

Mekuria Bulcha

Genocidal Violence in the Making of Nation and State in Ethiopia

Abstract

Based on a qualitative historical-sociological investigation of the incidents of mass-killings that have been registered during the last one hundred and fifty years, this study concludes that both the unification of the Abyssinian state between 1850s and 1870s and the creation of the Ethiopian empire state during last quarter of the nineteenth century were accomplished through wars that were clearly genocidal. Though their aims were building a state, there were differences between the types of state and nation envisaged by the two 'categories' of rulers. The attempts of the nineteenth century rulers were to purge the Abyssinian state of non-Abyssinian religious and ethnic communities they perceived as 'alien' in order to build an exclusive Abyssinian state and a homogenous Abyssinian nation. The nationalism of late nineteenth century rulers, as represented by its architect Menelik II, was expansionist. Abandoning the idea of Abyssinian homogeneity, they opted for hegemony over other peoples they had conquered in the heyday of the European scramble for Africa. The result was a multinational empire state. This study shows that policies used to build and maintain the empire state were implemented using methods that were ethnically oppressive, immensely exploitative, and genocidal. This had triggered ethnic nationalism that has been at logger-heads with the 'official' nationalism of the dominant ethnic group. Moreover, the conflict between the two brands of nationalism had increased in tandem with rising ethnic consciousness and intensified since the mid 1970s as a consequence the policies of the Dergue. In order to legitimate the state, control dissent, and stay in power the ruling elites built a huge military apparatus and used retributive genocidal killings. The study confirms that there is clear nexus between authoritarian rule, man-made famines, and genocide in Ethiopia. It suggests that there are several warning signs showing that genocide is in the making today. Taking the international context into account, the study indicates that the role of some Western states has been abetting rather than deterring genocide in Ethiopia.

Introduction

It is reported that, during the colonial and post-colonial periods, genocides have occurred in a number of African countries (Kuper, 1981; Chalk & Jonassohn, 1990; Fein, 1993, 2002; Hendricks, 2002). Fred Hendricks notes that 'in South Africa the San people, who had refused to be subjugated to outside rule, were systematically exterminated' (2002: 234). In its former colony of South West Africa (Namibia), Germany also used a genocidal colonial policy aiming at the extermination of the indigenous Herero and Nama peoples who were opposed to German colonialism (Chalk and Jonassohn, 1990: 230-248; Hendricks, 2002). Hendricks (*ibid*: 234) argues that, while the purpose of colonial genocides was to eliminate threats to external domination, 'post-colonial genocides were structured by a different set of internal and external forces'. In other words, attempts to forge and legitimate new states were reasons for many horrendous atrocities.

While genocides committed in Africa are associated with colonialism or explained as a consequence of consolidating the post-colonial African state, Ethiopia, which according to most writers had avoided European colonial rule, is mentioned along with Rwanda and other African countries as a 'genocidal state' in the works of many scholars (Rittner, Roth & Smith, 2002, Hendricks, 2002, Harff, 2002). For the last thirteen years, thousands of the officials and functionaries of the former regime have been in prison accused of genocide and crimes against humanity. Paradoxically, it is maintained that Ethiopia is one of the countries with an 'active' genocide risk today (Harff, 2002:128-127; Stanton, 2004). At the International Association of Genocide Scholars' Conference held in 2003 at the National University of Ireland, Galway, a panel on Ethiopia discussed the ongoing violation of human rights in the country, stressing its resemblance with genocidal killings that had occurred in other parts of the world. The panel concluded that the motives and preconditions for genocide are apparent in Ethiopia today (Hameso, 2003; Hassen, 2003, Abdulkadir, 2003). A recent report by Genocide Watch (2004) also accused the current Ethiopian government of committing genocidal killings against the Anuak of the Gambella regional state in 2003 and 2004. However, apart from a few conference papers and pieces of information from international and local human rights organisations, there are no proper studies on genocide or genocidal killings in Ethiopia.

The purpose of this article is to initiate structured studies and debates on mass violence in Ethiopia. I will discuss genocidal-violence in relation to the process of state and 'nation' building in the history of Ethiopia. I will assess the intent and magnitude of mass-killings that were committed by different regimes since the middle of the nineteenth century. My aim is to identify the key factors precipitating state-sponsored mass violence and explore the consequences of genocide and genocidal killings not only for the society whose

members were the victims but also for the perpetrators' society or Ethiopia as a whole. The role of external factors in abetting or constraining the violation of human rights and mass violence in Ethiopia will be also briefly discussed.

The method used in the study is qualitative, and the empirical data are gleaned from published and unpublished historical documents, and reports compiled by human rights organisations. Sociological theories of genocide inform the analysis. The study is carried out with the following humanist perspectives. Firstly, I share the widespread consensus that we must develop our knowledge and understanding of processes of organised mass violence in order to develop strategies of prevention. I also concur with the proposition that the 'scientific study of genocide is not a matter of morbid fascination or mystic divination but of the need to assert the historical reality of collective crime. Only by such a confrontation can we at least locate moral responsibility for the state crimes even if we cannot always prevent future genocides from take place' (Horowitz, 1997: 258). I am aware of the fact that accusing a person or a state for genocide is a serious matter. I also consider taking lives is too a serious crime to be ignored or overlooked. Having said that, I will leave to other researchers the responsibility to confirm or reject the conclusions I have drawn.

Genocide Defined

Genocide is a violation of the most fundamental human right of the individual, namely right to life. Consequently it is the gravest of all crimes. The sociologist Jack Porter argued that 'The study of genocide is important because ultimately so many sociological concerns are related to it'. These sociological concerns, according to Porter, include 'the process of war, and colonialism, the experience of death and extreme deprivation, the meaning of survival and resistance, and the very nature of society itself' (Porter, 1982: 4).

But how do we define genocide? What types of mass-killings are categorised as genocide? Under what conditions are genocides committed? Based on the works of other scholars, I will try to answer these questions before I proceed to discuss the recurrent mass-killings in Ethiopia.

First coined by Raphael Lemkin (1944), a Polish lawyer and survivor of the Holocaust, to explain Hitler's population policy against European Jews, the concept genocide is now understood as an extermination of a people or a community by mass murder. The objective of genocide can include both the social disintegration and the biological destruction of target groups (Fein, 1993: 9). According to the UN Convention on Genocide (UNCG, Article II, 1948) 'Genocide is any of the following acts committed with the intent to destroy, in whole or part, a national, ethnic, racial or religious group, as such:

(a) Killing members of the group; (b) causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; (c) deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; (d)

imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group, and (e) forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.

The UN definition is criticised by scholars as too narrow for not including politicide, the deliberate annihilation of political groups and social classes, as well as ethnocide or the destruction of a culture without killing its bearers (Chalk & Jonassohn, 1990: 11, 23). Consequently, several other definitions have been suggested to supplement the UN definition. The sociologist Helen Fein defines genocide as ‘sustained purposeful action by a perpetrator to physically destroy a collectivity directly or indirectly, through interdiction of the biological and social reproduction of group members, sustained regardless of the surrender or lack of threat offered by the victim’ (Fein 1993: 24). For Jack N. Porter, ‘Genocide is the deliberate destruction, in whole or in part, by government or its agents, of a racial, sexual, religious, tribal, ethnic or political minority. It may involve not only mass murder, but also starvation, forced deportation, and political, economic, and biological subjugation’ (Porter 1982: 12). Chalk and Kurt Jonassohn (1990: 23) define genocide as ‘a form of one-sided mass killing in which a state or other authority intends to destroy a group, as that group and membership in it are defined by the perpetrator’.

The goal of state-sponsored mass killing is not always or in all places to kill of the whole ethnic or religious group, etc.; often the intent is to ‘maim’ by destroying parts of them, in order to make the group dysfunctional as a collective. Therefore, there many scholars who use the concept of genocidal killings to denote actions perpetrated by states to debilitate a political or religious community or an ethnic group (Kuper, 1981; Fein, 1990; Markusen & Mirkovic, 2003). Justifying the use of such a concept, Huttenbach (1988:294 cited in Markusen & Mirkovic, 2003:187) stated that ‘In the process of categorising acts of genocide, a secondary category ought to be included under the rubric of “genocidal” indicative of events that can be clearly identified in character though the crime was not consummated in toto’. In this article the concept genocidal killing is used in that sense.

A Crime of the State

It is generally accepted that genocide primarily is a crime of the state. It is instigated and often perpetrated by agents of the state. Since it has access to the technology and may possess the organisational means for carrying out systematic mass murder, the modern state has, indeed, been the greatest perpetrator of genocide. However, the means used to commit genocide vary from state to state depending on the technological and organisational resources they can command. As the 1994 mass killing of the Tutsis in Rwanda, where the machete was used as the main weapon, indicated, the organisational efficiency of the state can be a deadly instrument even in the absence of technological sophistication (Prunier, 1995). Depending on their resource bases, authori-

tarian regimes are capable of perpetrating genocide using the most sophisticated technology as well the cheapest means – famine.

In *Taking Lives: Genocide and State Power*, I. L. Horowitz (1997: 24, 32) notes that genocide involves selective and systematic rather than individual and random killing. The human objects selected are chosen ‘anthropologically’ – on the basis of religion, race, ethnicity or other ascribed features. Whether states may or may not have elaborate plans when committing mass murder, a genocide is executed most often only partially. Though the intention of the Nazis was a ‘final solution’ to a purported race problem, even the Holocaust, despite the technology and rational planning with which it was executed, was not total. As Helen Fein (1993:18) put it aptly, in most other cases the victimisers do not have the capacity or may not even have the intention to kill all of the target group’s members. Therefore, ‘it is important to emphasize that to study genocide is to examine not simply the successful liquidation of entire peoples but also attempts at liquidation’ (Horowitz, 1997:265).

The Genocidal Process

There are three general conditions under which a genocidal process can take place. These are colonial conquest and occupation, formation of a new social order based on a particular ideology, and shifts of power under conditions of deep social cleavage. These conditions can overlap in some situations. This, for example, is the case of the history of genocidal violence in Ethiopia.

One of the pioneering sociologists of genocide studies, the late Leo Kuper, noted that mass killings occur at different stages of the colonial process. The initial stage of conquest involves mass slaughter, usually of combatants. In other cases the initial campaigns of conquest are followed by the mass killings of non-combatants (Kuper, 1981). Horowitz (1997: 22) suggests that one of the fundamental characteristics of nineteenth century European imperialism was its systematic destruction of groups or communities outside the ‘mother country’. He gives the decimation of the Zulu by British troops, the Dutch-run slave trade, and the depopulation of Congo by Belgians, as examples of this form of colonial genocide. Chalk and Jonassohn (1990) have discussed several cases of genocides perpetrated on indigenous peoples in Africa, the Americas and Australia by European colonial settlers. In the past, colonisers generally took for granted that they had the right to *Lebensraum* – space for expansion – at the cost of those they considered ‘inferior’ and could annihilate or subjugate and assimilate. Where and when the indigenous peoples or ethnic groups were seen as hindrance to a colonial project there was often nothing to prevent their destruction (Jack Porter, 1982: 14). In the view of colonialists, space was needed for the progress of humanity and history – that is their humanity and history. Inhabited by a ‘sub-human race’ lacking history, the territories to be colonised were perceived as ‘empty spaces’.

Secondly, the genocidal process is also instigated when a group with a new model or vision of reality takes power of the state and utilises state resources to establish and consolidate a new social order, or revitalise a threatened one using coercion. Whenever a group – ethnic, class or religious – is seen to pose a threat to this vision of reality, unbridled violence is used against it. Since the end justifies the means, normative and legal constraints are often ignored or eroded and genocidal processes are unleashed. This may mean purposeful collective or selective murder of members of a target group(s). The Armenian genocide of 1914-1918 (see for example Hovannisian, 1986) and Cambodian genocide of the mid-1970s were two examples of such mass murder (Chalk & Jonassohn, 1990:398-407). The ‘disappearances’ of leftist political activists in Argentina in the 1980s was an example of selective murder.

It has been argued that whenever a revolution occurs in a situation where most social institutions have been undermined and the identity of the political majority in question threatened, the tendency among members of the dominant majority is often to blame minorities for the problem. Quite often the blaming suggests their elimination in order to reinvigorate the ‘life’, identity, etc. of ‘the people’, ‘the nation’ or ‘the race’. ‘The Young Turks movement before and during the First World War attempted to establish power and authority in order to fulfil its ideal of forging a new Turkish identity and destiny’ (Porter, 1982: 13) as the Ottoman Empire collapsed. The Armenian, Greek and Assyrian Christian minorities in Asia Minor were considered a hindrance to the realisation of the Turkish state and identity that the Young Turks had in mind and were singled out and deported or massacred (see for example Hovannisian, 1986).

