishment of upper and lower ranks , clientage relations and an ideology of inferiority for the subordinated groups", which he says is the product of conquest and capture.[85] Things were different in Tigre in this time of Menelik and well into their first revolution in 1943. While Shoa Amhara rule extended to all corners, Tigray remained autonomous where their own hereditary rulers still governed their people. For want of total subjugation, the emperors depended on buying alliance with these traditional hereditary rulers mostly through dynastic marriages. As John Young says, "Shoan emperors reduced Tigray to a semi-autonomous buffer region, but they were never ever able to fully control it or deprive its leading families of their centuries old supremacy".[86] Even though as John Markakis says the fanatical provincialism of Tigrayan peasants allowed the provincial nobility to successfully defend their autonomy, it has

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[83] Edmond J.Keller, Ethiopia: *Revolution, Class, and the National Question,* African Affairs, Vol. 80, No. 321, 519-549, 1981, p. 527
[84] Vaughan, *Supra note 24,* p. 113
[85] Horowitz, *Supra note 5,* p. 29
[86] Young, *Supra note 74*, p. 47

only left them coveting the prosperity that was being enjoyed by the Shoa. This advantage enjoyed by the Shoa, for most Tigrayans was at the expense of their legitimate place as the source of ruling class in Ethiopia.[87]

Unscathed in terms of its cultural and administrative independence, Tigray moved forward towards the more modern times of Hailesellasie's regime in 1930, but socio economically impoverished and the resentment of its people for the Amhara rule growing. The contrast between Tigray and the other annexed regions vis-à-vis the Amhara dominance is well caught by the historian from Israel, Haggai Erlich who wrote;

> During modern times, Socio political changes were mush slower in Tigre than other regions in Ethiopia. Shoa underwent a centralization of power under Menelik… Ethiopia's southern regions had been annexed to the empire …, inevitable repercussions for their political, social and cultural institutions. Tigre in contrast, was barely affected.[88]

But such dominance and shift of power to the south and in the hands of the Amhara has not completely altered their relationship into one of subordination and dominance. But rather, as implied by the unranked systems of Horowitz, turned into a relationship of coexistence until the final days of attempt by king Haileselasie (1930-74) to quell the autonomy of self-rule by the Tigray people that sparked the first popular revolution in the region. The discussion so far shows that the interethnic relationship between the Amhara and those in the conquered territories on the one hand and Tigray on the other is manifestly one of ranked and unranked system consecutively. This is so, when one considers that the elites in the new regions could only enjoy the status of leading their communities if they were able to mask themselves in the cultural manner of their rulers or become Amharized to be accepted as administrators[89] while this was not so for the Tigre. And according to Horowitz, elite role is another way by which one can

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[87] *Ibid.*, p. 46

[88] Vaughan, *Supra note 24*, p. 158

[89] Lovise Aalen, *Ethnic Federalism in a Dominant Party State: The Ethiopian Experience 1991-2000*, Chr. Michelsen Institute Development Studies and Human Rights, 2002, p. 3

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differentiate between the two systems besides the main criteria of the coincidence of class and ethnic dominance which is found in ranked systems. He explains this by saying;

> Despite the blurring, nearly all ethnic relationships can be identified as ranked or unranked. A key question is whether each has a full complement of statuses or, to put the point differently, whether each of the group in contact possesses a legitimately recognized elite. If so the system is unranked[90]

2.3 The onset of Revolution in Tigray

This 'unranked' coexistence between the Amhara ruling class and the Tigre continues as opposed to the 'ranked' relationship of the ruling class and the people in other parts of Ethiopia. This constellation of opposed relationships according to the explanation given in the theoretical chapter will also result in differing cause and direction of ethnic conflict that is waged by the different ethnic groups against the state towards the end of the twentieth century, mainly propounded by the student movement of the 1960s. To remind ourselves once again, the ethnic conflict that takes place between ethnic groups in the unranked systems is the one that captures the real type of ethnic conflict, as Horowitz would say, engulfs its participants with emotion and its psychological element highly pronounced than the conflict between ranked systems which takes the form of social revolution of class exploitation. While the conflict among the ranked ethnic groups is pursued for the purpose of breaking the ties of economic exploitation, ethnic conflict in the unranked systems is directed at the averting of the threat of dominance and exercising power. As Horowitz says "the contest for worth and place is the common denominator of conflict among unranked groups".[91]

Two things stand out as factors of continual relevance in arousing Tigrayan perennial disaffection of the central state controlled by the Shoa Amhara. The first is the continuing

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[90] Horowitz, *Supra note 5*, p. 25
[91] *Ibid.*, p. 186

impoverishment of the Tigray population. And the second is Menelik's abandoning of the northern Tigryan territories in the hands of the Italians during the battle of Adwa. This battle was caused by a disagreement between the Italians and Menelik over the terms of a treaty they signed in 1889 called the treaty of Wuchale. The Italians not respecting the terms of this treaty and inserting in the Italian version that Ethiopia's foreign relation should pass through Italia, were encroaching deep into the hinterlands of the country. Menelik waged a war against the colonialists and in almost a year the battle was over and the Italians defeated. But Menelik did not pursue his victory to the ends of the Ethiopian territory in the Tigrean highlands leaving part of this area to the Italians suzerainty which later became the colony of Eritrea.[92]

Different justifications are put forward by scholars and historians for this failure of Menelik to capitalize on his victory against Italians and reunite the 'Tigrigna' speaking people of the Abissynian core. Some say Menelik was afraid of rebellion in the south and loosing his resourceful territories if he extends his war to the north with the Italian where Italy has a strong hold already established decades ago. The second reason simply says Menelik had a dim hope of success since the war taking place after a long journey from the south and a severe drought that has hit hard the region has already weakened him. But for others, this decision by Menelik was a deliberate action to marginalize his long time contenders and destine them to the control of a colonialist. It is a decision as some would say that "has long been a thorn in the side of Tigrayan nationalists, the seminal instance of Shoan perfidy, which only served to entrench the resentment that had already grown up"[93].

The Tigray people more than and above the loss of their historical privilege as the historical source of power, were now facing poverty as opposed to the growing prosperity of the Shoans which is located in a geographically suitable area for agriculture and also being sole beneficiaries

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[92] Keller, *Supra note 83*, p. 528
[93] Vaughan, *Supra note 24*, p. 108

of the extraction from the southward expansion. Tigray has always been a place of major battles that devastated the region and weakened the peasants of the region who had to feed the soldiers and suffer all the repercussions of war because of its location as an outlet to Ethiopia's northern gateway. According to Haggai Erlich, about twenty major battles were fought on Tigrayan in the time between the battle of Adwa (1896) and the Italian invasion of 1935.[94] And to make it worse Tigray was also hit by a recurring famine and a severe rinderpest epidemic hit between 1888 and 1882 that devastated the region, and this perhaps is said to be the reason for Menelik to curb his victory at Adwa and give up part of the Tigray highlands, what is now Eritrea. But whichever justification holds true for Menelik's withdrawal of his troops, for the Tigray people the famine and impoverishment of the region is taken to be caused by the advent of Shoa Amhara state.[95]

The recurrent famines starting from the time of Yohannes IV and up until the final days of the coming to power of the TPLF which according to John Young, hit by more than seventeen famines that devastated Tigra,y added to their loss of power and influence have all combined in the rising of the Tigre against the central state.[96] The subsequent regime of Hailesellassie, beginning in 1930, did nothing to redress the economic calamity befalling the Tigrayan people let alone quench their perennial feeling of marginalization from power. Years later in 1943, the Tigrayan peasants, waged a rebellion against Hailesellassie's regime referred to as Woyane rebellion which according to its leader Blata Haile Maraim Reda, began "not only out of desperation but also "to liberate Tigray from Amhara hegemony if the central government failed to respond to the call of the rebels and reform itself".[97]

 Among other factors that served to precipitate the Woyane revolution was the insistence by Hailesselassie of a stronger centralization of power divesting the Tigrayan nobility the relative

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[94] Young, *Supra note 74*, p. 46
[95] Vaughan, *Supra note 24*, Interviews with Tigrayan farmers, p. 108
[96] Young, *Supra note 74*, p. 49
[97] Aragawi, *Supra note 70*, p. 54

independence they have so far retained in running their own affairs. Centralization was pursued by Haileselassie by reducing the power of local nobilities not just in Tigray but also in other parts as part of his bureaucratization project. This included the creation of quasi representative institutions like chamber of deputies and senate, where nobilities are nominated by the king and were kept under the watchful eyes of the king in the capital city. Though the king was still forced to select these representatives from the aristocratic family, he was able to curtail their freedom and power they exercised ruling over their particular provinces.[98] But as John Young says, though these administrative reforms have in large manner changed the relationship between the center and the periphery and strengthened the power of the king, nothing fundamentally changed the Shoan character of the regime.[99]

Especially different was the trend of centralization pursued by Hailleselassie in Tigray. Since Tigray unlike other regions has until now kept the autonomy of its hereditary rulers, when Haileselassie took regional powers from the hereditary leaders and gave it to loyal administrators, many coming from Shoa, it has aroused the hostility of the local nobilities. But this measure by the king was not only opposed by the Tigrayan elite who led the rebellion but also the peasants who now were asked to pay tax in cash and not in kind, making their subsistence livelihood harsher. This has "raised the level of collective resentment, taking the form of ethno nationalist sentiment against the Shoan ruling class".[100]

The goals of the Woyane rebellion can generally be said the preservation of autonomy from the exploitation by the state for which Tigray having experienced repeated famines and the devastation of numerous wars was unbearable. This being the case, the historian of the Woyane rebellion Gebru Tareke says, partnership in the rebellion was based on different motives where

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[98] Keller, *Supra note 83,* p. 535
[99] Young, *Supra note 74,* p. 27
[100] Aragawi, *Supra note 70*, p. 53

for the nobles it was for their fair share of power while for the peasants it was the amelioration of their hardships. But this rebellion was immediately quashed by the joint force of the British areal bombardment and the state's well equipped military.[101] Nevertheless, its legacy was immense, as Gebru Tareke writing while the TPLF was still engaged in armed struggle and before its takeover of the state in 1991 mentions, though the Woyane rebellion was a defeat it remains to evoke memories of heroic resistance in the historic conflict between the Amhara dominated nation and Tigray.[102]

This is something the TPLF avowedly claims is its precursor and its leaders propound as setting an ethno nationalist precedent for their struggle. As it did, TPLF at its first congress in 1979, changed its initial name '*tegadelo harnet hzbi Tigrai*' (Tigrai People's Liberation Struggle) to '*hezbawi woyane harnet Tigray*' (Popular Revolution/Rebellion for the Liberation of Tigray).[103] But one thing to be gathered from the rise and fall of the Woyane rebellion is that the Tigrayan people have as has been shown throughout the discussion, maintained a relative form of autonomy amid the Amhara dominated state and they have continuously fought against any interference. But their final failure to keep such autonomy and the accompanying centralization that was being intensified by the regime of Haileselassie throughout Ethiopia has fated them equally open to the discrimination that other ethnic groups were facing at the time and after the fall of this regime.