Thirdly, potential genocidal processes may emerge under conditions of substantial shifts in power. This is particularly the case in pluralist societies with deep socio-cultural or religious cleavages (Kuper, 1981). Given the hierarchical ethnic structure of such polities, struggles over political and economic power often develop into mass violence when a dominated ethnic group attempts to seize power while a dominating ethnic group is trying to retain it. This was the case in Burundi in 1961 as well as in 1972, when thousands of Hutus were massacred by the Tutsi to maintain their political dominance (Wingert, 1974). A similar dynamic was also at work in Rwanda in 1994, when, in an attempt to maintain their dominant position, the Hutu killed hundreds of thousands of the Tutsis (Prunier, 1995). The Tutsi killed mainly the educated class with the aim of depriving the Hutu of leadership, while it seems that the Hutus’ aim was to exterminate the Tutsi minority in toto. In the case of Burundi, genocide was used by a dominant minority to terrify and pacify a dominated but feared majority, while in Rwanda it was used by majority to mete out collective punishment to a once dominant minority as a response to challenges to the structure of domination (Newbury, 1999).

There are also elements of ideology, myth, or articulated social goals used by perpetrators to justify the selection and destruction of victims. The victims are defined as ‘enemies of the people’ and devalued as inferior or sub-humans who are outside the moral universe of the perpetrators. In other words, they are to be exterminated to prepare the way for the perpetrators’ vision of society or state to become reality (Fein, 1993; Staub, 1989).

Based on a comparative historical survey published in their important work, *History and Sociology of Genocide*, Frank Chalk and Kurt Jonassohn (1990) distinguish the following four major reasons for which states perpetrate genocides: (a) to eliminate a real or potential threat; (b) to spread terror among real or potential enemies; (c) to acquire economic wealth; or (d) to implement a belief, a theory or an ideology. These are analytic categories and one or several of them may overlap in the explanation of a particular genocidal episode. By and large, this is also the case with the recurrent genocidal killings discussed in this article.

Background to Recurrent State-Organised Mass Violence in Ethiopia

The present state of Ethiopia was constituted of two parts that are referred to by scholars as ‘the north’ or the traditional Abyssinian state, and ‘the south’ – the regions conquered and annexed by the north. The terms north and south refer not exactly to geography but rather to culture and power relations. Geographically, the north refers to the central part of northern Ethiopia that is inhabited mainly by the Abyssinians – the Amhara and Tigrean peoples. It constituted, by and large, the traditional state of Abyssinia. As pointed out by a historian, the Habesha (Abyssinians) saw themselves as a people inhabiting a historically and geographically identifiable region, sharing a common linguistic origin (Geez), a common religion in the Tewahdo or Orthodox Church, a mythically derived common cultural frame of reference best articulated in the *Kebre Negast* (‘Glory of Kings’) and a mode of production that, despite regional and local variations, was essentially the same (Tareke, 1996: 36).

The indigenous peoples in the south speak mainly Cushitic languages and have different religious faiths, including Christianity, Islam and traditional religion. Though they are given phenotypical and sometimes even racial characteristics in the writings of scholars (see for example Ullendorff, 1969), the differences between the Abyssinians and these peoples are cultural rather than ‘racial’.

As mentioned above, the two groups were brought together when the north conquered the south at the end of the nineteenth century. The conquest not only coincided with, but was also influenced by, the European colonisation of Africa (Marcus, 1969; Keller, 1986; Jalata, 1993, Tareke, 1996: 26). So also was the

behaviour of the conquerors towards their subjects. As Gebru Tareke (ibid: 71), himself a northerner, noted,

Exhibiting different manners and habits, the new rulers were not without the pretensions to a 'civilizing mission'. They tried much like the European colonizers of their times, to justify the exploitability of the conquered peoples by stressing the historical inevitability and moral validity of occupation.

Explaining the genesis of ethnic nationalism among southerners, Keller notes that the Oromo, for example, consider the conquest 'as a colonial experience, not least because of its coincidence with the European scramble for Africa', but also 'the vast majority of the Oromo came to see the Amhara and the state they represented as colonialists, bent on exploiting and stripping them of their culture' (Keller, 1995: 625-626).

While conquest and colonisation may explain the genesis of much of the present socio-cultural, and socio-political cleavages that characterise the relations between the north and the south since the creation of the modern Ethiopian state, it should be noted here that the history of conflict between the Semitic-speaking Abyssinians and the Cushitic-speaking peoples predates the conquest. Historians have argued that the history of Ethiopia in the last 500 years is essentially the history of the relationship between two great antagonists – the Abyssinians, particularly the Amhara, on the one hand, and the Cushitic-speaking peoples, particularly the Oromo, on the other (Tibebu, 1995: 17; Hassen 1990; Asma Giyorgis, 1987). In the past, for the Abyssinians, the Oromo were 'heathens and enemies fit only for massacre or enslavement' (Perham, 1969: 300). This was not just a matter of belief or ideological discourse, but what had often been practised. In his *History of the Galla and the Kingdom of Shawa*, the Amhara historian, Asma Giyorgis, himself a Shawa Amhara, wrote for example, that Sahle Selassie who ruled Shawa for thirty years launched expeditions against the Oromo three times a year until his death.

The deep-seated animosities between the two peoples were reflected not only in the many wars fought between them, but also in images they painted discursively about each other. For centuries, the Oromo were depicted in Abyssinian historical and religious literature in dehumanising terms (Hassen, 1990: 1-3; Sorenson, 1993; Tibebu, 1995: 16-18). A student of Ethiopian history writes that since the time of Abba Bahrey, the Ethiopian cleric who wrote *History of the Galla* in 1593, 'the purported brutality of Oromo manners has been magnified and embroidered with grotesque distortions of history, which depicts the Oromo as "barbarian hordes who brought darkness and ignorance in their train"' (Hassen, 1990: 2). The negative image of the peoples of south, who were often generally referred to as 'Galla' (heathen), was used to justify their treatment not only during the actual conquest but long after the colonial rule was consolidated.

I will present a brief account of violence that devastated many Muslim communities in the process of the unification of the Abyssinian state in the

north in the nineteenth century in order to indicate its connection and continuity in the atrocities committed in the creation and maintenance of the Ethiopian Empire state later.

Ethnic Cleansing to Rebuild a Christian Abyssinian Nation: 1855-1968

The modern history of Ethiopia started, arguably, with the exploits of a man named Kasa Haylu who became the Emperor of Abyssinia in 1865, taking the royal name Tewodros II. The reign of Emperor Tewodros (1855-1868) is glorified in Ethiopia as an era of reform and change (Rubenson, 1976). Although historians regard him as the man who inaugurated the modern history of Ethiopia (Zewde, 1991:27), he tried to unite only the north, that is the traditional Abyssinian state, that had fallen into its regional or provincial components of Gojjam, Amhara, Tigray and Shawa during a chaotic period called the 'zemene mesafint' or 'Era of Princes' in Ethiopian history. Traditionally, the three regions were ruled by feudal lords who were vassals of the 'negusa-negast' ('king of kings' or emperor). During the 'zemene mesafint' that lasted from 1769 to 1855, the emperors were confined more or less to the capital city, Gondar, and were reduced to mere puppets in the hands of the warlords.

As a unifier of the Abyssinian state, Tewodros was regarded by generations of Ethiopian rulers and intelligentsia as a national icon. He is considered as the hero in and of Ethiopian history. However, while taking him as a hero and a model leader, the Ethiopian historical and political discourse tends to ignore the fact that 'Tewodros is one of the most violent of all monarchs – probably the most violent' (Crummey, 1971: 107). As I will describe in a moment, he literally hacked thousands of people to death. That such a figure is considered a national hero among the ruling elite and intelligentsia says a lot about the values underpinning the dominant political culture as well as the related problem of the violation of human rights by Ethiopia's ruling regimes.

Tewodros, who managed to become an important figure during the zemene mesafint, had no genealogical claim to royal titles. He started his career as a 'shifita' (bandit) leader in the lowlands bordering on the Sudan. As success in banditry and battles against rivals helped him attract many followers, he fought his way up to the Abyssinian capital, where he was crowned 'king of kings' or 'negusa-negast'. He chose the royal name of Tewodros to exploit a myth about a messianic king of that name who 'would appear to destroy Islam and conquer Jerusalem' (Trimingham, 1976: 117), and 'reign in Abyssinia for a thousand years' (Bruce, cited in Levine, 1974). It was also believed that during the reign of the messianic king Abyssinia would enjoy 'an era of peace, joy, and piety' (Bruce, 1805; Levine, 1974: 157). The myth was effective and Tewodros was recognised as a legitimate leader and emperor.

Leaders who ‘act out messianic fantasies’ or propagate ideologies of manifest destiny tend often to blame scapegoats for problems facing the society. And scapegoats are groups that are often easily distinguished from victimisers. Tewodros found scapegoats for the problems of the Abyssinian state and society in the northern Oromos – those of Wallo, Yejju and Raya. However, the main target of ‘the violence of Tewodros’, to borrow Donald Crummey’s (1971) words, were the first two groups.

The Wallo and Yejju Oromos were not only in conflict with the Abyssinian state since the sixteenth century, but also were influential in internal Abyssinian politics. Firstly their geographical location affected the emperors’ control over their Shawan vassals. Since Wallo separated the southern Abyssinian province from the rest, the emperors whose seat was Gondar in the north often had to negotiate with the largely autonomous rulers of Wallo for access to Shawa. Secondly, the Abyssinian kings and warlords often enlisted Oromo fighters for internal Abyssinian power struggles. Thirdly, men and women from a Yejju Oromo ruling family were even able to dominate the political scene in the Abyssinian court at Gondar during the Era of Princes. Although most of the Oromos who had played significant leadership roles in Gondar were Abyssinianised – Orthodox Christians who spoke Amharic – it seems that their Muslim background did not endear them to the Abyssinians (Bruce, 1805: 96-146). It is plausible to argue that, whether they were Christians or Muslims, the northern Oromo ‘were seen as a rough, sharp-edged bone in throat of the Geez [Abyssinian] civilization, tempted to choke it, but preferring to bleed it’ (Tibebu, 1995: 16). Indeed, despite some degree of inter-marriage, fear and prejudice characterised the relations between the two peoples.

According to sociologists, there are three general characteristics that mark relations between perpetrators of mass killings and communities to which its victims belong. Groups or communities from which victims come (a) are alien or perceived as alien by perpetrators, (b) they are seen as unassimilable either for racial or religious reasons, and (c) their elimination either removes a threat (real or symbolic) or opens up opportunities (or both) to members of the perpetrator group (Fein, 1993:34). This was also more or less how Tewodros perceived the Oromo when he came to power. Upon his ascent to the Abyssinian throne in 1855, he vowed to punish and drive them out because they were ‘intruders’ and ‘the spearhead of a Muslim attempt to take over Ethiopia [Abyssinia]’ (Crummey, 1971: 188). He appealed ‘to the latent anti-Galla [Oromo] feelings of the Amhara’ for support in his ‘war of extermination’ (Crummey, 1971: 111). His very first campaign against the Wallo Oromo began with ‘terrorism; both by mutilation of prisoners of war and by destruction of property’ (Zanab cited Crummey, *ibid.*). In 1855, Plowden, the British Consul in Abyssinia, reported to his home office: ‘The King is now I hear

wasting Warraimano (a Wallo district) with fire and sword' (cited in Crummey, *ibid*: 111-112).

It is impossible to estimate how many people were mutilated or killed during the thirteen years he was on the throne. However, scattered information indicates that those who were mutilated alone were counted in thousands. For example, Zanab, a court historian and witness to Tewodros's cruelty, noted that during one campaign in 1859 the emperor cut off the hands and feet of about 1000 men. He mutilated 777 of them just on one occasion and in one place. Several episodes of mass killings were reported during the period, including the extermination of peasants who showed their allegiance to their local leaders (Zanab cited in *ibid*: 118, fn. 48).

Claiming victory over the Oromo, and pleading for support for his crusade against the Turks, he wrote in 1862 to Queen Victoria of England and Emperor Napoleon III of France saying:

Since the kings of Ethiopia, my father, in times past had forgotten their Creator, he withdrew his Spirit from them and deprived them of their kingdoms, which he gave to the Galla and the Turks. At my birth, God picked me up from the dust, gave me strength, raised me up, and by divine power I have chased away the Galla. The Turks, however, resist the will of God, and since they refuse to surrender the land of my fathers, I am going out to fight them (letter published in Rubenson, et al. 1994: 203).

Scholars have stated that in order to ascertain whether a mass killing is an act of genocide or not, it is important to examine what perpetrators say, especially before they commit it (Fein, 1993). What they say reflects their intention or an ideology legitimating their acts. Though Tewodros could have not committed a full-fledged genocide against the northern Oromo, there is no doubt that his intent was, as the quotation above indicates, 'ethnic cleansing'. The Oromo and the Turks (meaning the Ottomans who controlled the Red Sea coast) were to be purged from his dominions in order to restore its lost glory. However, notwithstanding his many campaigns, '[he] never controlled Wallo closely and even seriously threatened the activities of the rebels there... By 1862 he may have resorted to mass deportations of the Wallo to western Ethiopia, still without significantly resolving the problem. What his Wallo campaign established was, above all, 'terrorism as a major instrument of control' (Jewish Records, NS, no. 28 and 29, 1863, cited in Crummey, 1971: 118-119). The intent to exterminate the northern Oromo was unsuccessful because of Tewodros's lack of resources and the fierce resistance he met.