 Regional autonomy of Tigray that it has kept for so long has now been undermined, with it also its relationship of coexistence rather than subordination which was a hallmark of Amahar's dominance in the south. And as described in the theoretical chapter, coexistence is a main indicator for unranked ethnic systems whose relationship between ethnic groups is built upon

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[101]Gebru Tareke, *Preliminary History of Resistance in Tigrai*, Africa: Rivista trimestrale di studi e documentazione dell'Istituto italiano per l'Africae l'Oriente, Anno 39, No. 2, 201-226, 1984, p. 207
[102] *Ibid.*, p. 208
[103] Vaughan, *Supra note24,* p. 159

autonomy as opposed to subordination. This relationship was suppressed with the Woyane rebellion when in its aftermath Haileselassie took harsh retaliatory measures with the holding Halemariam Reda in solitary confinement, renouncing the regional leaders and divesting Tigray of its internal autonomy it enjoyed for centuries.[104]

As the hypothesis posed by this thesis argues what leads to the ascendance to power of an ethnic minority is when such a minority having had a privileged status as one finds in unranked ethnic systems, and facing persecution by a majority it retaliates by trying to avert this threat through assuming power. The following chapter will follow this discussion and explain how the present regime mobilized the support of the masses of the Tigray people by capitalizing upon the past history of the Tigray people and their discrimination and waged an ethno-nationalist struggle. Finally it will also be shown that the present regime of the TPLF which has controlled state power on the grounds of an ethno national conflict is maintaining a minority ethnic rule.

Chapter 3: Ethnic Resistance and Minority Rule

3.1 TPLF from Revolution to State Control

John Young whose study of the revolution led by TPLF is the most extensive to date starts his book 'Peasant Revolution in Ethiopia' by underlying the revolt potential of the peasants in Tigray and the significance of the role of the petite bourgeoisie in mobilizing such revolution. Young especially draws attention to the peasant revolution theories of the 1970's developed in the wake of the Vietnam war that point to the importance of structural factors in explaining peasant revolution. These theories have been valuable in bringing the role of peasants in revolutions to the fore in contrast to the behavioralist and Marxist theories that ignore this role.

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[104] Gebru, *Supra note 101*, p. 208

But, Young argues, though on the right track, these structural theories do not sufficiently explain the peasant revolution led by the TPLF. This he says is because "peasant revolt theorists contend that peasants revolt to maintain old ways when traditional institutions and relationships are upended or made ineffective by agricultural commercialization"[105]. Structural theories hold that revolutionary potential lies in the middle or peripheral peasantry that have a relative freedom from the constraints of the land lord or market or state that want to protect their traditional way of life in the face of commercialization or proletarianisation. Similarly, others within the same structural approach hold that the impact of imperialism by bringing tension within peasants due to demands for more rent by the landowners or more taxes by the state promote resistance. Young argues these are not applicable for the revolution in Tigray. This is because at the time of the revolution in Tigray neither agricultural commercialism nor imperialism have figured in the region.[106]

According to Young, the revolution in Tigray was not due to the disruptive impact of structural changes of capitalism or commercialization that fostered class conflict between the peasants and state or the landlords, but because of the state's restriction of the people's involvement in commercial economy. [107]   In fact one of the first reforms by the TPLF in its first years of liberating the province was responding to the peasant opposition against the Military regime's policies of restriction on trade and market and the prohibition against hiring wage labor by allowing commercial economy.[108]   By emphasizing upon economy these theories miss the revolutionary potential of other non economic factors. One such factor is modernization through advancement in transportation and communication that will increase the cultural awareness of minorities and their relationship to others, particularly the dominant ethnic group in the state.

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[105] Young, *Supra note 24,* p. 21
[106] *Ibid*., 23
[107] *Ibid*., 23
[108] *Ibid*., 23

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This process is something that was well underway in Tigray after the advent of Haileselassie's centralization policy and as discussed in the sections above has triggered the first Woyane rebellion in Tigray.[109] John Young thus concludes his evaluation of peasant revolt theories in respect of the revolution led by the TPLF by saying:

> Exponents of peasant revolt thesis hold that peasants rebel when major changes in the economy undermine their way of life; they thus recognize peasants to be economic beings, but not political beings capable of giving nationalist[110] interpretations to changes in their economy and way of life. However, prior to the modern era both the nobility and peasants of Tigray regularly voiced national grievances.[111]

Rather, Young points to the significance of the leadership role that the petite bourgeoisie which was more in contact with Amhara dominated state apparatus has played in mobilizing the Tigray peasantry. This petite bourgeoisie constituted the participants of the student movement in the 1960s that later formed the TPLF. But more important to the theoretical approach this thesis has been discussing, that ethnic conflict is pronounced within unranked systems, John Young concludes his evaluation of the peasant revolution thesis by saying; "[Amhara dominance]…may not have given form to a nationalist movement, were it not that Tigrayans had a deep pride in their heritage and had long been ruled by people from their own community"[112]. Even though other people in the South were also victims to more severe economic exploitation and under the military regime of the Derg were no less exposed to its atrocities, but still that sustained revolution to these regimes came from Tigray proves the higher explanatory power of the psychological dynamics in ethnic conflicts.

The Haileselassie regime that lasted from 1930 to 1974 was ousted by what some refer to as a creeping revolution. It was a coup by 120 low ranking military officers called the *Derg* (in

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[109] *Ibid.*, p. 30
[110] This use of the term nationalist does not apply to the Tigray peasant revolt which as Young says in this same paragraph Tigray peasant revolution is ethno nationalist than nationalist since "Tigrayan rebellion was for ethnic autonomy within a single Ethiopian state", Ibid., p. 29
[111] *Ibid.*, p. 30
[112] *Ibid.*, p. 31

Amharic meaning committee) which is shorthand name for 'The provisional Military Adminstrative Committee (PMAC). The Derg ousted Haileselassie against a backdrop of a popular movement steered by the student movements of the 1960's that has already weakened the king's regime. Though it adopted the radical Marxist ideology that was espoused by the student movement, *Derg* was not willing to give up power to a civilian government nor share power with the different political parties that were contending for power at the time. Rather the harsh measures the *Derg* took against these political parties, as the Historian Teshale Tibebu in describing the horrendous atrocities of the time says, "drove the country into a bottomless drudgery".[113] This reign of terror as the *Derg* called it 'red terror' which targeted opposing political forces especially the EPRP (Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party) drove these opposing forces to go underground or start guerilla warfare. One such organization which has its roots in the student movement and took its resistance into armed struggle is the TPLF which finally toppled the *Derg* by 1991 and rules the country since then. The following paragraphs will discuss the roots of TPLF as a Tigrayan ethno nationalist movement and its sole exercise of power in the EPRDF led government in Ethiopia at the expense of other ethnically constituted parties in this coalition party.

The TPLF owes its foundation as any of the organized political movements in Ethiopia to the radical Marxist oriented student movement. This student movement against the age old regime of the king was itself sparked by the aborted coup by two brothers, General Mengistu Neway and American educated Germame Neway who were part of the aristocracy, in alliance with the intelligentsia. It was five years after this coup that the first student demonstration against the king took place in February 25, 1965 under the slogan "land to the tiller'. The student movement was shaped by espousing different and at times opposition perspectives of Marxixt Lenninist ideals of

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[113] Teshale Tibebu, *Modernity, Eurocentrism and Radical Politics in Ethiopia (1961-1991),* African Identities, Vol. 6, No. 4, 345-371, 2008, p. 356

national self-determination. These perspectives took on what came to be known as the 'national question' which set the fierce debate and ideological split within the student movement. The debate was stirred by a publication in a 1969 journal by the University Students Union of Addis Ababa, a piece written by an Amhara student Walelign Mekonen. Walelign's piece describes the suppression of non Amhara nationalities by the Amhara ruling class and calls for the equal participation of others as well as opportunity to preserve their culture.

Two perspectives have been developed out of this debate in the 'national question'. The first says the fundamental question rests in class exploitation and by solving this, other questions of nationality or ethnicity will be resolved. Political parties formed along this line were the EPRP (Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party) and AESM (All Ethiopian Socialist Movement). On the other side, there were those who thought the fundamental question is one of nations and nationalities depicting Ethiopia as a prison house of nationalities. Those organizations formed in line with this latter view include, Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), Western Somali Liberation Front (WSLF). Of these three that pressed on the nations and nationalities question, OLF and WSLF claimed the national question is one of colonialism and its solution is the breakup of Ethiopia. On the other hand TPLF still on the nations and nationalities side of the question claimed that the issue is national in which solution is to be sought within Ethiopia.[114]

According to former TPLF chairman and founder Aregawi Berhe, TPLF evolved from an ethno nationalist association called Tigrayan National Organization (TNO). This association was formed as part of the student movement in September 14, 1974, by seven university students. This group by then came up with a general guideline that declared, to wage an armed struggle in the rural area of Tigray and progress towards the urban area, and TNO to be in charge of leading

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[114] *Ibid.*, 347

this until the beginning of an armed struggle. Aregawi says that by preferring to use "ethno nationalist mobilization as the most effective and shortest way to uproot the oppressive system", TPLF has also failed to comprehend the future repercussions politicizing ethnicity. [115] Thus, after leveling the ground work for an armed struggle by recruiting future soldiers and mobilizing the local population of Tigray, TPLF was formed by a small band of ethnic Tigres in Febbruary 1975 at a place called Dedebit and declared the beginning of an armed struggle.[116] Among the few people that the TNO sent for military training for Asmara,Eritrea, then controlled by the EPLF (Eritrean People's Liberation Front), and formed the first TPLF group in Dedebit, include Abbay Tsehay, Hailu Mengesha, Sahle Abraha (Seye) and Legesse (Meles) Zenawi (future prime minister of Ethiopia from 1995 until his death in 2012).[117]

3.2 TPLF: A Dominant Party of a Minority Ethnic Group

After a protracted struggle of sixteen years TPLF was able to oust the *Derg* military regime in 1991. Before assuming power in 1991 and forming the transitional government, the TPLF formed the coalition EPRDF in 1989 in what is taken to be by most observers as an instrument by the TPLF to give a semblance of legitimacy to its minority position as a Tigrayan movement.[118] This conclusion to see EPRDF as a facade behind which real power is exercised in the hands of the TPLF is supported both by the process of the creation of the EPRDF and the unbalanced power relationship between the coalition parties. All the political parties member to the coalition were formed under the tutelage of the TPLF and joined the coalition respectively as,

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[115] Aregawi, *Supra note 70*, p. 64
[116] *Ibid.*, 77
[117] *Ibid.*, 76
[118] Lovise Aalen, *Supra note 89*, p. 45; See also, Marina Ottaway, *Ethiopian Transition: Democratization or New Authoritarianism*, Northeast African Studies, Volume 2, Number 3, 67-87, 1995, p. 73; See also, Medhane Tadesse and John Young, *TPLF: Reform or Decline,* Review of African Political Economy, Vol. 30, No. 97, 389-403, 2003, p. 398; See also, International Crisis Group, Africa Report No 153, 2009; See also, Young, *Supra note 33*, p. 532

1. Ethiopian Peaople's Democratic Movement (EPDM) later renamed as Amhara National Democratic Movement (ANDM). This party was formed out of former EPRP members who defected to TPLF or were prisoners of war after EPRP was defeated by TPLF in an armed clash in 1979;

2. Second to join EPRDF is Oromo People's Democratic Organization (OPDO) in 1990, in the same way composed of Derg soldiers prisoners of war captured by the TPLF;

3. The last to join EPRDF in 1994 was Southern Ethiopian People's Democratic Front (SEPDF). This party represents multiple ethnic groups found in the south. The SEPDF itself a coalition of numerous small parties, was put together, recruited, trained and had its leaders chosen by TPLF.[119] The formation of this later organization was made in a literal interference "Personalized through one specific man, Bitew Belay… member of TPLF central committee, assisting the regional president and chief executive, Abate Kisho.[120]

It should also be pointed out that EPRDF has been working with two other parties the Oromo Liberation Front and another party in the South, Southern Ethiopian People's Democratic Coalition (SEPDC). The OLF established for a long time and with stronger roots in Oromia than any other organization at the time had a strategic cooperation agreement with TPLF before the latter tried to bring it under its wings and the cooperation ended in 1986. TPLF thus formed its satellite party of prisoners of war OPDO and OLF's more than twenty thousand soldiers were detained by TPLF after the disagreement escalated into armed conflict. The same thing happened with the SEPDC, which also was formed by the region's elites independently of TPLF. SEPDC was thrown out of government for participating in a joint statement that criticized TPLF as

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[119] Sarah Vaughan and Kjetil Tronvol, *The Culture of Power in Contemporary Ethiopian Political Life*, Sida Studies No 10, 2003, p. 116
[120] Lovise Aalen, *Supra note 89,* p. 91,

creating puppet ethnic parties and thus it was replaced by SEPDF formed under the direct

tutelage of TPLF from mostly the uneducated part of the population in the region.[121] The

coalition formed in this way, the ANDM relatively speaking being better organized than the

other coalition members at the time, OPDO and SEPDF are the weakest part of the ruling

EPRDF coalition and consequently dominated by TPLF.[122]

This structuring of political parties for every ethnic group was designed to give TPLF a secure

base of winning elections in all regions of Ethiopia in the name of these ethnic parties that

compete with opposition parties representing their assigned ethnically demarcated regions.

Through a constitution making process that was wholly controlled and dominated by the TPLF

and by excluding non-ethnic political organizations from the making of the transitional

charter[123], the former non ethnic administrative regions of Ethiopia were redrawn into ethnically

demarcated 'Kilils' or regions. Ethnic groups are defined by the constitution as:

> a group of people who have or share a large measure of a common culture
> or similar customs, mutual intelligibility of language, belief in a common
> or related identities, a common psychological make-up, and who inhabit
> an identifiable, predominantly contiguous territory.[124]

Assefa Mihretu studying the impact of ethnic federalism upon the future viability of the state

says, these gerrymandered Zones or 'kilils' were intentionally designed to give TPLF an upper

hand by competing through its affiliate ethnic parties that it presides over.

> … for the TPLF which represents a minority tribe in Ethiopia with only
> about 10 percent of the population and its geographical center hundreds of
> miles to the north of Addis Ababa, the primacy of ethnic division in its

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[121] *Ibid.*, 7-8
[122] *Ibid.*, 89
[123] International Crisis Group, Africa Report No 153, 2009, p. 4; See also, Aalen, *Supra note 89*, p. 41- 48; See also, SarahVaughan, *The Addis Ababa Transitional Conference of July 1991, its origins, history and significance'* Occasional Papers 51, University of Edinburgh: Center on African Studies.
[124] EFDRE Constitution Article 39, sub article 10

governing model appears to have been an ingenious divide and rule political strategy which enabled TPLF to legitimize its power. [125]

To achieve this end, that is assigning ethnic parties for every region that contest elections, which for the past four elections since 1992 EPRDF and its affiliate parties have not lost, TPLF has also created other ethnic parties in the peripheral regions that stand outside the umbrella coalition but de facto are allied to the EPRDF. These parties are supervised and controlled by party officials of EPRDF known as 'advisors' and apparently these advisors are in almost all cases TPLF cadres. This relationship where the TPLF cadres control the day to day activities of these nominally independent ethnic parties, where in turn these parties rely on TPLF for the maintenance of their positions upon TPLF, has created a dual government in these regions where "TPLF cadres constitute second administrative structure in the regions".[126] These so called satellite parties include, Afar National Democratic Front (ANDF), Somali People's Democratic Party (SPDP), Harari National League (HNL), Benishangul/Gumuz People's Democratic Unity Front (BPDUF), and Gambela People's Democratic Party (GPDP).

Even though some try to make analogy between this ethnic arrangement of parties in Ethiopia that run independently at the regional level but the central government is controlled by a national based party to the one in Canada, Lovise Aalen a close observer of Ethiopia's federal system says this is not the case. Although EPRDF members are "equal coalition partners on national Level, the TPLF is the senior it was the creator of other parties and is the strongest political organization".[127] To this Marina Ottaway adds, the division of the country into ethnic regions and the creation of parties in those terms is a design by the TPLF to dominate politically while it in fact constitutes a minority, hence she says;

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[125] Assefa, *Supra note 9*, p. 117
[126] Aalen, *Supra note 89,* p. 87
[127] *Ibid.*, p. 80

> This approach to govern a multi ethnic country appeared to imitate consciously the model devised by the Soviet Union in the past; the division of the country into ethnic republics and districts, enjoying a degree of administrative autonomy but firmly held together politically by the domination of the communist party.[128]

While agreeing with the World Bank report in 2001 that concluded the Ethiopian federal system to be one of deconcentration rather than devolution of power to regions, Paulos Chanie writes that the evaluation of the effectiveness of Ethiopia's fiscal devolution should be studied in light of center-region political power relationship of the political parties. As such he points out four ways of how the TPLF by dominating the political and economic system of the country has created a centralized regional fiscal dependence and a system of clientele parties;

1. since its formation EPRDF has been led by the TPLF leader, who was president during the transitional Period (1991 – 95), and has been prime minister since 1995, until his death in 2012,[129]

2. …TPLF veterans managed and administered the EPRDF office. Among the nine members who led the office, seven were from TPLF and two from ANDM. OPDO and SEDM were not involved in top leadership at all [this is despite the fact that OPDO constitutes the largest bloc in the parliament due to the size of the region it represents, Oromia, the largest ethnic group in Ethiopia],

3. Top political leaders of TPLF have a de facto mandate to select and appoint individuals for regional party leadership positions.

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[128] Marina Ottaway, *Ethiopian Transition: Democratization or New Authoritarianism*, Northeast African Studies, Volume 2, Number 3, 67-87, 1995, p. 73

[129] Whether the death of Prime Minster Meles Zenawi, Tigiyan by origin, will result in a shift of power is an open question. The current Prime Minster who stepped in the place of the deceased Prime Minister is from SEPDF and was deputy before assuming his current post. The transition was the result of the constitution than a political bargain with in the ruling party, EPRDF.

4. TPLF enjoys remarkably greater economic power than the other parties. The parapartals (ruling political party owned and managed businesses) are engaged in manufacturing and service giving industries. The TPLF is a dominant economic power, owning and managing parapartals in agriculture trade, cement production, textiles, transport, banking … [130]

The major 'parapartal' is Endowment Fund for Rehabilitation of Tigray (EFFORT), whose executive leadership and board of directors are composed of TPLF central committee members. EFFORT, a huge player in Ethiopia's economy with an oligopolistic control of crucial sectors mentioned above has been privileged with monopolist trade practices by the ruling party.[131] This form of lopsided favor towards the development of their constituent ethnic group by handing such an oligopolistic control of the county's economy arises from TPLF's members who consider themselves as first and foremost the representatives of the will of the Tigrayan people and they control the country to this end.[132]

Besides the above practices by TPLF where it creates, nurtures and controls political parties under its wings, its principle of democratic centralization makes it the sole decision maker in the country's national affairs. TPLF's ill-defined ideology of revolutionary democracy that is in many respects opposed to liberal democracy, champions democratic centralism as its principle of decision making, as its 2010 party statute declares;

> All organizations that come under EPRDF umbrella are those which are led by democratic principles and those which respect democratic centralism.[133]

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[130] Paulos Chanie, *Clientelism and Ethiopia's post- 1991 decentralization*, The journal of Modern African Studies, Vol. 45, No. 3, 355-384, 2007 p. 363
[131] Vaughan and Tronvol*, Supra note 119*, p. 78
[132] International Crisis Group, *Supra note 123*, p. 6
[133] EPRDF statute 5-8., Cited in Jean Nicholas Bach, *Abyotawi Democracy: neither revolutionary nor democratic, a critical review of EPRDF's conception of revolutionary democracy in post 1991 Ethiopia*, Journal of East African Studies, Vol. 5, No. 4, 641-663, 2011, p. 647; See also, Aalen, *Supra note 89*, p. 84

Democratic centralism as such by promoting upward accountability has served the TPLF's inner circle of people constituting the politbureau or central committee to take all decisions in their hands, which according to Merera Gudina, "[has] been fashioned to serve the hegemonic interests of the Tigrayan elite".[134] Related with the structure of democratic centralism which is typical of TPLF which follows Marxism Leninism as its internal guiding ideology, is the concept of *'gemgema'* or criticism. *'Gemgema'* is a widely as well as strictly practiced method where by members of all party's under EPRDF are evaluated for misconduct. Even though the satellite parties of the peripheral regions are supposed to be independent, since they are formally not part of EPRDF, their members also go through *gimgema* and are held accountable to the TPLF controlled EPRDF cadres. As Jean Nicholas says "it is a practice inherited from the TPLF internal organization during the struggle [and] is now at the center of the administrative system in which the ruling party finds a powerful way of controlling the affiliated parties"[135].