Generally, genocidal killings tend to spill over, affecting people who actually belong to the perpetrators' group and hence may have not have been targeted in the first place. As proposed by Ben Kiernan, 'In practice, genocidal regimes also tend to be both domestically repressive, even of their own "favored" ethnic community... They usually commit both crimes against humanity and war crimes, and often ethnic cleansing as well, along with genocide' (Kiernan, 2002: 141-142). And indeed Tewodros's terror was not

limited to the destruction or ethnic cleansing of Muslims or Oromos. Seen in a human rights perspective, his thirteen-year rule was a reign of terror that caused the death of tens of thousands of Abyssinians. What started as a campaign against the Wallo Oromo developed into indiscriminate terror against all types of real or imagined enemies, including the clergy of the Abyssinian Orthodox Church (Zewde, 1991:35).

According to Tekla-Tsadik Mekuriya's *The History of Ethiopia: From Tewodros to Haile Selassie* (1969: 30), 'having created a new type of punishment, he burnt men, women and children, guilty and innocent in *saqala bet* [wooden buildings] where he had them locked up. Ordinary wayfarers and peasants working their lands were rounded up and massacred'. Here it should be mentioned that historians have recorded many Amharic ballads and dirges depicting the gruesome killings that Tewodros had committed. The ballads grieved the fates of men who were deprived limbs and life, the of the numerous women who were turned into widows and about those who died from thirst because of Tewodros's wanton cruelty (see *ibid*: 16-18, 29-37).

Though he was a cruel man, it seems that he was not in any sense 'mad', although his erratic behaviour during the latter part of his rule may suggest the possibility. There is ample evidence indicating that his acts were purposeful and that he was particularly consistent in his violence against the Wallo and Yejju Oromos. According to Crummey (1971: 111), 'From the beginning, Tewodros's treatment of the Galla [Oromo] in general and the Wallo in particular, differed from his treatment of the Amhara'. The fixation of Tewodros with Wallo indicates the intent and determination with which he pursued the destruction of those he saw as the ideological enemies of the Christian state. Although his government was facing serious threats from other provinces, he concentrated his energy on Wallo. Crummey (1971: 117-118) has written:

Following the urging of Plowden [British consul in Abyssinia], in February 1859, Tewodros moved his camp to Wadla, a district of Begemder, more strategically placed to deal both with Wallo and the Tigré rebels. But before long he was back in Wallo, and this time his campaign was really terrible. As his army advanced, it looted, burned and killed prisoners, while Wallo resistance took the form of retreat. What the king did not demolish, the Wallo themselves destroyed in scorched earth policy, effectively designed to deprive the royal army food and fodder. Mass mutilation took place, while many children were seized and forcibly removed from their homes.

Crummey argued that because he was so 'obsessed with Wallo, a province of limited strategic value, [he] paid an unjustifiable high price in pacifying it'. According to Crummey the Wallo did not constitute the major threat to Tewodros's power, as the activities of other rebellious groups in the Christian Amhara and Tigrean districts did (*ibid.*: 115). However, for Tewodros 'the Wallo Gallas are still worse, for they want to make all Abyssinia Muhammadan' (Kienzlen, cited in Crummey, *ibid*: 117). The Christian rebels,

being in his view a lesser evil, he deemed them less threatening as they posed no threat to the nation.

Bahru Zewde (1991:33) maintains that 'before his sense of justice fell to his indiscriminate violence, he was severe towards any of soldiers caught looting. Yet, when Wallo rebels killed his night guard and stole some mules, he gave his soldiers permission to loot the locality in retribution'. There are indications that even in the Amhara heartland of Gojjam and Gondar, districts that were identified with Oromo settlements were affected (Tibebu, 1995:38). This seems to have been, for example, the fate of Macha, a district north of Lake Tana (Zanab cited in Crummey, 1971: 112). According to Tekle-Tsadik Mekuriya, on one occasion, he imprisoned and condemned about 400 men to die of hunger and thirst with the allegation that they had plotted against him. Unlike the Wallo who as Muslims were blamed as proxies of foreign Islamic powers intending to destroy a Christian nation, these were assimilated into the Abyssinian culture, spoke Amharic and were Orthodox Christians.

In addition, Tewodros's Shawan campaign of 1855 provides evidence of his intentions of destroying the Oromo as an ethno-national category. While treating the Amhara who had rebelled against his rule with consideration and respect, he decimated the Oromo living in the same region, though the resistance they had offered was scarcely distinguishable from that of the Amhara (ibid: 112).

Historically, dispersion was one of the methods used by communal groups to eliminate their enemies after defeating them in battles. Dispersion was by selling them into slavery or deporting defeated enemies from their homeland, which prevented them from recouping their losses and again pose a threat (Chalk & Jonassohn, 1990: 32-33). Deportation was also one of the methods he used to eliminate the northern Oromo. Thus Tewodros even authorised his soldiers to enslave the Muslims of Wallo (Zewde, 1991:34), or as stated by the German missionary, Theophil Waldmeier, 'allowed to be distributed to his soldiers in lieu of pay' (cited in Pankhurst, 1968: 93) contradicting an official ban he had put on the slave trade in his realm.

It seems that Tewodros vented his anger on the Oromo even for things that non-Oromos did at his court. This was, for example, the case when Shawa's crown prince, Menelik, escaped from a prison attached to Tewodros's fort at Maqdela in 1865. Though it was planned by Shawan prisoners with the connivance of Tewodros's elder son Meshesha, who had long been out of favour of his father, the Wallo paid a 'terrible price for Menelik's escape' (Prouty, 1986: 6-7). Soon after he was informed about the escape, Tewodros took 25 Wallo hostages, 'had their hands and feet amputated and the bodies thrown over the precipice to die in agony'. As stated by Prouty (ibid.) and Darkwah (1975:53, fn. 55) it is indeed remarkable that the Shawa Amhara prisoners 'who remained behind at Maqdela should have remained unmolested while the Wallo prisoners were executed'.

It should be noted also that even during last hours before his death, Tewodros was killing prisoners from Wallo while releasing others, including the English. It was noted by a historian that ‘He... released the English prisoners, Shawa prisoners and Gojjam prisoners... He threw the rest of the Ethiopian Balabbat and Wallo Balabbatoch [nobility], who numbered more than 500, down the precipice of Maqdala after having shot each of them with a bullet’ (Asma Giyorgis 1905/1987: 599).

The documented pattern of onslaughts perpetrated by Tewodros against the northern Oromo, preceded by the statement of his intention ‘to throw the “Galla intruders” out of Ethiopia [Abyssinia]’ (Tibebu, 1995: 41) in order to restore her glorious past, suggests acts of genocidal killing and ethnic cleansing. Inferring from the narratives about his destructive and discriminatory acts, it is plausible to conclude that both deep-seated fear and deep-seated hatred led to the Emperor’s genocidal killings of the northern Oromo.

Paradoxically Tewodros became at last a de facto prisoner in the midst of the people he attempted to destroy or drive away. Thus when a British rescue force arrived at Maqdela in 1868 to free British citizens and of several other European countries imprisoned by Tewodros, he was deserted by most of his soldiers and was confined to his isolated fortress on an amba – a flat mountain top-surrounded by Oromo enemies. According to historians (Tekle Tsadik Mekuriya, 1969:35; Rubenson, 1976), when Tewodros realised it was futile to resist the 32,000-man strong British force, he tried to escape from Maqdela but was unable to do so because the only exit from the fortress was blocked by the forces of Queen Warqitu, the ruler of Wallo. Her son was one of the many prisoners whom he had had mutilated and cast over the edge of the Maqdela cliff to die. As Flad (1887), one of the Europeans imprisoned at Maqdela, articulated the situation, Tewodros ‘was already a king without land and almost without people [when he] ended his life by committing suicide’ (cited in Rubenson, 1976: 285).

A Tigrean warlord named Kassa Mercha became Emperor Yohannes IV of Abyssinia-cum Ethiopia in 1872. Yohannes was a Christian fundamentalist and he was fanatically intolerant of Islam. The ‘thrust of his repression was directed against Wallo, the same province which had earlier been the main target of Tewodros’s fury’ (Zewde, 1991: 48). However, he knew that Tewodros’s policy of ethnic cleansing was counter-productive. Therefore, he adopted a policy of forced religious conversion and cultural assimilation. In a decree issued in 1878 at Boru Meda in the middle the Wallo territory, he declared: ‘Now let all, whether Muslim or Galla [pagan] believe on the name of Jesus Christ! Be baptized! If you wish to live in peace preserving your belongings, become Christians’ (Caulk, 1972: 24). The policy was not confined to Wallo. The Emperor passed orders to his vassals in Gojjam and Shawa to implement the decree in their respective provinces without any delay.

To implement the policy of religious conversion and cultural assimilation, the emperor immediately set out building churches, and baptising the northern Oromo by force as well as ‘exterminating those who refused’ (Asma Giyorgis, 1905/1987: 689). As a court historian expressed it, ‘the Muslims were offered only the unenviable choice of leaving Yohannes’s dominions if they would not convert’ (Abba Garima cited in Caulk, *ibid*: 28). In other words, they were given a choice between deportation and ethnocide.

The Muslims’ response to Yohannes’s religious policy was varied, and included acquiescence, flight, and resistance. Notwithstanding the threat of death, it seems that a small minority of the population was acquiescent and accepted conversion. Amongst them were many prominent members the ruling families in Wallo and Yeju. Apparently a smaller number who chose exile to forced conversion fled to different territories in north-east Africa. According to historical sources, many fled to Matamma, in the Sudan in the west, to join the Mahdists; and others to Gurageland and Jimma in the south, and Hararge in the southeast – the last three were Muslim states that were conquered and incorporated in Ethiopia later in the nineteenth century. Tekle-Tsadik Mekuriya (1990: 200) maintains that siding with the Mahdists, those who fled to the Sudan had participated in the Battle of Matamma where Yohannes was killed in 1889. The majority of the population went against the imperial decree; they stayed at home resisting forced conversion.

As his policy of ethnocide met resistance, Yohannes resorted to physical annihilation of the recalcitrant. The records indicate that he had marched several times into the Wallo country to subjugate and baptise the population. There are no estimates of how many people were killed during the many campaigns in which the emperor’s vassal, Menelik of Shawa, also participated. The historian Asma Giyorgis, who, at that time was in the service of Menelik, wrote:

Human blood was sheld [sic] in every river... Menelik... asked [Yohannes]: ‘Janhoy [Your Majesty or Emperor], will God be pleased if we exterminate our people by forcing them to take Holy Communion?’ Janhoy [Emperor] is said to have replied: ‘I shall avenge the blood of Ethiopia [Christian Abyssinia]. It was also by force of sword and fire that Grañ islamized Ethiopia. Who will, if we do not, found and strengthen the faith of Marqos [St. Mark]?’ And this was told as a glorious thing by the contemporaries... Yohannes spent the rainy season in Wallo offering Holy Communion, exterminating those who refused and constructing a church at Boru Meda (1905/1987: 689).

As noted by a social anthropologist, since the sixteenth century, fears of Islam and of the Oromo have dominated the political consciousness of the Amhara ruling elite, and ‘he thought of the two in combination has been a recurring nightmare’ (Baxter, 1983: 132). The proposition is supported by a historian who argued that ‘In the collective memory of the post-sixteenth-century Ge’ez [Abyssinian] civilization, the “barbarian infidel” is pictured as a two-head hydra: one “Galla”, and another Muslim’ (Tibebu, 1995: 17). Thus,

Yohannes's association of Grañ, the sixteenth century Harari leader who invaded Abyssinia, with his campaigns against the northern Oromo, was to activate his audience's Christian nationalist sentiments.

Notwithstanding their resistance to forced conversion, it is interesting to note here that the Wallo, Yejju and Raya/Azabo (hereafter Raya) Oromos are the most liberal people one may come across in Northeast Africa (Wylde, 1901: 383; cf. Isenberg and Krapf, 1843: 323-324). As individuals they easily abandoned one religion for another. Inter-marriage between Muslim and Christian Walloyee (Wallo people) was not only very common, but also the wife and husband often maintained their respective pre-marital religion. Collectively, the Oromo in Wallo or elsewhere, adopted Islam 'as reaction against Abyssinian nationalism' (Trimingham, 1976: 197, Donham, 1986: 45), but not for mobilisation against Christian Abyssinians. Since Orthodox Christianity is a defining element of Abyssinian (Amhara-Tigre) nationality, the Muslim Oromo resistance against forced conversion attempted by Yohannes IV was to maintain their collective identity and their freedom to profess a religion of their own choice (Asma Giyorgis, ([1905], 1987: 135).