On top of these and other control mechanisms utilized by TPLF to exert its hegemony, its Tigrayan leaders have also been in charge of the top positions of the executive. Beside the late Prime Minister Meles Zenawi, who served for seventeen years before his death in 2012, other posts like foreign ministry has been headed for nine years by a Tigrayan, an erstwhile leader in TPLF, Seyum Mesfin, since the start of the regime in 1991 until 2010. At the moment this ministry is headed by another TPLF member Tedros Adhanom Gebreyesus. Other important posts in the army, and security are held by TPLF members. This says Jon Abbink, a close

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[134] Merera Gudina, *Competing Ethnic Nationalisms and Democratization in Ethiopia,* African Journal of Political Science, Vol. 9, No. 1, 27-50, 2004, p. 33

[135] Jean Nicholas Bach, *Abyotawi Democracy: neither revolutionary nor democratic, a critical review of EPRDF's conception of revolutionary democracy in post 1991 Ethiopia,* Journal of East African Studies, Vol. 5, No. 4, 641-663, 2011, p. 647

observer of Ethiopian politics, is a 'Tigrayanization' of general power structures in Ethiopia whereby Tigrayans assume pivotal positions in the country in all sectors.[136]

Nothing other than the purge or formally called by the party as *tehadsso* or reform upon leaders of EPRDF member parties and the satellite parties following a split within the TPLF ranks reveals the dependence of these ethno regional parties upon TPLF for their survival. In the aftermath of the Ethio-Eritrean war that broke out in 1998, two factions developed within the TPLF leadership, Tewolde Woldemariam's group on the one side and the then prime minister Meles Zenawi and his faction on the other. The conflict came public due to the two group's disagreement over the course of the war with Eritrea. Tewolde's group accused Meles of being lenient on Eritrea who on his part due to international pressure did not want an all-out conflict in the first place. Besides this, Meles' contenders accused him that his leniency is due to his blood relationship with Eritreans.[137] But their antagonism has been brewing for a long time and the war served as a catalyst. Tewolde's group or later on called dissenters had a more firmly based backing in the Tigray region than Meles who as a prime minster is responsible for national affairs. As such one of the accusations by the dissenters was that "Meles [is] attempting to put an end to the special advantages accorded to Tigray due to its devastation by war, as well as planning to dismantle a consortium of Tigrayan companies under the Endowment Fund for the Rehabilitation of Tigray (EFFORT)"[138]. These accusations were raised when Meles tried to appear in public drumming on Ethiopianism lauding past achievements of Menelik II, in contrast to his former castigation of such a concept as Amhara chauvinism.[139]

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[136] John Abbink, *Breaking and Making the State: the dynamic of ethnic democracy in Ethiopia*, Journal of Contemporary African Studies, Vol. 13, p. 156

[137] Paulos Milkias, *Ethiopia, the TPLF, and the Roots of the 2001 Political Tremor*, Northeast African Studies, Vol. 10, No. 2, 13-66, 2003, p. 18

[138] *Ibid.*, 18

[139] *Ibid.*, 26

But in the final count in 2001 Meles came out as the winner after numerous exchanges of accusations by the two groups and endless TPLF central committee and congress debates. In one of these meetings that took place in Mekele, the Tigray capital, Meles had to appeal to the ethnic solidarity of the Tigray and explained that these dissensions put Tigray's interests at stake.[140] Meles who came out victorious and now personally dominated the TPLF, purged the dissenter TPLF members from their government posts including Siye Abraha, Minster of Defense (later charged with corruption and imprisoned) and Lt. General Tsadkan Gebre Tinsae, Chief of Defense.

But the purges were not limited to the TPLF but also the other coalition and affiliate parties. The main victims were especially OPDO led by Negasso Gidada, then president of the republic, and SEPDF, led by Abate kisho who condemned the purging of the dissenters and unlike the ANDM did not side with Meles during the split.[141] OPDO members had long expressed their concern that their region's, Oromia, resources are unfairly being used to the development of Tigray, and in one incident Shiferaw Jarso an OPDO, resisting the meddling of TPLF in their party affair has said "rather than cowering to you [TPLF], I would rather die in order to make sure that my children will have a chance to live in freedom"[142]. This manner in which the affiliate parties both within the EPRDF coalition and the satellite parties to swing with whoever is in power inside TPLF and breathing the life of TPLF which from its origin is an ethno nationalist party representing the interests of its constituents, the people of Tigray, makes them puppets as well summarized by Paulos Milkias, an analyst of TPLF ideology and history:

> It is true during the last decade, appendages of the TPLF, such as the Amhara National Democratic Movement (ANDM), The Oromo People's Democratic Organization (OPDO), And the Southern Ethiopia People's Democratic Front (SEPDF), have proven beyond doubt what they really

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[140] Medhane Tadesse and John Young, *TPLF: Reform or Decline*, Review of African Political Economy, Vol. 30, No. 97, 389-403, 2003, p. 391
[141] Milkias, *Supra note 138*, p. 27
[142] *Ibid*., 28

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are – organizational autometons that are manipulated by whomever is in control of the TPLF. As soon as they realized who was the person or group holding the upper hand, they stood firmly in that person or group's camp.[143]

Chapter 4 Ethnic Minority Rule: Syria and Rwanda

4.1. Syria: The Perils of Minority Rule

Since the uprising in Syria against Bashar Al'Assad's regime that started in March 2011, of all the uprisings that have swept the middle east since 2010 it has proven to be the most catastrophic and the conflict long drawn. The uprising is part of region wide revolutions, or known as the Arab Spring, that first began in Tunisia in 2010 forcing its president Ben Ali to step down on January 2011. From its beginning, the Arab Spring has quickly spread to the other parts of the region resulting in the toppling of authoritarian leaders in Libya and Egypt, but throughout these uprisings the countries experienced a huge loss of lives and destruction of infrastructure. While the revolutions in the other countries affected by the Arab spring came to a halt or at least succeeded in a change of government, most of them in less than a year, the conflict in Syria has continued to claim lives, at this moment the death toll quite surpassing 100, 000 and the number of refugees in millions.[144] The following summarization of the death toll in the Arab Spring by The Economist as early as 2011 shows the difference of the repercussion in the early days of the conflict in Syria as opposed to other countries.

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[143] *Ibid.*, 25
[144] Amnesty International UK, *Campaign Lowdown: Syria*, April 2014

Table- 1 'Death Arab Spring Death Toll'

Deaths in the Arab awakening

Recorded deaths during protests/clashes between civilians and government security forces
To July 12th 2011 (Libyan figures unavailable)

Country	Status	Population, m*	Number killed, minimum	Deaths per m population	Period of unrest
Syria	Ongoing revolution	20.4	1,300†	63.7	Mar 2011 – present
Egypt	Regime toppled	81.8	846	10.4	Jan – Feb 2011
Tunisia	Regime toppled	10.5	219‡	20.9	Dec 2010 – Jan 2011
Yemen	Ongoing revolution	24.1	200§	8.3	Feb 2011 – present
Bahrain	Uprising crushed	1.3	29**	23.0	Feb – Jun 2011

Sources: Amnesty International;
Egyptian Ministry of Health; OHCHR;
UN Population Division; press reports

*2010 estimates   †Excluding security force members
‡Of which 72 reported linked to the unrest or in custody
§Excluding deaths resulting from clashes between security forces and other armed groups
**Of which 16 reported linked to the unrest or in custody

*Source - The Economist, The Arab Spring Death Toll: the price of protest so far, July 2011.

One of the reasons for the longevity of the conflict in Syria is that the uprisings have been turned into a civil war that cut across sectarian divisions where part of the population is being identified with the ruling regime of Bashar al 'Assad and the opposition with the Sunni majority in Syria.[145] Among the reasons for the escalation of the uprisings in Syria into civil war and the endurance of the regime in the face of these massive uprisings is Assad's use of the sectarian card as a means of buying the loyalty of his ethnic group of Alawites both within the masses and the military/security structure that is tied to the Alawites.

The Alawites representing only 12% of the Syrian population have dominated Syrian politics since the time of Hafiz al 'Assad, Bashar's father, since 1970. According to Fareed Zakaria, the sectarian nature of the regime reduces the chances of defection of the regime's key figures as has been the case in the other revolutions that hastened those regimes removal adding that, the Alawi, the regime's core loyalists " stick with the regime because they know that in a post Assad Syria, they will likely be massacred".[146] The sectarian divide has both added to the resilience of

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[145] Anthony Shadid, The New York Times, July 2011
[146] Fareed Zakaria, *The case against Intervention in Syria*, Time, June 11, 2012

Assad's regime and stifled the popular uprising by turning it into a civil war. And this factor, which the regime in Syria benefits from a social base of a minority, sets apart the Syrian uprising and its protracted popular movement still unable to topple Bashar, from the other Arab Spring movements in the Middle East.[147]

Bashar al 'Assad, who came to power in 2000 by continuing in the footsteps of his father Hafiz al' Assad has maintained the Alawite dominance in the army and government by assigning them to important positions and used them to spearhead the crackdowns against the protestors.[148] By claiming to be the protector of the Alawite community and other minorities, Christians (about 10%) and Druzes (3%), against a potential Sunni persecution, the regime has secured a loyal base of support for its repression of the protestors.[149] The regime's use of Alawi insecurity to instill a sense of fear has turned the Arab Spring protests into one of ethno-sectarian civil war and weakened the prospects of post conflict democratization in the country. Using the Alawi-Sunni divide, the regime has mobilized an exclusionary sectarian support for its atrocities and used its loyal supporters as a defensive bulwark.[150]

Sectarian divide and mistrust have a long history in Syria right from the time of Hafiz's coming to power. One of the earliest precedents is the sending of thirty thousand Syrian soldiers by Hafiz al-Assad in support of Lebanon's war against the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) in 1976. This was seen by Syrians as an intentional act by the Alawi regime to stand with the Christian Maronite minority of Lebanon against the Sunni Palestinians. Following this, Hafiz al' Assad has faced radical Islamist campaign and exacerbated Sunni's animosity to the regime. This campaign centered on the slogan 'a minority cannot forever rule a majority' soon turned from a

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[147] Stephen Zunes, *Supporting Unarmed Civil Insurrection in Syria*, in Nader Hashemi and Danny Postel (ed.), THE SYRIA DILEMMA,Boston Review Book, 2013. P. 104
[148] David W. Lesch, SYRIA: THE FALL OF THE HOUSE OF ASSAD, Yale University Press 2012, p. 50
[149] Ibid., 51
[150] Steven Heydman, *Tracking the "Arab Spring": Syria and the Future of Authoritarianism*, Journal of Democracy, Vol. 24, No. 4, October 2013, p. 62

verbal into a physical and violent attack. One such attack that increased the regime's insecurity, thereby also increasing its repression was the slaughtering of eighty three Alawi cadet officers in Aleppo Artillery School intentionally assembled by a Sunni Baathist staff member in June 1979.[151] Such early Jihadist violent reaction drove the regime to intensify its Alawi cohesion built around insecurity. Fear was an element of sectarianism that tied the Alawi's to the regime which as Hanna Batatu says "working for cohesion at the present juncture is the strong fear among the Alawis of every rank that dire consequences for all Alawis could ensue from an overthrow or collapse of the present regime"[152].