One can discern at least two of the four general motives that genocide scholars (Chalk and Jonassohn) have identified with genocidal killing clearly reflected in Yohannes's policy against northern Oromos. Yohannes wanted not only to impose a religious ideology on them but also to eliminate a real or potential threat. As mentioned above, the thrust of his violence was the Muslim population Raya, Yejju and Wallo (the latter two inhabiting a region designated later on as the Wallo province of the Ethiopian empire). Justifying this policy, the historian, Zewde Gebre-Sellassie (1975: 96), commented 'It was apparent to him that the Muslims in the centrally located core-region province of Wallo, whose leaders have assumed the title of Imam (the leader of the faithful), could no longer be left in authority to propagate Islam, for they constituted practically a foreign state in the midst of the Christian heartland' (my emphasis). If we believe Gebre-Selassie, there was a clear-cut case of two nationalisms in conflict in Abyssinia during in the nineteenth century. Although the myth and fear of a fifth column of Muslims who might ally with the external enemies of the Christian nation was, as with Tewodros, an important reason for his use of violence against the northern Oromo, it seems that Yohannes's main concern was the religious 'purity' of the nation rather than the threat from outside. Consequently, he did not even tolerate other branches of Christianity that were being practised in his dominions. He threatened Catholics that they would 'be shot down like Taltal or Galla' (Caulk, 1972:29) if they did not convert to Orthodoxy. 'Taltal' is a derogative term for Afar and 'Galla' a derogative term for Oromo. According the Emperor, the Afars and Oromos, who were also Muslim, could be killed without any remorse.

As has been argued by scholars of genocide (Horowitz, 1997: 263; Markusen & Mirkovic, 2003: 198-199), malignant nationalism, as a political

ideology, 'instils not only a sense of difference between those who belong and those who do not belong, but also the inhumanity of those who do not belong and thereby the right of the social order to purge itself a alien influence'. This was also the ideology reflected in the nationalism that both Tewodros and Yohannes represented. They sought to purge the Abyssinian nation of those they considered alien; Tewodros used murder and deportation, and Yohannes mainly assimilation that is, the elimination of non-Abyssinian religion and culture, but also the physical extermination of those recalcitrant to religious conversion.

Yohannes IV, like his predecessor, Tewodros II, died without achieving his goal. His aspiration of building an ethnically homogenous Abyssinian nation based on an Orthodox Christian faith and culture did not materialise. Islam persisted as the religion of the northern Oromos. However, the legacy of authoritarianism, religious and cultural Manicheanism, state-sponsored terrorism and mass killing, entrenched during the reign of these two emperors, remained the characteristic elements of the political culture of Ethiopia's ruling elite. The suppression of northern Oromos continued by Emperors Menelik II (1889-1913) and Haile Selassie I (1930-1974). One of the most devastating onslaughts took place against the Raya and Yejju in connection to the Weyane revolt in 1943 (Tareke, 1996: 89-124).

Conquest, Genocide and the Creation of the Ethiopian Empire State

As pointed out by a historian, 'Tewodros's vision of Ethiopia [Abyssinia] was limited to the central provinces, with Shawa making the southern limit. Yohannes's conception, while extending further in the north, was broader in the south by proxy, through his vassal[s]', the kings of Shawa and Gojjam (Zewde, 1991: 60). Unlike his predecessors, Menelik's territorial ambitions were not limited to the Abyssinian heartland. He had adopted a policy of conquest and colonialism even before ascending the Abyssinian throne. Since he was receiving many European travellers, fortune-seekers and adventurers at his court, Menelik was informed about developments in other parts of Africa. Thus, impelled by 'the appearance of European colonialist in the region', he 'embarked on a much larger scale of colonization in the 1880s' (Tareke, 1996: 40) than what was attempted previously. Arguing along the same lines, Bairu Tafla stated that though the Ethiopian (Abyssinian) sovereigns frequently attacked and plundered various neighbouring peoples, they did not attempt to occupy them permanently before the mid-nineteenth century. He adds, 'European colonial acquisition in Africa awakened the interest in the minds of the Ethiopian rulers of the late nineteenth century' (in Asma Giorgis, 1905/1987: 405, fn. 584). This was particularly the case with Menelik who wrote to contemporary European leaders, the participants in the Scramble for Africa, saying that he would not watch while they divided Africa between

themselves and that ‘he intended to conquer as far as Khartoum and Lake Nyasa if circumstances allowed him’ (ibid.). What was declared implicitly in the letter was that the Abyssinian state had a right to a lebensraum – the right to expand by colonising peoples and territories in Northeast Africa just as the European colonial powers were doing.

The Abyssinians succeeded in conquering and annexing many independent states and nations, including the Oromo. They met resistance from those they invaded, but they were able to defeat them because of the large arsenal of firearms Menelik II was able to buy using revenues from the slave trade (Marcus, 1974; Darkwah, 1975; Jalata 1993; Hassen, 1999; Bulcha, 2002). Thus, the Abyssinian kingdom ‘not only survived European colonial occupation but increased its size by more than 65 percent in the wake of the Scramble for Africa... [T]he Ethiopian state attained more or less its present spatial organization during precisely this period (Tareke, 1996: 27).

Many European adventurers and fortune seekers helped Menelik in the race for colonies. Fortunately, some of them had kept notes providing us with valuable information that they collected during their sojourn in the region. For example, the Russian Cossack Captain, Alexander Bulatovich, who served as logistics officer under the command of Ras Wolde Giyorgis, the emperor’s general who conquered the Kingdom of Kafa and the adjacent territories in 1896-1898, wrote two books: *From Intoto to the River Baro*, and *With the Armies of Menelik II*. In the summary of the second book, Bulatovich wrote:

Summing up my stay with the army of Menelik II, I consider it necessary to say the following: By order of the emperor, a fifteen-thousand-man corps, in spite of the immense region over which it was quartered, concentrated incredibly quickly and set out on a campaign to annex to the real of Ethiopia vast lands which lie to the south of it, which no one before this had explored, and which were completely unknown. In the course of just four months, this corps annexed to Abyssinia an area of just over 40,000 versts [18,000 sq. miles]. Garrisons are posted in the newly conquered lands, and these regions should now be considered definitely lost for any other power which might have had pretensions on them. An expedition which would have cost any European power millions, was carried out by the Abyssinians almost free, if you don’t count several hundred men killed and several thousands cartridges shot ([1898], 2000: 381).

Concerning the points raised in the quote two things should be noted. The first is Bulatovich’s reference to competition between the colonial ‘powers’ over lands and peoples hitherto ‘completely unknown’ to them. It is important to underline this because the Abyssinian conquest of the south was, by and large, a colonial undertaking and not as maintained, post factum, by politicians and Ethiopianist scholars, ‘a reunification of Ethiopia’, or an ‘ingathering of peoples with deep historical affinities’ (Levine, 1974). In the quotation, Bulatovich alludes to a British expedition that was in the vicinity at the same time but was not authorised to make territorial claims or did not have forces on the spot to prevent the Abyssinians from claiming the territory (see Bulatovich, 1898/2000: 319-322) and setting up garrisons.

The second point concerns the cost incurred by the Abyssinian compared to the size of the territory they had annexed. It indicates the predatory nature of Abyssinian colonialism rather than the overall cost incurred as the consequences of the conquest. As indicated by Markakis (1987: 28), ‘Menelik took full advantage of his soldiers’ ability to live off the land’. His commanders and soldiers were not paid salaries but promised ‘a unique opportunity to win fame and get livestock and prisoners’ (Bulatovich, 2000: 239). Having been promised glory and a lot of spoils, the soldiers looted and carried away whatever they could carry away and often destroyed the rest. They killed the men and captured the women and children as slaves. Bulatovich indicated that after about three weeks, ‘Our marching column had increased now almost double what it had been before, from the quantity of livestock that had been taken, and captive women and children’. In the meantime, ‘several dozen captive women and children died’ because ‘they were unaccustomed to protracted walking and endured thirst badly’ (ibid: 354).

Although he was apparently disgusted by what he termed the barbarity of the Abyssinian soldiers against the indigenous peoples (see ibid: 300ff.), he continued his service in the expedition, often participating in battles. Back in his tent after a very tiresome campaign against the Maji (Dizi) people, he noted in his diary on 23 April, 1898,

[H]ow many victims had the conquest of this land cost? It seemed to me brim-full of violence and injustice. Of course, a new phase in the history of peoples is always paid for with sacrifices. But world justice and individual justice are quite different from one another. Murder always remains murder for us whatever goal it may accomplish and it is especially immoral in relation to these peaceful, industrious people who never did harm to us, whose land we now take away by force, using the superiority of our weapons (Bulatovich, ([1898], 2000: 370).

In this statement, and in several parts of his report, Bulatovich referred to the one-sidedness of the killing he had witnessed. The victims, according to his descriptions, were not only non-combatants, but were also often murdered indiscriminately. The onslaught he witnessed was a clear case of genocidal killing. It is plausible to suggest that the annexation of most of the other regions had followed the same pattern. Consequently, at least four to five million people were killed, died of the attendant diseases, or were captured and sold into slavery during the conquest of the south. One may argue that the mass killings were the results of war. But none of the conquered peoples declared war against the Abyssinians. Some ‘never even heard of the existence of the Abyssinians’ (ibid: 168), or were able to put up any meaningful resistance when invaded by them. In addition to Bulatovich’s reports, there are several other eye-witness descriptions of Menelik’s *zamacha* (expeditions) that explain why and how so many lives were taken during the conquest. The Italian diplomat and arms dealer, Pietro Antonelli, followed the king on some of his expeditions against the Arsi Oromo and wrote that Menelik’s army fought

against tribes ‘who have no other weapons but a lance, a knife and a shield, while the Amharas, infinitely superior in numbers, always have in their army several thousand rifles, pistols, and often a couple of cannon’ (Antonelli, 1882, cited in Marcus, 1975: 64). Describing the havoc they caused when in action, he noted:

one sees thirty or forty thousand men running in one direction... soldiers no longer think about their generals, nor... of the king... [who] in these moments is a simple soldier. It is a flood of men following a giddy course. After eight or ten hours of assault the soldiers return to camp with herds of cattle and groups of women and children; captive able-bodied males and elderly were killed. The severity of the zamacha was aimed at the eradication of all resistance... Wherever the army surged forward, there was the utmost destruction; houses were burned, crops destroyed and people executed (ibid: 67).

Marcus reports that the commander-in-chief halts the assaults only after the enemy surrenders. Then the king or his surrogate assigns an Amhara nobleman along with colonists (soldiers who participated in the war) to administer the ravaged land, divides the rich booty, and returns home (ibid: 68).

Ras Tesemma, Menelik’s most trusted general and commander of many of the expeditions in the conquest of the south, told the head of a French military delegation in 1899 that, ‘Up to now, I have made war to kill, ravage, pillage and collect beasts [livestock] and slaves. Now His Majesty Menelik wants no more of this aggression’ (Prouty, 1986: 206). Although the conquest of the south was almost complete at that point, the atrocities did not cease. They continued, by and large, until the Italian invasion and occupation of Ethiopia in 1936. However, the statement throws some light on the genocidal process. The perpetration of mass death committed in the process of the conquest reflected three of the four categories of intentions ascribed by scholars to perpetrators of genocides namely, elimination of real or potential resistance to the empire building project; spreading terror among real and potential enemies; and acquiring economic profits (Chalk & Jonassohn, 1990).

Firstly, the conquering forces committed mass killings, particularly against the Arsi Oromo, the Walaita, and the Kaficho, to eliminate what was perceived as real or potential resistance to their empire-building project. Put in a comparative perspective, the case of the Kafa, Gimira and Maji/Dizi bear similarities to the atrocities inflicted on the Herero and Nama peoples of Namibia by the German colonisers almost at the same time. Frank Chalk and Kurt Jonassohn (1990: 24) wrote that ‘No fewer than 80 percent of the Herero and 50 percent of the Nama had... fallen victim to colonial rule’. They indicated that the Herero and Nama were exterminated for opposing German colonial rule. They added that ‘the staggering human cost of German colonial rule in South-West Africa’ was accompanied by plunder. The sources suggest that more than 90 percent of the Maji or Dizi, about 80 percent of the Gimira, between third thirds and three quarter of the Kaficho and about half of the Oromo population had lost their lives as the consequence of the conquest and colonisation The small kingdom

of Walaita also lost a large proportion of its inhabitants. An Abyssinian expedition in 1894 slaughtered about 119,000 men, women and children (Prouty, 1986:115) in less than two weeks.

The Frenchman, Gaston Vanderheym, who accompanied Menelik on that expedition, described the offensive against the Walaita as 'some kind of infernal hunting where human beings rather than animals served as game'. Not only were the surrendering Walaita killed and mutilated, but the invaders made no distinction between fighters and civilians. 'It was a terrible butchery of living or dead flesh... by soldiers drunk from blood... [O]ur mules turned aside continuously from recently killed corpses which encumbered the country. The wounded, terribly mutilated, were trampled by the cavalry men' (Vanderheym, 1896: 181; Marcus, 1969: 449-450). Chris Prouty wrote that captive women and children were forced to carry the severed parts of their dead husbands and fathers, and that 'Menelik's Christianizing-colonizing objective was achieved but at a terrible cost'. He added that 'Despite the fact that Menelik, "in his mercy", gave the Welamo back some of their herds, the cattle he took to Addis Ababa still numbered 36,000' (Prouty, 1986: 116). The conquest was followed by confiscation of land and property on an extensive scale (Markakis, 1987: 39).

Indeed, as Jack Porter (1982: 16) pointed out, 'Genocide can become a military and political tool in subjugating the land and its people in the colonial conquest'. This was even more evident in Kafa, which was conquered three years later. Kafa (also spelt Kaffa, Keffa) was invaded in December 1896, and the poorly armed Kaficho (as the people of Kafa call themselves) bravely faced an army of 30,000 Abyssinians. Since his forces were equipped with outdated arms, Chenito, the Tato King, resorted to guerrilla war. He resisting the invading forces and eluded capture for nine months. In their effort to eliminate Kaficho resistance, the invaders laid waste the country, ravaging it village after village, 'taking prisoner the women and children who were hidden in the forests, and setting fire to everything that could burn' (Bulatovich, [1898], 2000: 220). After nine months of evading the Abyssinian forces he was captured and brought to Shawa in chains. On the way, he threw his regalia of a golden ring into the Gojeb River on the northern border of his kingdom exclaiming: 'The end of the Kingdom of Kafa has arrived, let her royal ring lie under your silt undisturbed forever!' (Nyonyo, 1991:35).

As remarked by Prouty (1986:199), genocide characterised the conquest and colonisation of the Kingdom of Kafa. In its ferocity and the number of lives taken, it exceeded the mass killings perpetrated against the Oromo or the Walaita. Frank de Halpert, who as Haile Selassie's adviser in matters concerning slavery, toured the region in 1933 and estimated that judging by the traces of abandoned villages the population of Kafa had probably decreased by three-quarters since the conquest. He also wrote that 'the old commerce had died out', and a 'traveller would rarely see a Kafa native on the tracks, and often

when he did the native would flee in fear' (cited in Perham, 1969: 321). It is clear from the records that the desolation and insecurity were consequences of the mass killings and slave raiding that continued long after the conquest.

The Kingdom of Kafa never recovered from the consequences of the genocidal onslaught. Its last king, Chenito, died in 1918 having spent twenty years of misery in an Ethiopian prison. Its population never recovered from the demographic collapse caused by the genocide. It was indicated by some sources that the population of Kafa was about 1.5 million at the time of conquest (see for example Newman, 1936: 93). The official national census conducted in 1994 shows that there were, at the time of the survey, 599,188 Kaficho; that is, by far less than half of the estimated number of the Kaficho who lived about a century ago.

Secondly, to spread terror among real and potential enemies, the Abyssinian forces committed acts of mass murder and mutilation against the different peoples they conquered. Here, unlike in the north, mutilation included even women. In that respect the best-known case was the mass mutilation of the Arsi Oromo during the wars of conquest fought from 1882 to 1886. What was remarkable here is that mutilation did not stop with Abyssinian victory at the battle of Azule in 1886 that cost the lives over 12,000 Oromo fighters (Haji, 1995; Zewde, 1991: 63). Weeks after the Arsi were defeated at battle of Azule, the commander of the conquering forces, Ras Darge Sahle Selassie, ordered thousands of Oromos to gather at a place called Anole. Thousands came obeying the order and were killed or mutilated – the men of their hands and the women of their breasts (Haji, 1995: 15-16). As argued by Helen Fein, 'were the victims during war to surrender, the killing should cease (assuming adherence to the war convention) but surrender of victims in genocidal situations does not avoid their mass murder but expedites it' (Fein, 1993: 21). The Arsi mass mutilation and murder was undertaken with intent and sanctioned by the highest authority, the commander of the Abyssinian forces. The intention was not to embark on the impossible task of killing off the numerous Arsi Oromo, but to secure their submission and exploitation. The method was effective, at least for a while.

It is difficult to know the exact number of people who died during the wars of conquest. However, the war as well as the attendant epidemics and the famines that were caused by the destruction and looting of property took their toll in great proportions. Alexander Bulatovich, who visited Oromoland at a time when the Oromo were still reeling from the shock of conquest, wrote that the dreadful killing of more than half the population during the conquest took away from the Oromo all possibility of thinking about any sort of uprising. Bulatovich estimated the Oromo population to be at least five million at the time of his tour, 1896-1898. As he was a highly respected and decorated friend of Menelik and his generals he had no motive to exaggerate what he observed. In addition, the estimates he made were corroborated by those which were

made by a French missionary who lived among the Oromo for decades (De Salviac, 1901). Oral sources and notes made by European travellers during the early decades of the twentieth century indicate that mass murder was committed in the process of conquest and consolidation of the Ethiopian rule in the south.

Thirdly, the acquisition of economic profit was a driving force behind the genocidal colonial policies. During the protracted war of conquest and the pacification that lasted for several decades, vast amounts of property belonging to the conquered peoples was confiscated or destroyed, and millions of head of livestock were looted. Tens of thousands of captives were deported and sold into slavery. This was even the case of with the Maji or Dizi, Gimira, and other peoples in what is now south-western Ethiopia who submitted with little resistance to the conquerors. It was reported that, 'in contrast to the genocide that characterized Ras Wolde Giorgis's conquest of Keffa, the colonization of the area up to Lake Rudolf... was almost bloodless' (Prouty, 1986: 199). But that did not save the inhabitants from being captured and deported en masse to be sold into slavery later (Darley, 1926). Tens of thousands of them died resisting enslavement. The hardships of deportation also took their toll. It was reported that in 1912, about 40,000 of the Gimira were rounded up and taken to the north, and that half of them died on the way while the rest were sold as slaves and scattered within and outside the Ethiopian empire (Pankhurst, 1968: 107).

While, in the case of the Arsi Oromo, both resistance and surrender to the conquering forces led to mass murder and mutilation, the initial passive incorporation of the Gimira and Maji/Dizi expedited their enslavement and mass deportation from their land (Hodson, 1927: 02). Writing about the Maji/Dizi, the German anthropologist Eike Haberland (1984: 47) notes that

Before the arrival of the Amhara troops in the 1890s and the subsequent forced incorporation of the Dizi into the Ethiopian empire, the Dizi probably numbered between 50,000 and 100,000. The conquest had profound consequences in the decades that followed: subjection to... economic exploitation and oppression; the abduction... of innumerable peoples as slaves, servants or carriers, only a few of whom were ever able to return; famine, disease and a growing sense of hopelessness and resignation, engendered by a total absence of justice. These things not only caused the number of the Dizi to shrink (in 1974 there were probably scarcely more than 20,000) but shook their whole culture to its roots.

Chalk and Jonassohn have noted that 'The part played by genocide in the destruction and crippling of so many societies spread over a vast area and colonized by settlers of many different nationalities and social systems is complex and still poorly understood' (1990: 176, 203). They maintain that these took many forms but that genocide through famine was the most important form. Famine was caused by destruction or confiscation of the victims' source of livelihood, and raised their vulnerability to disease, increased their mortality rate and limited the birth rate of those who survived. It

seems that famine was an important factor in the genocide not only against the Dizzi, but also the other conquered peoples. Enslavement and deportation were the other factors that contributed to their demographic collapse. Enslavement resulted not only in deportation but caused physical extermination as slave-hunters murdered men in order to capture women and children.

Nationalism and the Rationalisation of Genocide

Helen Fein notes that because they lack contacts and visibility, ‘the victims of genocide and genocidal massacres are often the least likely to raise accusations of genocide’ (1993: xviii-xix). This applies also to the peoples who were conquered by the Abyssinians in the late nineteenth century. They were voiceless because they lacked not only contacts with the rest of the world, but also their leaders were killed and their institutions incapacitated or completely destroyed by the conquest.

It is argued that in some cases, academics play key roles in obfuscating genocide by justifying the discrimination and persecution of target groups (Markusen, 2002: 85). This was (is) the case in Ethiopia, where in the writings of some scholars (Wolde-Mariam, 1972; Marcus, 1969; Levine, 1974), the atrocities of conquests were either blamed on the victims or are rationalised as a necessary evil in building a nation and state. Writing about the works of early twentieth century Abyssinian intellectuals, Bahru Zewde (2002: 131) argues that even the most liberated among them had few sympathetic words for the conquered peoples. They applauded the conquest, describing jubilantly Menelik’s ‘campaigns of expansion into the Oromo country’, and ignoring the human costs involved. The attitude of many Ethiopianist scholars is not different even today. What is also remarkable in this regard is that whenever writers mention the violence perpetrated by the conquerors, it is often to justify rather than explain its consequences.

However, notwithstanding the rationalising discourse and taboo that distort the history of the atrocities or the denial that genocide had occurred in Ethiopia, memories of past injustices together with present forms oppression are underpinning ethnic nationalism and political conflicts in the region. According to researchers the cultural trauma caused by the atrocities still linger (Lange, 1979:70; Haji, 1995:15-16).

The Dergue’s Reign of Terror, 1974-1991

Following the overthrow of Emperor Haile Selassie’s autocratic government, a group of low ranking officers from the armed forces and the police called the Provisional Military Administrative Council (PMAC), or more generally known as the Dergue, took power in Ethiopia. During the first two years of the revolution the country experienced not only freedom of speech but also a radical change in its political and social structure. Following land reform in

1975 that made urban and rural land state property, the feudal power structure of the Ethiopian state was abolished. However, the initial period of democratic opening provided by the revolution was closed brutally when an uncompromising faction of the junta led by Mengestu Haile Mariam took power, assassinating General Teferi Benti, the Chairman, and other moderate members of the Dergue on 3 February, 1977.

The Red Terror

Following the coup against General Teferi Benti, Mengistu launched what he officially labelled the 'Campaign of Red Terror' on 4 February, 1977. Initially, the campaign was declared against the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party (EPRP), one of the urban-based leftist organisations opposed to the regime. Since the EPRP was using assassination in its opposition to the military regime, Dergue leaders and their supporters came out with such slogans as 'We shall carry terror into the camp of the anarchists', 'Their blood shall serve as the water we will put out the fire of counter-revolution' (Tola, 1989), etc., to justify the genocidal killings that followed. In a statement he gave news reporters about the liquidation of Teferi Banti and other Dergue members, Mengistu bragged that, 'Making decisions promptly and without hesitation or constraint can be counted as decisive factors for the triumph of our revolution. That is to say, the anti-people forces who had lined us up for their lunch – we had them for breakfast' (Schwab, 1985: 112).

Irving L. Horowitz (1997: 36) has argued that 'Those states with long histories of internal repression tend to be the same ones that have exhibited patterns of genocide in modern times'. This is also evidently true for Ethiopia's history of which the Dergue's reign of terror was the most barbaric episode. The barbarism was manifested not in the number of victims killed but the extent of the dehumanisation of the society as a whole. It revealed not only the level to which 'despots can sink to fulfil their cravings for power', but also 'stained the respect given to intellectuals when some of these were found to be no better, if not worse, than the illiterate killers employed by the regime'. It 'damaged the whole nation in a way which needs decades to overcome and erase' (Tola, 1989: 159).

There are, of course, those who argued that the end justified the means. They maintained that terror was used for 'revolutionary ends that benefited needs of the masses' and that therefore it was wrong to blame the Dergue. For example, reflecting the stand of many scholars and politicians inside and outside of Ethiopia, and arguing against the debate that branded the Dergue as killers, political scientist Peter Schwab (1985: 23) argued that

Whatever its image, the Dergue consisted of a group of men who took power, and intended to use it for the benefit of the peasantry of Ethiopia, and were willing to use virtually any means to achieve their ends; to a large extent, the Dergue was often forced into the position of using extreme violence to achieve a successful revolution.

According to Schwab, the Red Terror was directed only against the EPRP 'counter-revolutionaries' and 'anarchists' who by the end of 1978 were either 'either dead, in jail, or in exile' (ibid: 41). Therefore, he concluded that 'Peasants and the urban proletariat are finally, and fortunately, obtaining their primary human and social, political and economic needs. The country is unified and more at peace with itself than it has been for decades' (ibid: 113). The facts depict a radically different picture. Indeed, Schwab's attestation in defence of the Ethiopian revolution is useful only as reminder of what Alexander Solzhenitsyn said in *The Gulag Archipelago* (1988: 215) about Western 'observers' who, after having listened only to the officials running the gulags, wrote with admiration about the 'humanity' and 'dignity' which the labour camp administration epitomised. Solzhenitsyn wrote:

[Oh], you well-fed, devil-may-care, nearsighted, irresponsible foreigners with your notebooks and your ball-point pens...how much you have harmed us in your vain passion to shine with understanding in areas where you did not grasp a lousy thing!

Although Schwab was recognised as an area expert and had 'written and published extensively' on Ethiopia, he did not grasp 'a lousy thing' about what was going on in that country. The terror was not limited to 'counter-revolutionaries' or ended with their extermination as he maintained. It engulfed the society as a whole. Though some cities and regions experienced the consequences of the terror more than others, every region and town in the entire country was affected (Tola, 1989). According to one writer, 'the Oromo had been living a life of terror since colonization, but this one [life under the Dergue] was different and total... the whole of Oromiyaa became a prison house and killing field' (Ibsaa Guutamaa, 2003: 172). The same can be said about any region in the country, particularly for the period between 1977 and 1991. The country was not only at war with itself when Schwab wrote the above lines, but the peasants and urban proletariat were dying in thousands from war and man-made famine.