At the apex of such sectarian conflict and Sunni Islamist opposition that spread throughout Syria, one event stands out as the most gruesome but also with longstanding precedent in Syria's sectarian politics. Fearing the takeover of Hamma, the Sunni Moslem Brotherhood stronghold, Hafiz al-Assad unequivocally sent the message to the people that resistance to his regime is going to cost heavily and made an example of Hama by massacring more than 20, 000 (the number is reported be more than 40, 000 by some) in February 1982.[153] Such atrocity, besides its targeting the Sunni opposition in Hama, was perpetrated by the armed forces mainly composed of Alawi troops, including Hafiz's brother Rif'at in charge of the Defense Brigades. And its lasting impact has been to "effectively tie the fate of the Alawis with the Assad Dynasty. From that moment forth the politics of Syria was dominated by the politics of sectarian insecurity".[154] Little has changed in the forty years of the Assad dynasty and the same as in Hama, the first

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[151] Raphael Lefevre, ASHES OF HAMA: THE MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD IN SYRIA, Oxford University Press, 2013, p. 73.
[152] Hanna Batau, *Some observations on the Social Roots of Syria's Ruling, Military Group and the Causes for Its Domiance,* Middle East Journal, Vol. 35, No. 3, 331-341, 1981, p. 336
[153] Lefevre, *Supra note 151*, p. 77
[154] Leon Goldsmith, *Syria's Alawites and the politics of Sectarian Insecurity:* a Khaldunian perspective, Ortadoğu Etütleri, Volume 3, No 1, July 2011, pp. 42-43

protestors who started the Arab Spring in Syria in the town of Daraa in March 2011 were met with live fires from *Shabihha* militia of Assad's Alawi sect.[155]

But more important to the main concern of this thesis, how did the Alawite religious minority composing merely 12% of the population and in the presence of a Sunni majority of 70% come to power? The following section will as in the last chapter follow the hypothesis that Alawi community came to power with a background of a privileged status in the autonomy it enjoyed amid a majority rule, even though for most of their history Alawis have been persecuted and disdained as inferior people by the majority Sunni population.

4.2 Alawi: history of Persecution

Alawi is a term that signifies the Alawites adherence to Ali, son in law of the prophet Mohammed, but, until 1920 when the French imposed the use of this term, they were also known as Nusayris. Alawism as a separate sect within Islam dates from the tenth century as an offshoot of Shi'ism derived from a doctrine by Muhammed ibn Nusair, a follower of Hassan al-Askari, the eleventh Shi'a Imam. The Alawis' most crucial difference from other Muslims is their deification of Ali, where "Muslim's proclaim their faith saying 'there is no deity but God and Muhammad is his prophet, the Alawis assert 'there is no deity but Ali, no veil but Muhammad, and no *bab* but Salman".[156]

The Alawi are not even considered to be true followers of Islam and this has been the major cause of their perennial persecution taken as heretics. Different aspects of their religion set them apart from Islam, first, a form of "paganism the Alawis adopted in a divine triad, of its successive manifestation in the seven cycles of world history, and of the transmigration of

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[155] Christopher Philips, *Syria's Torment, Survival*: Global Politics and Strategy, Vol. 54, No. 4, 67-82, 2012, p. 67.
[156] Daniel Pipes, *The Alawi capture of Power in Syria*, Middle Eastern Studies, Vol. 25, No. 4, 429-450, 1989, p. 431

souls"[157]. Second "unlike Shi'ites, Alawis believe that Ali was the incarnation of God himself in a divine triad"[158]. Third, The Alawites have an undisclosed religion because of their belief in esoteric religious knowledge known only to a few, a feature due to the uncertainty of their belief has added to their discrimination. A last aspect is the Alawis similarity to Christianity because of their use of wine and celebration of Christian holidays like Christmas.[159]

Because of the above and other features ascribed to the Alawi religion as being unorthodox and heretic, their history has been one of persecution and marginalization from the time of the Mamluks. As early as the 13th century, the Alawi religion was declared a heresy by an influential scholar of Islam, Ahmad ibn Taymiya, by passing *fatwa* (religious ruling) holding that, Nusayris should face war and persecution according to Islamic law since they are enemies of Muslims and infidels than Jews, Christians or polytheists.[160] Tamya's *fatwa* was so influential that Islamist resistance against Hafiz al-Assad frequently used his ruling to wage war against his regime.[161] Tamya declared that:

> These people called Nusayriyya […] are more heretical than Jews and the Christians and even more than several heterodox groups. Their damage to the Muslim community […] is greater than the damage of the infidels who fight against the Muslims such as the heretic Mongols, the Crusaders and others. They do not believe in God […]. They are neither Muslims, nor Jews, nor Christians.[162]

In the same period during the Mukluks in 1317, the Sultan in Cairo hearing of an uprising in Jabal district by the Alawis ordered for them to be put to sword. The only thing that saved them

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[157] Mahmud A.Fakfh, *The Alawi Community of Syria, A New Dominant Political Force*, Middle Eastern Studies, Vol. 20, No. 2, 133-153, 1984, p. 135
[158] *Ibid.*, 135
[159] *Ibid.*, 136,
[160] Pipes, *Supra note 156*, p. 434
[161] Lefevre, *Supra note 151*, p. 75
[162] Yarin Friedman, *ibn Taymiyya's Fatwa Against the Nusayri-Alawi Sect*, Der Islam, Vol. 82, No. 2, 2005, pp. 349-63. Cited in Lefevre, *Supra note* 151, p. 65

was, since they are the ones who do the farming and feed Muslims who own the land, saving them is to secure the livelihood of the Muslims.[163]

This persecution has continued throughout the Ottoman rulers, who are themselves Sunnis, from 1516 until 1918. During this period the Alawis although repressed by the Sunni empire of the Ottomans, were to some extent able to keep their autonomy to practice their own religion but all the while kept in an inferior status against the majority Sunnis of Syria. Their subordination is exhibited in the levying of extra taxes by the Ottomans in 1571 upon the Alawis who lived in the rural area as farmers in most cases working upon absentee landlords of Sunnis and Christians. This decree held that custom required this treatment, extra tax, because the Alawis, "neither practice the fast of Ramadan nor the ritual prayers, nor do they observe any precept of the Islamic religion".[164] The Alawis were also denied the status of Millet (a status of sect or religion) along other religious minorities like the Druze by the Ottoman rulers as opposed to the Sunnis and Christians.

Insistently persecuted, the Alawis isolated themselves from the rest of Syria by living in the inaccessible mountainous region of Latakia, North West of Syria, which added to their cohesive identity. Jacques Weulersse, who in 1940 had written with regard to Alawis, that a minority can dominate a majority, describes their situation saying:

> Defeated and persecuted the heterodox sects disappeared or to survive renounced proselytism… The Alawis silently entrenched themselves in the mountains …. Isolated in rough country, surrounded by a hostile population, henceforth without communications with the outside world, the Alawis began to live out their solitary existence in secrecy and repression. Their doctrine, entirely formed, evolved no further[165]

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[163] Batatu, *Supra note 152*, p. 333
[164] Pipes, *Supra note 156*, p. 434
[165] Jacques Weulersse, Le pays des Alaouites (Tours: Arrault & Cie., 1940), Vol. 1, p. 54; as cited in Pipes, *Supra note 156,* pp. 435-36

The persecution of the Alawis corresponded with class oppression as well. This was because, until recently, almost all Alawis lead a rural life to the extent that it has been reported, until the French took over in 1920 only 771 Alawis out of a population of about 175, 000 lived in towns.[166] This is true even in Latakia region where the Alawis are concentrated (75%) and are the majority (62%) but in the capital city of Latakia they are still the minority (12%). The same holds true to the small number of Alawites that live out of the mountains of Latakia in the plains of Homs and Hama who are agrarians as well. As such, the name Nusayri is equated with being peasant. Because the rural area is the most impoverished compared to the urban centers where mostly the Sunnis and Christians live, Alawis faced both class domination in their poverty and sectarian isolation because of their religion. And as Mahmud Faksh says "this helps to understand the deep seated resentment, antagonism and distrust that the Alawi community had developed in the course of time against the Sunnis, their oppressors".[167]

The Sunnis on the other hand were privileged both at the time of the Mamluks and the Ottomans who integrated them into their administrative structures and their elites being predominant in government.[168] Such being the state of the Alawi community, since 1970s they have become the masters of Syria and the Sunnis turned into a dominated majority. What made this possible will be the concern of the next section.

4.3 Alawi's Ascendance to Power

The Alawi's ascendance to power took place in a gradual process over half a century that can be divided in three stages, French mandate (1920-46), Sunni dominance after independence (1946-63) and Alawi consolidation of power (1963-1970).[169] It has been argued in this thesis that the

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[166] Haklai, *Supra note 12*, p. 31
[167] Faksh, *Supra note 157*, p. 134
[168] Haklai, *Supra note 12*, p. 31
[169] Pipes, *Supra note 156*, p. 437

coming to power of minorities is explained by their resistance to keep their privilege, which is autonomy, against the domination and subordination by the majority. While colonialism gave the Alawis such a privilege of self-governance saving them from persecution by the majority Sunnis, in the same way Tigrayans in Ethiopia were able to keep their autonomy until the first half of the 20th century. In both cases the two minorities have reacted similarly to the encroachment by the majority to dismiss their privilege in self-governance, a process that finally led to their control of power. In Ethiopia it has been shown that the Woyane rebellion in 1943 a precedent that set in motion future revolution was a reaction against the centralizing efforts of Haileselassie against the regional autonomy enjoyed in Tigray.

The Ottoman Empire in Syria ended in 1918 and with the help of the British, the Hashemite Emir Faysal took over Syria forming an Arab nationalist government in Damascus. With the Agreement of Britain and later by the League of Nations mandate the French took over Syria in 1920 and evicted Emir Faysal. Taking over Syria the French pursued the same policy of indirect rule they used in their colonies of North Africa which was oriented towards native administration and the preservation of traditional society. But more important to the French in the perusing *'La Politique Minoritaire'* in Syria was to suppress and antagonize the Arab nationalist opposition to their suzerainty which was intimately linked to Sunni Islam, the majority in Syria.[170] The French for their policy of endowing the minorities in Syria, the Alawi, the Druze and Christians a separate autonomous government have argued that Syria was a heterogeneous country without a national identity. Though opposed by the majority Sunni elite and the British that supported the Sunni Arab Emir Faysal, the then Secretary General of the Mandatory government, Robert de Caix, the proponent of autonomy for the minorities had argued;

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[170] Itamar Rabinovich, *The Compact Minorities and the Syrian State, 1918-45*, Journal of Contemporary History, Vol. 14, No. 4, 693-712, A Century of Conservatism, Part 2, 1979, PP. 695-698

> Syria was a heterogeneous country, both in religious and ethnic terms and that its political structure should reflect this pluralism.The solution would be a federal organization which gradually under the French supervision and guidance should mature toward unity.[171]

The French administered the Alawi area as a separate autonomous state beginning from their control over Syria in 1921 that brought immense benefits to the historically persecuted Alawis. Through their own local administration the Alawis had control over their own territories, enjoyed representation in their institutions and preferential treatment by the French administration.[172] Much consequential to the later development of events to the control of power by the Alawis was the increased social development of the Alawis and education that spurred the political mobilization of the people and also their overrepresentation in the French army of *Troupes Speciales*. The French recruited their army mostly from the minorities and the Alawis were favored than the Sunnis who were not trusted for their Arab nationalism. When the Treaty of Independence was signed in 1936 the French gave up almost everything except the *Troupes Speciales* until they agreed to transfer it to the Syrian government on June 21, 1945.[173]

A clear example to the mobilization of the Alawis in wanting to protect their autonomy was their rallying around a man named Suleiman al-Murshid a leader in their struggle for their autonomy against Sunni domination. Murshid, born in 1905 in Jabla al-Ansariyya, in east Latakia to an Alawi family was a shepherded before he started his adventurous career Syria's politics. He first started as a soothsayer in 1923.[174] He led a resistance against Sunni domination after independence in 1939 followed by 5, 000 Alawis and with the support of French weapons.[175] He was elected in the Syrian parliament in 1943 but, an enemy of Syrian unity and successful in

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[171] *Ibid.*, 697
[172] *Ibid.*, 704
[173] David Roberts, THE BATH AND THE CREATION OF MODERN SYRIA, 1987, p. 27
[174] Gitta Yaffe and Uriel Dan, Suleiman al-Murshid*: The Beginnings of an Alawi Leader*, Middle Eastern Studies, Vol. 29, No. 4, 624-640, 1993, p. 625
[175] Pipes, *Supra note 156*, p. 439

keeping away the Syrian authorities out of the Alawi's region, he was seized in Beirut, put to house arrest for months and finally hanged by the Syrian government in 1946.[176]

The distinction made between ranked and unranked ethnic systems elaborated in the theoretical chapter is useful to understand the change made by the French in the relationship between the Alawis and Sunnis in Syria. As said before ranked ethnic systems are based on domination that coincides with class lines. While in the case of ranked systems the relationship between the subordinate and superordinate group is rigid and stratified, in unranked systems ethnic groups "act as if they were state in an international environment".[177] While in ranked systems domination and subjection lends itself to an ideology of inferiority to the subordinate group, in unranked ethnic groups relationships are reciprocal based on mistrust and apprehension.

The domination by the Sunnis upon the Alawis before the time of French colonization is a case of ranked ethnic system where subordination corresponded class lines with clear stratification of upper and lower ranks. But as Horowitz says the rigid stratification in ranked systems can go through significant changes "when the cement cracks in ranked system, the edifice usually collapses. When ethnic hierarchies are undermined, they may undergo fundamental transformations"[178]. Such changes can be brought about international contact, increased education among the subordinate group and the coming of new leaders who no longer submit to the built system of domination.[179] Hence by the new regime of autonomy and self-governance the French endowed to the Alawis and the increased level of education among the youth of the Alawi and their experience in producing their own leaders that resisted Sunni domination, the relationship between the two ethnic groups has been turned to an unranked system.

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[176] Rabinovich, *Supra note 170*, p. 708
[177] Horowitz, *Supra note 5,* p. 31
[178] *Ibid.*, 29
[179] *Ibid.*, 32

The Alawis resisted the Arab Sunni state that the Syrian government implemented after independence in 1936. As discussed in the beginning in chapter one, modern states were not bureaucratic and neutral founded upon the concept of citizens but rather cast upon nationalism that excluded those who do not belong in the nation state in ethnic terms. The Arab nationalist leaders who took over the French after 1936 were less tolerant of the interest of the minorities. Even though the 1936 treaty provided for the incorporation of the Alawi and Druze area into Syria upon a special status, the Sunni government ambivalent of the Alawi autonomy immediately placed Sunni nationalists in local leadership positions in these areas.[180] By 1946 the separate state of Alawi was destroyed and the Sunni domination once again vigorously pursued by its nationalist leaders culminating in literally creating a Sunni State.[181] It can be said that the Alawi's privileged status was over with the end of the French mandate, the Sunni government in Damascus quelled their armed resistance, destroyed the Alawi state, their military units, their seat in parliament and the application of Alawi laws of personal status in courts.[182]

4.4 Alawi Consolidation of Power

The two most important institutions in the rise to power of the Alawis are the Army and the Bath party.[183] And one of the main factors that drove the Alawis to join these institutions was the discrimination that followed independence. As our hypothesis posits, discrimination that follows a privileged status leads a minority to protect itself and as a means of averting the threat of domination it seeks power. And this is what happened when the Sunni domination tried to bring back the historical subordination of the Aalwis as Raphael Lefevre describes it;

> This was of course, something the most influential Alawi figures of the region were not prepared to accept […]. Discriminated against in political,

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[180] Rbinovich, *Supra note 170,* p. 700
[181] Lefevre, *Supra note 151,* p. 66
[182] Pipes*, Supra note 156*, p. 440
[183] Faksh, *Supra note 157*, p. 140

religious and socioeconomic terms, many Alawi left their countryside during the immediate post-independence period in order to join two of the few institutions providing them with upward mobility and inside which their power would ultimately prevail after the coup of 8 March 1963: the army and the Bath party.[184]

Bath formally proclaimed a political party in 1947, had two main elements that ideologically were attractive to the minorities in Syria. Bath advocated secularism and rural oriented socialism, two aspects that favored the minorities in promising them equal citizenship in a secular state and social development for most of the minorities and especially the Alawis the majority of which were agrarians. The secular ideology of the party encouraged the unfettered membership of non-Islam minorities by advocating the elimination of the Sunni Arab dominance and the creation of a political system that does not discriminate socially and economically.[185] As such the Bath party provided a forum of political mobilization for the educated youth and as the only organization for the Alawis to channel their political interests the Latakia branch of the party was the biggest.[186]

Another reason for the Alawis disproportionate representation in the army was the prevailing socioeconomic condition of the Alawis than their initial placement by the French in the *Troupes Speciales* which the French maintained after the independence agreement of 1936 until they handed it over to the Syrian government on June 21, 1945.[187] The first reason is the poor economic condition of the Alawi's at the time has pushed them to take the army as an attractive place for employment. In particular, the exemption fee, or *badal*, 500 Syrian pounds that was required to be relieved or exempted from the military service which was beyond the capacity of the poor peasants of the Alawi but easily affordable to most Sunni families who lived in the

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[184] Lefevre, *Supra note 151*, p. 67
[185] Faksh, *Supra note 157*, pp. 140-141
[186] Haklai, *Supra note 12,* p. 33
[187] Roberts, *Supra note 173,* p. 27

cities was a major factor for their large representation in the lower ranks of the army.[188] Besides this the military was perceived by the Sunni as a despised place for inferior people and minorities.[189]

Another decisive factor for the Alawi's control of top position in the army was the internecine power struggles, purges and counter purges among the Sunni high ranking officers in the army between 1943 and 1963. While the Sunnis' top ranks were depleted by these purges the Alawis standing apart from this power struggle were taking their positions. When the Alawis were brought to higher ranks in this way they used the chance to bring their kin and selectively place them in the army, as Daniel pipes says, "Sunnis entered the military as individuals while Alawis entered as members of a sect; the latter therefore prospered".[190] All these factors have helped the Alawi's to topple the Sunni government and dominate the ensuing coups that brought the party into power in 1963.

Not only were the Alawis overrepresented in the Army and the Bath party, some would also argue that there was a purposeful sectarian motive by the Alawis to control power. Most cited evidence for this is the establishment of a clandestine military committee within the Bath party by Alawi Syrian army officers based in Cairo who later on in the 1963 coup played a major role.[191] To this Daniel Pipes also adds, clandestine meetings of Alawi religious leaders and military officers, including Hafiz al-Assad, where they planned on how to bring Alawi's to higher positions in the Bath party and use this to control power in the state.[192]

In 1963, military officers in the Bath party staged a coup and Bath came to rule Syria but now that their Sunni contenders are out of the way the following struggle came to be between the

[188] Batatu, *Supra note 152*, p. 342; See also, Lefevre, *Supra note 151*, p. 69; See also, Pipes, *Supra note 156*, p. 441
[189] Pipes, *Supra note 156,* p. 440
[190] Ibid., 441
[191] Lefevre, *Supra note 151*, p. 69
[192] Pipes, *Supra note 156,* p. 430

Alawis. Again in February 1966, Salah Jadid, came to power through a *coup de ta* but he was soon deposed through a *coup by* Hafiz al-Assad in 1970.[193] Under Hafiz, sectarianism reached unprecedented proportion in Syria's politics where the Alawi dominated all important positions in government, and most of all in the Army. Hafiz's socio economic policies were also geared towards the development of his sect to the disadvantage of other sects and mainly the Sunnis.[194]