What made the Dergue's Red Terror so pervasive was the active involvement of two mass organisations known as the *kebele* and *gabare mahber* or urban dwellers' and farmers' associations. Together, the two organisations controlled every individual and household in the country. Though initially organised to promote the interests of the people in their respective areas, they were brought under the control of the regime and were used as instruments of its terror. As I have discussed elsewhere, places of detention increased at least tenfold when the kebele and peasant associations were proclaimed and given the power to have their own local tribunals (Bulcha, 1988). Between 1700 and 2000 kebeles, and about 23,500 peasant associations were established throughout the country. The associations were empowered inter alia with the right to impose sentences of imprisonment up to three months and hard labour up to fifteen days. In other words, they had a total control over

the population: they kept strict surveillance over them through registration of households, individual identity cards, roll calls at compulsory weekly meetings. The movement of people from one place to another was controlled through a pass system, whereby everyone was required to have written permission from the officials of the associations to leave their village or city for another.

Members of the kebele and peasant associations were armed, and at the height of the Red Terror, the defence guards of the kebeles were given, without any restrictions, the power to arrest and execute anybody they suspected of being 'anti-revolutionary'. This prerogative to kill without restriction was called *netsa ermijja* (Lefort, 1983; Bulcha, 1988). It was conferred not only on the armed guards and militias of the kebele and peasants associations but also on the regular security service organised in different auxiliary branches. The *netsa ermijja*, which in Amharic means instantaneous execution of suspects without any pretence at judicial procedures, turned the revolution into an orgy of blood shedding. An extensive search for 'counter-revolutionaries' called *fitesha* in Amharic was conducted involving every house in the kebeles. Large numbers of people were arrested and many were executed and dumped in mass graves. It was in the prisons of the kebeles that the worst cases of torture and killing took place. Here, the *netsa ermijja* was exploited not only by rapists and thieves but also by psychopaths who tortured, maimed and killed for pleasure. It was, for example, using the *fitesha* and *netsa ermijja* as pretexts that in May 1977, a kebele official could kill over thirty people, including an eight-month pregnant woman and mother of many children in one urban neighbourhood in the centre of Addis Ababa (Tola, 1989: 138). Torture was the main part of the terror campaign and was carried out with indescribable cruelty regardless of the gender and age of victims: flogging victims with the head dumped in a barrel full of water, rape, mutilation of the private part of victims, shoving iron rod or bottle in the private organ of female detainees, mental torture, etc., were among the methods used to solicit information from prisoners.

Since it was meant to terrify and control, the results the Red Terror were often brought to the attention of the public. To inculcate a feeling of helplessness against the power of the regime, and cultivate apathy among the population, dozens of corpse were displayed in public squares or placed near the homes of relatives. The mutilated and disfigured corpses characterised the torture of the Red terror. The corpses were left lying there in the street for a day with placards attached to them some of which read: 'I was an anarchist', 'I was an enemy of the people', etc. The victims were denied customary burial and relatives were not allowed to display even signs of grief for their murdered children. Since the majority of EPRP's supporters were secondary school and university students, most of the victims were very young. Relatives and the public were often forced to go and look at the corpse. But 'One could be arrested, tortured and shot for shedding tears for corpse one saw on the street'

(Tola, 1989: 177). Traumatized mothers often sat in anguished silence on the spots where the corpses of their children were thrown for display before these were dumped in unmarked mass graves. In the beginning, when the regime allowed parents and relatives to fetch the remains of the victims, they were made to pay for the bullets the state 'spent' on them.

The number of those killed in the Red Terror is unknown. Estimates of the total number of people killed during the reign of terror vary between 150,000 (Tola, 1989) and 200,000 (Human Rights Watch, 1999) for the country as a whole. The number of people who went through the prison system that mushroomed in every neighbourhood all over the country is unknown. According to one estimate, about 125,000 people were detained in Addis Ababa's conventional prison establishments and 335 kebele detention centres alone (Bekele, 1980). Given the fact that each kebele and peasant association was empowered to have a detention centre there were perhaps over 25,000 prisons in Ethiopia during the Dergue's reign of terror.

The Red Terror helped to suppress only overt urban opposition. Opposition to the regime continued throughout the country on a broad front. There was the wanton killing in the countryside where much of the repression was exercised during the later half of the 1970s and the 1980s. Summarising the consequences of the atrocities committed by the military regime, Dawit Wolde Giorgis (1989: 369-370) wrote:

The world has never had and may never have an accurate count of the victims of famine, internal conflicts and repression, but the best estimates stagger the imagination. In the last ten years, 2.6 million people have died as a result of war and famine; over 3 million have been made refugees in the neighboring countries and around the world; 6 million have been displaced internally; 500,000 children have either been abandoned or orphaned; and more than 400,000 people disabled, while the entire population lives in permanent poverty, fear and terror.

How do we explain the violence of the Dergue? Was the Red Terror the work of irrational individuals? Are there cultural or structural links between the genocidal killings of the past epochs and the Red Terror?

For Halliday and Molyneux (1981) the Red Terror was not the work of irrational individuals or a product of an irrational process: it was used deliberately for demobilising an enemy and consolidating obedience to the regime. Indeed, we may have a better grasp of the phenomenology of the Dergue's reign of terror if we place it within the context of Ethiopia's political culture of violence. The Abyssinian-cum-Ethiopian political system was and even today, is autocratic. The power of the king or ruler was unlimited. Therefore, not only his person but also his name stirred awe and fear in the minds of his subjects. According to an Amharic dictum, 'When demanded in the name of the King, the running water stops let alone a person'. The dictum indicates that for centuries, Ethiopian rulers used fear as an instrument to control their subjects. Though they used socialist rhetoric to castigate the former Ethiopian kings and

emperors as feudal dictators and oppressors, the role figure of the military rulers was not a socialist or democratic African or world figure but an emperor of feudal Ethiopia. In the self-image that the regime tried to portray, Mengistu was deliberately compared to Tewodros (Haliday and Molyneux, 1981: 153), the most violent of all Abyssinian rulers. He even made a 'pilgrimage' to Tewodros's grave in the remote hills of Megdela, paying homage to a leader he adopted as a role model, and 'drums were beaten and the media poured praises on this great event as a hero visiting the grave of his own image' (Guutama, 2003: 63).

The difference between how the nineteenth century emperors and Mengistu or the Dergue used violence for political purposes is simply a matter of style, organisational scale and sophistication. Like the emperors, the Dergue also committed genocidal killings that were ideologically motivated. The difference was only in the terminology and the justifications used. In the discourse used by the military regime the old religious terms were changed to Stalinist concepts: pagan or heretics were changed into reactionary, *tseré* Mariam (enemies of St. Mary) and sinners became *tseré hizb* or enemies of the people. As mentioned above, Tewodros hacked off the limbs of victims and cast them from cliffs, hanged them to die or sent them home to terrify the population. The Dergue displayed mutilated corpses to achieve the same goal. It used, without any compromise, the gigantic bureaucratic structure and immense military power it had built to implement its version of Ethiopian nationalism based on the ideology of *Etiyopiya Tiqdem* – 'Ethiopia First'.

The Dergue mobilised the society to wage war against the very foundation on which it stood. It attacked its institutions, including the family, undermining solidarity and trust between members of the community, household, and citizens at large. Children were used against their parents and siblings, husbands and wives were pitted against each other. A refugee who escaped the Red Terror and settled in Australia told a researcher in Melbourne that 'Life was cheap at that time, you couldn't trust anyone, even your own family... that's what Mengistu wanted us to think... it was terror that we all felt. Mothers were forbidden to cry for their murdered sons' (Gow, 2002: 14).

The natural reaction of parents to the situation that made human life so cheap was to send their children out of Ethiopia to save their lives. As I have noted elsewhere, 'Families sold their property and... even their houses, to pay exorbitant fees to guides who could lead a threatened son or daughter through deserts and wild terrain to one of the neighboring countries' (Bulcha, 1988: 106). The traumatic socio-economic consequences of the Red Terror were not confined to families that were deprived of their members. Since its main target was the literate section of the society, the Red Terror had dire consequences for the country as well. As I will discuss later, it triggered the flight of educated and skilled men and women that developed later in the 1980s and 1990s into an

incessant brain drain that severely damaged the economic and social development of the country.

The political consequences of the Red Terror were even more dramatic. It contributed to the proliferation of what George Markakis called 'dissident nationalism' (Markakis, 1987). Although the *raison d'être* for their grievances was the conquest described above, the direct reason for the mushrooming of nationalist movements in the south was the Dergue's reign of terror. In the north, it contributed not only to the development of the Tigrean Liberation Front (TPLF) but also signalled to the Eritreans that the ongoing political conflict was not to be solved by peaceful means. The result was also an unprecedented increase in the number of young people fleeing the urban centres and joining the fronts in the bushes. It is plausible to suggest that the reign of terror of the 1970s was instrumental in cementing the foundation for Eritrean independence but also the 'ethnic' nationalisms that came to dominate Ethiopian politics.

Misplaced Priorities and Genocide by Attrition

During the last three decades millions of Ethiopians lost their lives because of starvation. For outsiders, Ethiopia has become the epitome of hunger and starvation. The frequent large-scale loss of life due to famine in Ethiopia is often blamed on drought. The question is: Why does this occur only in Ethiopia and not the neighbouring African countries that are also affected by the same drought? Why is it that Ethiopia, which, in the 1960s, was described by development specialists as a country 'having the potential to be the bread-basket of the Horn of Africa and the Middle East' (Cohen, 1987: 39) is poorer than for example Somalis and Kenyans whose land is less fertile and less endowed with natural resources? Why is it that it is always the Ethiopians who die from famine in great numbers when drought affects the whole region? How come that Egypt which depends entirely, for its agriculture, on water from the Nile produces surplus food while Ethiopia, from which more than eighty per cent of the water in the Nile originates, blame its recurrent famine on drought?

It is indicated that some of the worst human rights catastrophes in modern times have been 'famines created or manipulated by governments', and that therefore 'When mass death results from hunger, governments, not God or nature, deserve scrutiny for their relationship to the catastrophe' (Marcus, 2003: 245). Can we blame then the Ethiopian famines on the conduct of those in power? Economists and sociologists have stated that large-scale loss of life due to famine does not occur often in a functioning democracy. Such famines occur often in states ruled by autocratic or military dictators. Being chronically undemocratic, consecutive Ethiopian rulers have exposed millions of their own citizens to starvation and death for decades.

According to Horowitz (1997: 250, 262), the higher the level of repression within a society, the greater the need for an apparatus capable of exercising maximum control. He notes that the mechanisms aimed at ensuring maximum control are in themselves exceedingly costly, and that at the same time they increase the potential and even the necessity for more manifest resistance. The same vicious circle was apparent in the way the Dergue ran the state. As indicated above, the suppression of opposition through the Red Terror in the urban centres was followed by a dramatic increase of conflict in the peripheries as many of the regime's opponents joined armed fronts fighting against the state or created new ones. In order to fund its expanding control apparatus the regime increased taxes on peasant households and introduced new methods and ways of extracting more rents called 'contributions to the defence of the motherland'. To pay the 'contributions', many peasant households were forced to sell their possessions including oxen and other means of production thereby destroying their means of livelihood. Thus the consequence of the Dergue's belligerency against the opposition was an astronomical rate of increase in military expenditure and the parallel decline in economic growth in the 1980s.

The agricultural sector was hit most severely, and from 1980 onwards, agricultural production declined successively. The war interfered with food production in various ways. Continued conscription of able-bodied young men into the militia significantly reduced the labour force everywhere in the south. In 1975, there were about 50,000 men in the Ethiopian army. In the 1980s these were about 400,000. In the 1980s, the Ethiopian army and air force possessed one of the largest fleet of armoured cars, tanks and jet fighters in Africa. Thus, with a GNP per capita of about US\$100 (one of the lowest in Africa), Ethiopia became one of the most militarised states in the world. In 1974, when the regime came to power, the annual military expenditure was about 134 million birr, or about '30 to 40 percent of the expenditure of the imperial state' (Markakis, 1987: 92). By 1990 it had risen to over 2.3 billion birr, an astronomical increase of 2,075 percent in just fifteen years. While spending billions of dollars on arms, the regime was negligent of the basic needs of the citizens. Its policy created the horrendous 1984-1985 famine that killed about a million people.

David Marcus (2003) mentions four types of government conduct ranging from least deliberate to deliberate in creating or abetting famine. He ascribes least deliberate conduct to 'incompetent or hopelessly corrupt regimes', who, when faced with food crises are unable to respond to their citizens' needs. The second type of regime conduct is characterised by complete indifference to the fate of the citizens. According to Marcus these regimes may possess the means to respond to crises, but they 'turn blind eyes to mass hunger'. That was also the response of the autocratic regime of Haile Selassie I during the 1974 Ethiopian famine. Because the regime ignored, and even hid, the plight of its needy

citizens, the famine killed over 200,000 people in the province of Wallo alone (Keller, 1988: 168).

The third type of regime conduct is marked by recklessness, by which 'governments implement policies that themselves engender famine, then recklessly pursue these policies despite that they are causing mass starvation'. The fourth type of regime conduct is intentional, that is, governments use famine as a tool of extermination against troublesome populations. Although it is difficult to conclude that it was intentional, such policies were the cause of the 1984-85 famines (Clay and Holcomb, 1986; Wolde-Giorgis, 1989) rather than drought. Marcus argues the Dergue 'took advantage of existing faminogenic conditions, namely severe drought, to direct starvation against insurgent population in Tigray and Wallo' (2003: 258). Food shortage developed into famine because of 'the counter-insurgency strategy adopted by the government, and the restrictions and burdens imposed on the populations of non-insurgent areas in the name of social transformation'. The regime manipulated and abetted famine, and this, according to Marcus, should be regarded as 'first degree famine crime' (*ibid.*), or genocide by attrition. Attrition or the wearing down the resources of an opposition or recalcitrant population is one of the oldest methods used by many regimes to overcome resistance. This includes obstruction of the targeted groups' access to food or destruction of their means of food production.