4.5 Tutsi Minority Rule: Rwanda

Rwanda and Burundi are neighboring countries, similar in many ways, religion, topography, agrarian economy, language and ethnic composition of Hutu approximately 85%, Tutsi 14% and Twa 1%. They were both administered as one territory by the German colonizers and after the First World War by Belgium (1916-1962) as Rwanda-Urundi by the League of Nations mandate.[195] After their independence in 1962, both countries have gone through the most destructive and bloody ethnic conflict between the Hutu and Tutsi. But the political dynamics between the Hutu and Tutsi after their independence takes different paths in the two countries. While in Burundi, the Tutsi continued their colonial and pre-colonial privilege as a monarchy, and prince Rwagasore of the royalist party *Uprona* won elections both before and after colonization, the Tutsi monarchy in Rwanda was over when the colonizers left in 1962.[196]

This thesis is mainly concerned with the coming into power of ethnic minorities, not in pre modern monarchies and kingdoms but in modern politics of representative governments and political participation based on the democratic ideal of equal citizenship. Hence its focus will be on Rwanda where after the 1994 genocide, the RPF under Paul Kagame controls power rather

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[193] Roberts, *Supra note 173*, pp. 87-92
[194] Faksh, *Supra note 157*, p. 147; See, Batatu, *Supra note 152*, p. 331 for government positions controlled by the Alawi under Hafiz's regime
[195]Stef Vandgnste, *Governing Ethnicity Under Genocide: ethnic amnesia in Rwanda versus ethnic power sharing in Burundi*, Journal of Eastern African Studies, Vol. 8, No. 2, 263-277, 2014, p. 265
[196] Peter Uvin, *Ethnicity and Power in Burundi and Rwanda: Different Paths to Mass Violence,* Comparative Politics, Vol. 31, No. 3, 253-251, 1999, p. 254

than Burundi where the Tutsi minority rule was a continuation of the monarchy of the Burundi Kingdom since the 16th century.

Even though most people trace the origin of violence that marked postcolonial Rwanda as well as Burundi to the racial ethnic divide constructed by the colonialists, the Hutu-Tutsi distinction was present before that. Two basic distinctions are made between the Hutu and the Tutsi, while the Hutu are agriculturalists and physically shorter, the Tutsi are pastoralists and generally tall and slender. Because of such occupational and especially physical distinctions that the colonial anthropologists emphasize to trace a separate origin for the two ethnic groups, there are different views as to their origin.[197] One popular thesis called the migration thesis says the Tutsi arrived in Rwanda in successive waves from the north, probably from southern Ethiopia, beginning from the fifteenth century. [198]

The social status between the Tutsi and Hutu in Rwanda became markedly polarized immediately before their colonization, where the Tutsi became centers of power as aristocratic rulers and the Hutu a subordinate ethnic group. This happened during the reign of Mwami Kigeri Rwabuguri (1860-95) who imposed a serf like institution or Uburetwa that subjugated only the Hutu and spared the Tutsi.[199] Mahmood Mamdani, holding the same view says that "more than any other time in its history, the state of Rwanda appeared as a Tutsi power under Rwanbuguri", also suggesting, besides these ethnic differences colonialism brought another dimension to this ethnic division in terms of race and an alien-indigenous distinction.[200]

Racism, argues Mamdani, the colonizers used as a means of promoting their indirect rule, a system that racially categorizes the colonized into the non-native subjects, a minority like the

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[197] Mahmood Mamdani, WHEN VICTIMS BECOME KILLERS:COLONIALISM, NATIVISM, AND THE GENOCIDE IN RWANDA, Princeton University Press, 2001, p. 44
[198] Johan Pottier, RE-IMAGINING RWANDA: CONFLICT, SURVIVAL AND DISINFORMATION IN THE LATE TWENTIETH CENTURY, Cambridge University Press, 2002, p. 12
[199] Ibid., 13
[200] Mamdani, *Supra note 197*, p. 66

Tutsi in Rwanda, through whom the colonizers rule the indigenous upon whom colonial rule was fully imposed. Such a distinction solidified the relationship of the pre-colonial period which to an extent allowed social mobility, into an alien and indigenous relationship which made the post-colonial conflict volatile.[201]

In 1959, in what has been called a social revolution, a Hutu militant group overthrew the Tutsi monarchy with the help of the departing Belgian colonizers. The anti-colonial nationalist struggle was waged on a nativist ideology of eliminating outsiders who have been subjugating the Hutu which was targeted at the Tutsi. In 1961 a radical Hutu party, *Parmehutu* came to power under Gregoire Kaybanda (1962-73). Kaybanda's regime continued upon the massive pogrom that started with the revolution, and by 1963, 10,000 Tutsi's were killed that led to the fleeing of more than 150,000 Tutsis to neighboring countries who later on formed the RPF (Rwanda Patriotic Front) in 1987 based in Uganda. Kyabanda was overthrown through a coup by the ministry of defense, Jovena Habyarimana who reigned until his death in a plane crash in 1994 that triggered the Rwandan Genocide.[202]

The present regime of Paul Kagame came to power when the RPF, the rebel movement of exile Tutsi's, started the 1990 civil war against Habyarimana. In April 6, 1994 the plane carrying Habyarimana was shot down, and immediately led to the genocide that killed about 800,000 Tutsi's and moderate Hutus in matter of three months.[203] In July 1994, RPF controlled Kigali and thereby ending the genocide, but the RPF also has reportedly killed more than 200, 000 Hutu's on its way to Kigali.[204]

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[201] *Ibid.*, 75
[202] Uvin, *Supra note 196*, p. 261
[203] Front Line Rwanda, *'Disappearances, Arrests, Threats, Intimidation and Co-option of Human Rights Defenders 2001 – 2004'*, 2005, p. 7
[204] Rene Lemarchand, *Bearing Witness to Mass Murder,* African Studies Review, Vol. 48, No. 3, 93-101, 2005, p. 97

The RPF instituted an authoritarian regime where opposition political parties, journalists, NGO's and Hutu politicians were harassed, killed and most were forced into exile. These suppressions are justified by the RPF as threats to its ideology of 'Rwandanicity', that claims there are no ethnicities but only Rwandans, which is used to accuse any opposition in the name of divisionism and promoting genocide ideology. The use of the terms Hutu, Tutsi, Twa has been outlawed by the 2003 Fundamental Law of Rwanda. But RPF's stance upon the elimination of ethnic identity from Rwanda's politics has been criticized as its tool for promoting Tutsi domination of political power and not willing to respond to this criticism in the name of fighting divisionism.[205]

From early on of RPF's coming into power Hutu elites were being victimized and a tendency toward the centralization of power within Tutsi elites was already visible. Prominent Hutu politicians including Prime Minister Faustin Tuagiramungu a Hutu leader of major opposition party MDR (Democratic Republican Movement) and Interior Minister Send Sendashonga fled into exile in August 1995.[206] In March 2003, a few months before the national election, MDR, at the time the strongest challenger to the RPF was banned accused of spreading genocidal ideology and inciting ethnic division.[207] In the same month March 23, President Pasteur Bizimungu resigned for 'personal reasons' but was soon accused of corruption and imprisoned. In an interview he gave to the *Feune Afrique* in 2001, President Bizimungu has once said:

> We believed that things would change with the RPF, but we have been
> deceived … We are convinced that if things continue as they do the Hutu
> will sharpen their weapons … Here as in Burundi, the army is mono
> ethnic. You cannot run Rwanda with an army that is 100 percent Tutsi,
> while the population is 85 percent Hutu! [208]

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[205] Filip Reyentgens, *Rwanda, Ten Years on: From Genocide to Dictatorship*, African Affairs, Vol. 103, 177-210, 2004, p. 187
[206] Front Line Rwanda, *Supra note 203*, p. 8
[207] Ibid., 12
[208] *Feune Afrique* 2112 (3-9 July, 2001); Cited in Filip Reyntjens, *Supra note 205,* p. 193

Since 2000, the RPF, was controlling almost all important political offices and consolidated its power within a small circle of Tutsi elites which by some people has been referred to as 'Tutsization'. The table below indicates the Tutsi bias of government posts in Rwanda as of 2000.

Table 2: 'Distribution of Key Offices, mid 2000'

Institution	Tutsi	Hutu	RPF/RPA	Other part/no party/unknown
Government	12	8	11	9
Permanent Secretaries	10	2	10	2
Provincial Governors	9	3	11	1
Ambassadors	7	3	8	2
Parliament	49	25	61 (*)	13
President's Judges, Supreme Court and Courts of Appeal	7	3	-	-
Army Command	8	0	8	0
CEO Public/Mixed enterprises	17	5	18	4

(*) The parties or wings of parties having joined the RPF coalition are included under RPF/RPA. This informal platform was confirmed when six parties Joined the RPF in backing Paul Kagame as a presidential candidate in July 2003.

* Source- Filip Reyentgens, Rwanda, Ten Years on: From Genocide to Dictatorship, African Affairs, Vol. 103, 177-210, 2004, p. 189; See also, International Crisis Group, Africa Report No 153, 2009, p. 4

Paul Kagame leader of the RPF since the civil war became Rwanda's president since 2000 following the resignation of Pasteur Bizimungu, and keeps this position until now. In both presidential elections of 2003 and 2010 Kadame's victory has been criticized to be a result of widespread repression against his opponents, the media and civil society and in many cases marred with the killing and disappearance of opposition politicians.[209] Some observers are now suggesting that this authoritarian centralization of power within the RPF, a Tutsi dominated

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[209] Freedom House Rwanda, *Freedom in the World,* 2013

party, may exacerbate the perennial ethnic tensions in Rwanda. According to Mahmood Mamdani, RPF has pursued victor's justice that tries to compensate the Tutsi's past persecution by taking the country back to the 'Tutsi power' of the colonial and pre-colonial times, that led to the 'Hutu Power' Ideology the *Interhamwe* used to justify its genocide against the Tutsi.[210]

Conclusion

This thesis set out to find out the determinant factors for the coming into power of minority ethnic groups. Ruling ethnic minorities are not a common phenomenon in the modern world and only a handful of such cases are found today. After the end of the cold war the world has witnessed the devastation caused by ethnic conflicts, the disintegration of states and the primacy given to the principle of self-determination especially for minority ethnic groups that sought its protection, but, protection from what?

The modern nation state that replaced the empires and kingdoms of the pre modern era had underneath its principle of citizenship and popular sovereignty expressed in the democratic and equal participation of the people, the logic of common identity of the people of the nation. The nation state became identified with the majority dominant ethnic group resulting in a nation defined in terms of ethnic identity, the ethnos, rather than a civic identity, the demos. This has set the state to be a playground of the politics of exclusion and inclusion, of those whose national identity is interwoven in the will of the state and those who have yet to be assimilated. Ethnic minorities in most cases formed the latter group, the people who fell under the spell of majority suppression. The foregoing has been the main subject of the first chapter, to lay the background of when ethnic politics of exclusion and inclusion became important and ethnic conflict suddenly

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[210] Mamdani, *Supra note 197*, p. 271

appeared when it was thought ethnicity has no place in the modern world of material instrumentalism.

Following the hypothesis that ethnic minorities come to power when an ethnic group that had a privileged status in the past faces persecution by the majority and resists this discrimination and try to avert this threat through domination, the second up to the fourth chapter have comparatively sought to find out if such a pattern exists.

The first and second chapter dealing with Ethiopia have discussed the origins of the present ethnic minority rule and elaborated the sequence of factors that led to this following the claim made by the hypothesis. It has been shown that the Tigray minority ethnic group has historically been the center of political power until power shifted to the Amhara majority ethnic group beginning from the tenth century. The Amhara dominated government expanded to the south and brought numerous ethnic groups under its rule forging a ranked relationship of subordination over these new territories. But in this Amhara dominated government, Tigray has remained autonomous in the government of its affairs keeping its hereditary leaders intact, a privileged status not enjoyed in the captured regions of the south.

Tigray's autonomy was put into question when Haileselassie's policy of state centralization that began in the 1940s instituted the authority of the central government in Tigray breaking the ties of hereditary leadership and self-government. This was received with the resistance by the Tigrayans, in what has been known the Woyane rebellion of 1943. This resistance was quickly defeated and Tigray put under the authority of the central state losing its past autonomy. But resistance was continued, this time lead by the elites who have joined the socialist student movement of the 1960s. By waging an ethno nationalist armed struggle from their home base of the Tigray region in 1975, they succeeded in toppling the military regime, Derg, that replaced

Haileselassie in 1974. Assuming power in 1991, the TPLF that led the struggle against Derg, has instituted an authoritarian regime where power is concentrated in the hands of its Tigrayan elite.

The fourth chapter has explored the ethnic minority rules of the Alawi in Syria and Tutsi in Rwanda. The Alawi minority religious group has historically been persecuted and subordinated by the Sunni majority who had controlled political power since the time of the Mamluks. This dominant-subordinate relationship was changed after the French colonial system endowed the Alawi with autonomy from 1921 until independence in 1936. The Sunni government that took over the French pursued a nationalist project which was part of the anti-colonial struggle. But Sunni nationalism was opposed to the interests of the minorities in Syria, especially the Alawi who have enjoyed a large measure of self-government under the French. The post-independence Sunni government took away this autonomy, but the Alawis resisted this through a number of rebellions until their compete domination in 1946. But finally, it was the Bath party formed in 1947 and its Alawi dominated military wing that toppled the Sunni government through its first coup in 1963. After two consecutive coups in 1966 and 1970, Hafiz al-Assad became Syria's president finally consolidating the Alawis' control of the state which has continued until this day under his son Bashar al-Assad.

Rwanda's ruling party RPF came to power in 1994 after a civil war that started in 1991 ending the genocide that took the lives of thousands of Tutsis and moderate Hutus. The RPF was formed as an armed resistance in 1987 by Tutsi migrants who fled the country when the Hutu nationalist government that came after the 1959 revolution began massacring the Tutsis. The main reason for the Tutsi massacre was their affiliation with the colonial masters who during their rule intensified the Tutsi (dominant)-Hutu (subordinate) ethnic divide into a racial distinction of alien-indigenous relationship.

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In all the three cases of ethnic minority rule that came to power in different periods Syria 1966, Ethiopia 1991, Rwanda 1994, a similar pattern appears. First these minorities had an extent of autonomy and self-government and even political dominance in the case of Rwanda before they were faced with the loss of such privilege under suppression by a majority ethnic group. Second, this suppression by the majority ethnic group was tinged with a nationalist stance that gave the majority ethnic group cultural and political supremacy. The previously autonomous and dominant ethnic groups have reacted to this threat of domination by mobilizing themselves with the leadership of their elites who brought them to power, turning the table around so that now the majority has become dominated by a minority.

The third and final aspect of this process that brought ethnic minorities in power is that, the minorities tightened their grip on power once they have assumed it. In ethnically divided societies, democracy expressed in the simple formula of majority rule can become a zero sum game. One can cite Burundi's experiment with democracy in the 1993, a process initiated by the ruling Tutsi minority regime lead by President Pierre Buyoya, by some compared to Mikhail Gorbachev for his audacity to reform the system through which he gained power. Melchior Nidadaye, a Hutu politician, won the presidential election held in June 1993 and his party *Forbedu* won the majority of the seats in parliament. But the experiment was immediately thwarted and Nidadye was killed after a coup by Tutsi military officers. This drove to the massacre of many Tutsis by the Hutu majority that was angered by the loss of a democratically elected president.[211]

Although there exists a similar pattern to the coming into power of the ruling ethnic minorities in the three countries Ethiopia, Syria and Rwanda there is a striking difference in the way ethnicity was placed in the political arrangement instituted by these regimes. The Bath party since its

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[211] Uvin, *Supra note 196,* p. 262

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formation was based on a secular ideology which was the main reason for the over representation of non-Islam minorities in the party. Since the time of Haffiz al' Assad the regime has pressed upon the Arab unity of the people and deemphasized the religious difference of Syrians. Through its pan Arab ideology the regime in Syria has sought to forge a unifying identity that transcends the Sunni Islam identity of the majority and its own minority Alawi ethnic identity as a means of legitimizing its narrow ethnic base.[212]

In like manner, RPF, the ruling party in Rwanda which came to power on a Tutsi minority platform has pursued a pan Rwandese ideology so called 'Rwandanicity'. Reference to ethnicity in the political sphere has been banned to the extent that the use of the terms Hitu, Tutsi and Twa is prohibited by law. To the contrary, in Ethiopia, TPLF, since its coming to power has fomented ethnicity and encouraged political competition and political party formation to be based on ethnic lines. A plausible explanation for the difference in the strategy pursued by these three regimes Syria and Rwanda on the one hand and Ethiopia on the other can be the distinct ethnic configuration between majority and minority in these countries. In Syria and Rwanda there is one single majority, Sunni 70% and Hutu 85% respectively, that constitutes a large segment of the population. This makes it difficult for the ruling minority ethnic group to emphasize the ethnic identification of the regime and to legitimize itself in the face of a hostile majority.

The majority-minority ethnic composition in Ethiopia is highly dispersed without a clear majority and numerous ethnic minorities. Including the two majority ethnic groups Oromo about 30% and Amhara about 25%, there are more than 80 ethnic groups in Ethiopia. In such a diverse ethnic configuration the minority ethnic party TPLF can easily assume the role of a vanguard for the minority ethnic groups of Ethiopia. The protection of the self-determination right of ethnic groups has been at the core of TPLF's sacred objective and made Ethiopia the only country that

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[212] Haklai, *Supra note 12*, p. 36

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constitutionally guarantees the secession right of ethnic groups. Its commitment to self-determination rights being laudable, without a practical power sharing and equal participation in politics of all ethnic groups, it becomes impossible to commend TPLF even by its own objective of ending ethnic discrimination.

By displaying its achievement in breaking the historical Amhara domination over other ethnic groups, TPLF has added to the non-cooperative stance between the Amhara, Oromo and other minorities, a situation visible in the divisive opposition political party formation that follows ethnic lines. According to the National Electoral Board of Ethiopia, presently there are 79 registered political parties more than 90 % being ethnic based parties. At the moment there are only two coalition parties and only one of them 'Ethiopia Democratic Unity Forum' sustains a cross ethnic composition. Ruling under a coalition platform of the EPRDF, and bringing numerous ethnic parties under its wings over which it remains the dominant party, the division and inability among the opposition political parties to unite under a common front has benefitted the TPLF immensely.

The lack of cohesion within the majority ethnic groups, which Oded Haklai endorses to be the main factor that has worked in favor of the Alawi dominance in Syria, is a major factor to the sustenance of ethnic minority regimes. The third national election in Ethiopia held in 2005, which was the only time where since EPRDF came to power in 1991 it allowed an open pre electoral competition with relatively free participation of civil society and the media attests to the regime threatening potential of a unified opposition.[213] In the run up to this election two coalition parties were formed from the formerly fragmented parties as well as new ones, Coalition for Unity and Democracy (CUD) formed in 2004 and Union of Ethiopian Democratic Force (UEDF) in 2003.The CUD as a coalition was first of its kind to espouse non ethnic political program and

[213] Lovise Aalen & Kjetil Tronvol, *The End of Democracy? Curtailing Political and Civil Rights in Ethiopia,* Review of African Political Economy, Vol. 36, No. 120, 193-207, 2009, p. 195

base its foundation on a pan Ethiopian national agenda. The UEDF maintained an ethnic composition formed out of ethnic based opposition groups.[214]

For the first time since the holding of multiparty elections in 1995 the opposition was able to win a substantial number of parliamentary seats, 174 out of a total of 547 in 2005 as opposed to 12 seats in 2000. The CUD won 109 and the UEDF 52 seats, but this election free as it was during the campaign period, the post-election period was followed by violence and instability and government crackdown upon opposition parties, civil society and the media. The two coalition parties refused to accept the election results, which was followed by public protests against rigged election especially in the capital. The government took swift measures against the protesters killing 193 civilians and imprisoning thousands of opposition party members and supporters. The CUD leaders who refused to take up their seats in parliament and other members of civil society and journalists were charged over crimes of treason and inciting genocide and sentenced to lengthy prison terms but released in 2007 upon presidential pardon.[215]

The post 2005 election violence and the government's harsh measures against the opposition as well as the media and civil society by the passing of a number of restrictive legislations has resulted in a weak and stifled political environment. As a result, during the last parliamentary election held in 2010 the opposition was only able to win one seat in parliament. This brings us to the common character of ethnic minority regimes that makes them authoritarian resting their power on an unrestricted use of force, which as the forgoing chapters have shown is a hallmark of the ethnic minority regimes in Syria and Rwanda.

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[214] *Ibid*, 194. See also, Asnake Kefale, *The Unmaking of Opposition Coalitions and the Challenge of Democratization in Ethiopia (1991-2011),* Journal of Eastern African Studies, Vol. 5, No. 4, 681-701, 2011, pp. 689-690.

[215] John Abbink, *Discomfiture of Democracy? The 2005 Election in Ethiopia and Its Aftermath*, African Affairs, Vol. 105, Issue 419, 173-199, 2006, p. 186. See also, Aalen and Tronvol, *Supra note 213*, p. 197.

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