Using famine as a pretext, the Dergue embarked on a project known as the resettlement programme, forcibly relocating northern peasants hundreds of kilometres away from their homes in the south and the southwest. The purpose of the relocation was perceived by the opposition and scholars as an attempt 'to drain the sea to catch the fish', or deny support to the armed opposition, but the result was disastrous for the victims of the deportation. As reported by a Norwegian researcher, the operation was an 'unbelievable cruelty to the Ethiopian people' (Eide, 1996: 296). In the process of recruiting and transporting settlers, thousands of families were torn apart. The senseless brutality with which the settlement was conducted was such that the husbands and wives, and parents and their children were dragged to different sites hundreds of kilometres apart, never to meet again (Wolde-Giyorgis, 1989: 128). A Norwegian nurse who witnessed the physical and mental distress of the settlers reported that the conditions in resettlement camps were horrendous, and that 'Mothers cried in despair because they had been separated from their families or their children had died during the transportation. They had been forced to leave' (cited in Eide, 1996: 297).

Many died people during the arduous transit from north to the south that took weeks. According to Dawit Wolde-Giyorgis (1989: 304) who was the head of the state's Relief and Rehabilitation Commission (RRC) at the time, about 20,000 died during the transit. He also noted that almost 500 people were executed trying to escape. A report compiled by Medicines Sans Frontiers

indicated that between 50,000 and 60,000 men, women and children had died during the movement from north to the southwest (Malhuret, 1985: 64). The death rate soared at the settlement sites, lack of food and of medication against malaria and other diseases being the main factors behind the increase. After resettling some 600,000 of the 1.5 million targeted peasants, the regime stopped the deportation because of lack of resources and criticism from aid donors. Of the 600,000 resettled in 1985-86, a survey conducted by the Ethiopian Central Statistical Office in 1988 counted 425,164 persons on site (CSO, 1991: 190-191). In less than three years, over 170,000 of the settlers had died or deserted, becoming refugees in neighbouring countries. The government-sponsored survey also uncovered the intensity of the settlers' resentment against the programme, confirming that the fact that the resettlement was deportation and not something that the people joined voluntarily (cf. Lemma, 1988: 21; Galperin, 1988: 182-183).

The resettlement programme had negative effects on the lives of the indigenous populations and the environment wherever it was located (Cultural Survival, 1988; Wolde-Meskel, 1989; Bulcha, 2001). One of the indigenous minorities adversely affected by its resettlement programme were the Anuak of the Gambella region who came into direct and sustained genocidal conflict with the settlers and the state. To that, I will return later.

Parallel to the resettlement programme, the Dergue also forcibly moved about 12 million peasants from their traditional habitat into hastily set up villages. This programme when started in 1978 targeted only Oromo peasants, and is known as villagisation. The motive then was to isolate the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) and curb secessionist tendencies among the population in the south-eastern part of the country. When villagisation was implemented in 1984-1985 on a larger scale, again the Oromos were the first to be affected. Elsewhere I wrote:

villagization disrupted agricultural activities as it was conducted even in the middle of the harvesting or planting seasons. Thus the state owned daily, *The Ethiopian Herald* (28 October, 1986), reported that about 554,000 households with about two million members were moved into new villages between October 1985 and February 1986. The period coincides with the harvesting season in Ethiopia. That means that the peasants were tearing down their homes while weather and wild animals were destroying their harvests (Bulcha, 2001: 142-143).

In order to realise its model of society, the Dergue used quick, and often very cruel, methods to terrorise the peasants and solicit their obedience. Its cadres set fire on the houses of peasants who refused to move from their homes, and shot leaders who were vocal in their opposition to villagisation (Clay, 1986; Vallely, 1986). In 1985-86, about 140,000 Oromos fled villagisation from the Hararge region to Northwest Somalia (Zitelmann, 1989:5). More than two thousand of the 'villagisation refugees' died of starvation and a cholera epidemic that broke out in an overcrowded refugee camp near the border town of Tug Wajale in

Northwest Somalia (Skari, 1985; Godwin, 1986). The Sudan also received thousands of 'villagisation refugees' from the western regions of the country. In this connection, an extract from Claude Ake's description of post-colonial African despotism explains the behaviour of the Dergue. He wrote:

Having abandoned democracy for repression, our leaders are de-linked from our people. Operating in a vacuum, they proclaim their incarnation of the popular will, hear echoes of their voices, and reassured, pursue with zeal, policies which cannot, therefore, mobilize them. As their alienation from our people increases, they rely more and more on force and become even more alienated (Ake, 1987: 7).

The resettlement and villagisation projects did not lead to the expected results: they did not prevent the insurgents from growing in strength and influence. Christopher Clapham (1987:219) suggested that 'the villagisation campaign, which seeks to increase control at the expense of an inevitably increased alienation, may well prove to be the touchstone of central government success or failure'. Indeed, it proved to be the touchstone of the Dergue's failure. It intensified the dissatisfaction of the peasants who joined the ranks of refugees abroad or swelled the number of the guerrilla forces from which the regime wished to keep them separated. The growth of the liberation front and the intensification of dissatisfaction of the population as a whole led to the demise of the Dergue in May 1991. Mengistu Haile Mariam and hundreds of the Dergue's officials are now being tried for genocide and crimes against humanity.

Still a Genocidal State

Following the demise of the Dergue, a conference was held in Addis Ababa in July 1991 to map out a political course for Ethiopia. The conference was attended by twenty-two organisations and groups reflecting different political interests and views which adopted a Transitional Charter which laid out guidelines for respect for human rights, a geographical reorganisation of Ethiopia, and adopted democratic principles for sharing power between the central and regional governments. In other words, a new situation was created to reverse a history of centralised autocracy and violent political conflict. What the Charter promised was a new model of nation and state-building that would involve the different ethnic groups – or nations and nationalities, as they are designated in the Charter – in decisions affecting their lives. The principles enshrined in the Transitional Charter of 1991 and the Constitution of 1994 do not seem to have given the people freedom to exercise their rights. It has been also argued that the facade of autonomy for different nationalities, peoples and nations, hides centralised control by the minority Tigrean elite.

The reasons which led to the failure of the constitutional changes to yield the promised and expected returns have been discussed by scholars and politicians (Tronvoll & Aadland, 1995; Leta, 1999; Robinson, 1997). There is no need to mention them here. Studies made on current human rights situation in Ethiopia

confirm that 'A decade after the EPRDF came to power, human rights violations occur throughout the country, and are at times very grave' (Vaughan and Tronvoll, 2003: 18-19). Although we may not conclusively state that genocidal killings are occurring at the moment, it is plausible to argue that the economic and human rights situation indicates that Ethiopia is moving along what Irving Straub (1989) called a continuum of destruction. The country still remains a fertile soil for genocidal killings.

The economic conditions have been deteriorating for the majority of the people. Even if it is difficult to make estimates, it is clear that people are dying en masse as the consequence of the prevailing socio-economic conditions. Between ten and fifteen million Ethiopians are threatened by starvation every year and need international assistance to stay alive. Indicating that at least 12 million Ethiopians are in immediate danger of death by famine, the *Herald Tribune* (30 July, 2003) stated that their survival depends on external assistance. The paper added that 'rural Ethiopians never fully recovered from the famine of 1984, nor the severe droughts that have come after, especially in 1999 and 2000'. During the period famine killed up to 50,000 persons. In October 2004, the United Nations (UN, 2004) reported that as many as 200,000 people, mainly children, died during the last eighteen months. The death toll is comparable to that which was caused by the Wallo famine in the early 1970s. The recent UN report indicates that the current food crisis, as many others before it, is the result of the government developmental policy or lack of it rather than bad weather alone. Rejecting the arguments that the food crisis resulted from drought, it criticised the government for failing to deal with regular crises facing the people. The statement is also an indictment, albeit an indirect one, of the government for mass deaths.

A comparison of EPRDF expenditures on medical care and armaments will reveal the recklessness that characterised the conduct of the previous regime. It seems that waging war and keeping a huge military force rather than keeping the taxpayers alive, has been the top priority of the EPRDF. The *Herald Tribune* wrote that 'Ethiopia spends only \$1.5 per person per year for health, although Ethiopia now has more than two million people with the AIDS virus and the infection is exploding' (ibid.). From 1998 to 2000 the current regime spent US\$2.9 billion dollars sending 123,000 young men and women to their death in what observers have characterised as a 'meaningless war' with Eritrea (*The Economist*, 2002). While thousands of people were dying of famine, the EPRDF was spending daily about one million dollars on the war against Eritrea. The sum of one million dollars is enough to give proper medication to thousands of patients in Ethiopia for weeks or dig dozens of waterholes in the drought-affected areas, preventing the death of thousands of children and domestic animals from lack of drinking water. It is plausible to state that authoritarian regimes in general, and the Ethiopian rulers in particular, do not think often in such terms or make this kind of calculation. Consequently, while

maintaining its position as the largest military force in sub-Saharan Africa, Ethiopia remains one of the poorest countries in the world.

It is remarkable that the consequences of previous genocidal killings for the perpetrator have failed to deter the present government from treading the same path. Many of the factors which scholars see as precursors of genocidal killings such as extra-judicial executions, ‘disappearances’ or assassinations of leading members of the target group, the denigration or stigmatisation of the target group through campaigns in the press and media, etc., characterise the regime’s treatment of many of the ethnic groups in Ethiopia. Particularly, the peoples of southern Ethiopia are undergoing an ever-escalating political oppression and psychological stress that can ignite a genocidal eruption. As pointed out by a scholar of ethnicity and conflicts in Africa, the current Ethiopian regime

perpetuates not only violence but also intensified conflict and warfare among groups of peoples outside and within Ethiopia. In effect, it creates an atmosphere of animosity and fear that create conducive atmosphere for genocide. The policy of handling such conflicts is based on arming/favouring one group and disarming and jointly attacking the other group which led to the destruction of sizeable communities.... This is genocide by other means. The causes of bloodshed among peoples hardly get independent scrutiny and acceptable resolution (Hameso, 2003: 14).

Genocide, as perceived by many scholars, is not a result of a sudden eruption of new violence, but often the culmination of successive and diverse violations of human rights by the state (Kuper, 1981; Staub, 1989; Ould-Abdalla, 2002). In other words, ‘recurrent “small” or “retail” violence could be signs announcing that “wholesale” killings could be expected’ (Ould-Abdallah, 2002: 178). During the last two years several incidents of state-sponsored massacres were reported from several regions. I will discuss briefly two of the most recent incidents below.

Warning Signs of Genocide

Reporting on mass murder perpetrated against the Annuak of the Gambella Regional State, Genocide Watch and Survival International (2004: 2) wrote that the ‘government forces and settler militias initiated a campaign of massacres, repression and mass rape deliberately targeting the indigenous Annuak minority’ on 13 December, 2003, and that this ‘has led to a severe escalation of violence’ in the region. Here, a brief note on the Annuak is in order before going into the discussion of the recent incident.

The Annuak or Annywaa are one of the three indigenous groups who inhabit the Gambella regional state in south-western Ethiopia. The oppression of the peoples of this region started about a century ago when their territory was conquered by and partitioned between the two colonial powers of the day: England and Abyssinia. Like most of the other parts of the south-western marches of the Ethiopian Empire, the Gambella region also became hunting fields for ivory and slaves. Eisei Kurimoto (2002: 223), who conducted field

studies during the Dergue period and after, notes that the clashes with the imperial agents who came to exploit local wealth such as ivory, cattle and slaves after the advent of the empire are vividly narrated.

The end of slave hunting, with the Italian occupation of Ethiopia from 1936 to 1941, brought some security to the peoples of south-western Ethiopia. However, following the restoration of the Haile Selassie government in 1941, the Anuak, like most of conquered peoples of the region, were treated like third class citizens (Cultural Survival, 1988). They were denied educational opportunities, and had no part in the affairs of the country.

Although the Dergue brought the Anuak some benefits like schooling, it also created problems that made life very difficult. A respondent told Kurimoto that the Dergue brought upon them 'taxation, poverty, hunger, and forced military recruitment', and that 'Our life has changed. It became bad. Our fields were taken, our children have nothing to eat' (ibid: 224-225). The establishment of settlements in areas led to the loss of their traditional land and disrupted their agricultural and non-agricultural modes of producing subsistence. It undermined their traditional subsistence security system: fishing and hunting to supplement the food they produced for consumption. According to the respondents, the customs and institutions of the Anuak were also affected. It seems that, among others, the introduction of alcoholic beverages by the settlers had demoralising effects on the Anuak society. According to one of the elderly informants, many young men do not marry and build families as before. He complained, 'Now those young people, why do they not multiply at all? It is because of the beer. Those young boys who did not drink, now they have started to drink. Now those young boys, they do not raise around ten children as their fathers did' (ibid.: 226).

Despite their numbers (between 40,000 and 50,000 in Ethiopia), the Anuak were one of the ethnic groups that formed an ethno-nationalist movement, the Gambella People's Liberation Movement (GPLM) to fight the Dergue. In the 1980s, GPLM struggled against the Dergue in co-operation with other nationalist movements. Therefore, following the demise of the Dergue in 1991, the GPLM participated in the transitional government (Cultural Survival, 1988; Kurimoto, 2002: 222, 230). Though the coalition with the EPRDF looked promising in the beginning, violent clashes followed. The conflict was between the EPRDF and the regional organisations. It also involved ethnic conflicts between the Anuak and the Nuer, the largest indigenous groups in the region (about 60,000 in Ethiopia), and the indigenous populations and settlers. As it escalated the ethnic conflict claimed thousands of lives (ibid.: 236). Apparently the situation developed into what Straub (1989: 239) called 'difficult life conditions', and which included oppressive anxiety, hopelessness and an unpredictable future because of political, social and economic deterioration. Kurimoto wrote 'Life as they [Anuaks] saw it was in a process of continued deterioration. The common themes were death, poverty, and the destruction

and breakdown of community. They did not see anything good in the present' (Kurimoto, 2002: 231). Hopelessness and the breakdown of the community were exacerbated by the fact that young people were leaving home for other countries because of fear and poverty. Meanwhile tension was developing between the EPRDF and the Anuaks.

Genocide Watch and Survival International (GWSI, 2004: 3) reported that on 13 December 2003, 'Soldiers using automatic weapons and hand grenades targeted Anuaks, summarily executing civilians, burning dwellings (sometimes with people inside), and looting property. In four days, some 424 Anuak people were reported killed, with over 200 more wounded and some 85 people unaccounted for'. Sporadic murders and widespread rapes have continued for the rest of the month. Based on eyewitness reports the GWSI (*ibid.*) wrote:

Reminiscent of the Interahamwe civilian militia involved in the attacks against Tutsis in Rwanda, victims shot or beaten by soldiers were typically then set upon by groups of Highlanders who mutilated and dismembered bodies. Such symbolic dehumanization is an early warning sign of genocide. Highlanders used rocks, sticks, hoes, machetes, knives, axes and pangas (clubs) to kill people; they also worked independently of soldiers. Several witnesses described hearing Highlanders [settlers] chant slogans as they hunted down and killed Anuak people.

The GWSI concluded that, confronted with the spectre of genocide, 'members of the Anuak community have taken both defensive and offensive military actions' (*ibid.*: 4). Retaliatory attacks and counter-attacks continued into 2004, claiming many lives on both sides. The incident also sparked the flight of thousands of Anuaks into Sudan and Kenya.

Although 'there have been regular massacres of Anuak since 1980', there are many unanswered questions regarding the latest incident. The GWSI notes that the conflict 'was sparked by the killing of eight UN and Ethiopian government refugee camp officials... on December 13, 2003', and that 'there is no evidence attesting to the ethnicity of the unidentified assailants'. However, 'the incident provided the pretext for a major political pogrom against the Anuak minority carried out by EPRDF soldiers and Highlander militias' (*ibid.*). Why were the Anuak targeted? Why did the government authorities order their forces to kill the Anuak immediately (on the same day) after the attack on the UNHCR officials?

It seems that the explanation is, at least partially, what the GWSI called 'powerful incentives to control the natural resources of the region' (*ibid.*: 8). While the conflict over resources started during the Dergue regime, it may have been intensified under the present government. There is ample evidence confirming that increasing need for timber in the north, and the discovery of minerals including gas and oil in Gambella, have brought local and international prospectors and exploiters to the region. The experience the indigenous

seem to be similar to the experience of many of other indigenous peoples elsewhere and discussed by other scholars (Chalk and Jonassohn, 1990).

The Japanese anthropologist, Re'ya Sato who has been studying the Majang neighbours of the Anuak, reported that 'Since the early 1990s... wood-felling by several private companies has been taking place in the forests around Meti, and Majang leaders have began to feel that their habitat and resources were no longer inexhaustible' (Sato, 2002: 193). The private companies are apparently not from Gambella, but the north. The income from timbering benefits those who come from outside, while indigenous people's source of subsistence is being destroyed.

The GWSI argues that 'The Anuak situation has grown markedly worse since oil was discovered under Anuak lands' (SWSI, 2004: 9). The central Ethiopian authorities have signed concessions with foreign prospectors and therefore have powerful incentives to seek to control these resources. The GWSI argue that even conflict over gold may be relevant in explaining the repression of the Anuaks. They indicate that Anuak subsistence miners mine gold in Gambella district, which the Ethiopian authorities may be interested in gaining control over (*ibid.*).

Warning signs for genocide are coming not only from Gambella but also from other regional states, particularly the Ogaden (Abdulkadir, 2003), Sidama (Hameso, 2003) and Oromia (Hassen, 2003). Reports on serious violations of human rights are most frequent from the Oromia regional. According to a Norwegian sociologist who acted as an international observer in the 1992 and 1994 election, 'the fear of the colonised Oromo appears sometimes stronger than the spirit of democratic competition' (Pausewang, 1994: 5). The fear concerns Oromo political domination of Ethiopia, given their numbers, and this in turn fuels the need for absolute control over them through systematic state violence (*cf.* Fein, 1993: 89). Consequently, detention without trial, torture, 'disappearances' and extra-judicial executions are regularly reported (Waugham and Tronvoll, 2003: 19). During the last ten years, thousands of men and women have gone through prisons and detention centres. Following the withdrawal of the OLF in 1992, the EPRDF government imprisoned between 20,000 and 45,000 men, women and children accusing them of being members or supporters of the OLF (HRW, 1994; Pollock, 1996). Although the actual number is unknown, it is widely believed that thousands of detainees had died of malnutrition, torture and diseases in official and hidden concentration camps.

The UK-based international human rights NGO, the Oromia Support Group (OSG), has reported 3,566 extra-judicial killings and 901 disappearances of civilians suspected of supporting groups opposing the government. The OSG noted that 'most of these have been Oromo people' (OSG, 2004). Although those who are victims of the extra-judicial killings come from every sector of the society, the majority are civic leaders, teachers etc., with the potential of

providing leadership. Those who 'disappeared' also belong to this social category. It is plausible to argue that, functionally, the unexplained disappearances of Ethiopian citizens have their parallels with the disappearances of the regime opponents in Latin American countries in the 1970s and 1980s. They are meant to terrorise and control the local population while avoiding responsibility and accountability.

While the extra-judicial killing and the disappearance of prominent members of the different ethnic communities continue to occur, there are also indications of systematic suppression of civic organisations and the collective persecution of intellectuals. For example, the Macha Tulama Association was closed down in 2004 and its leaders were imprisoned following their abortive attempt to stage a peaceful demonstration to protest the evacuation of Oromo organisations, particularly the offices of the Oromia regional state, from Addis Ababa, which originally was an Oromo district of Finfinnee. Apparently, government repression also increased even against educational institution as well as teachers and students across the country. The Human Rights Watch (HRW, 2003a: 3) stated that:

Being educated can be a risky business in Ethiopia. Students and teachers, often among the most politically active elements of society, are frequent victims of human rights violations including extra-judicial killings, arbitrary arrest, and denial of freedom of association and expression.

In 2003, for example, the EPRDF conducted what may look like ethnic cleansing when it dismissed over 350 students of Oromo ethnic background from Addis Ababa University following a demonstration. Similar measures were taken in other universities and colleges and many students of Oromo ethnic background were purged. The repression against students and teachers is not limited to universities. During the last two years, many incidents of state-sponsored violence involving the death of many school children have been reported (see for example, *ibid.*).

There are three well-known cases of massacres perpetrated on school children by oppressive regimes in Africa since the 1960s. These were the 1976 massacre in Soweto by the apartheid regime of South Africa, the Bokassa regime's massacre on school children in 1977 in Central African Republic (Hendricks, 2002: 235), and the massacre of over 500 youngsters by the Dergue on 29 April, 1977 (Halliday and Molyneux, 1981: 122). Compared to these incidents the EPRDF's violence against Oromo school children bears similarity with Soweto. In both cases the victims were ethnically defined. But unlike the Soweto massacre, the violence against school children in Ethiopia is hidden from public scrutiny. While this can be partly explained by the absence of a free press in the country, it seems that the relations between the Ethiopian government and the Western countries also played a role.

Genocide and the International Context

To develop into genocide, violence needs an enabling international context. As was the case on the eve of the Rwandan massacre of 1994, genocide occurs when the international community remains indifferent or inactive because the perpetrator government is successful in disinformation; when foreign observers do not take the killings they see for what they are and the UN will not criticise a member state (Smith, 2002). As has been remarked by human rights scholars, 'genocide lurks largely in the darkness of irresponsibility, which prevents too little and intervenes too late' (Rittner, Roth and Smith, 2002: 205).

Although evidence collected by local and international human rights organisations is mounting, little is being done to prevent the ongoing serious human rights violations in Ethiopia. And Western governments seem to have full knowledge of events in Ethiopia, but they are complacent in their belief that Ethiopia is making moves towards a democratic state. It was pointed out by a researcher that 'reports by NGOs and churches, submitted since 1992 on human rights violations and election fraud, have not been taken seriously' by governments in the West (Englert, 2000: 7) As stated by a sociologist, the ultimate meaning of democracy is respect for the lives of people and that 'Life itself a precondition for the democratic social order' (Horowitz, 1990: 263). Indisputably, the extra-judicial killings and disappearance of real or suspected political opponents of the EPRDF, reported by researcher and human rights organisations, constitute a blatant violation of this principle.

The attitudes of Western states towards the EPRDF government have been, by and large, a mixture of indifference to its violations of human rights and appeasement of its economic and diplomatic needs. Consequently, the present Ethiopian government has been a recipient of large US and European economic aid without the constraints of conditionality.

As Mark Levene (2002: 71) aptly remarked, genocide in the age of globalisation 'is a dysfunction not just of particular societies but our entire community and of the political economy that goes with it'. It was also suggested that 'Appeasement or international indifference to arbitrary government action and the cruel treatment of people by their own government also makes fertile soil for genocide' (Rittner, Roth and Smith, 2002: 179). It is a well-known fact that self-interest weighs more than the concern for economic development and respect of human rights in the Third World in the international policy decisions of many of states in the West. The observation applies to US relations with Ethiopia.

Ethiopia is considered an important regional partner of the US in its war on international terrorism, and the country also supported the US invasion of Iraq. For several years, US special operations forces have been cooperating with and training an Ethiopian army division in 'anti-terrorism' and 'counter-terrorism' (GWSI, 2004). Thus as pointed out by Dieter Oberndörfer (2000: 5), the

'Americans... have repeatedly been moved by geo-strategic considerations... in establishing their policy of "benign" neglect of the ugly aspect of Ethiopia's policies'. Drawing similar conclusions, the American sociologist William Robinson maintains that given these geo-political interests, 'it should have come as no surprise that the United States has continued to support the EPRDF regime... ignoring (and even supporting) the systematic repression of the Oromo and other groups (Robinson, 1997: 31). The fact that the EPRDF is using Western aid to fight the opposition confirms Robinson's statement. Like many other authoritarian regimes around the world, the current Ethiopian government is also using 'counter-terrorism' to suppress legitimate political demands (HRW, 2003b).

A senior State Department official told Human Rights Watch that, after the attacks in the US on 11 September, 2001, the US is even less inclined to demand respect for human rights in Ethiopia because it is completely dependent on the cooperation of this strategically located country, which borders Sudan and Somalia in the horn of Africa. Ethiopian government security forces have taken advantage of this international climate to systematically repress students, teachers, civil society organisations, and journalists (HRW, 2003a).

The counter-terrorism alliance with the U S after 'September 11' has emboldened the EPRDF leaders to label the political opposition such as the OLF as 'terrorist' organisations 'in order to give legitimacy to their handling of the Oromo question' (Vaughan and Tronvoll, 2003: 131). Indicating that the human rights situation is worsening in Ethiopia, Oberndörfer (2000: 4) argues that development co-operation 'by the international community has primarily served to stabilize the dictatorship of the EPRDF'.

What should be noted here, however, is that there is a limit on how long terror can be used to cow a whole country into obeying the dictates of political elites whose social base constitutes less than ten percent of the population. Although militarily the balance is in favour of the EPRDF, the political conditions in the country are tense and threatening. What should be taken into account also is the fact that the current Ethiopian government can readily resort to genocidal violence if its power is threatened. The Ethiopian military apparatus has killed more citizens than the enemies of the nation during the last fifty years. As a scholar stated, 'States of terror can become states of genocide when rulers detect members of a distinctive group are challenging the state' (Fein, 2002: 46). Apparently, the EPRDF is not less reserved in its use of terror if much more subtle than the Dergue.

Consequences of Genocide

Raising the important question why genocides occur so often and in such a variety of situations and historical epochs, Kurt Jonassohn (1990:415) explained that 'The answer seems to lie in their efficacy'. He maintains that

genocide solves the perpetrator's 'problem' sufficiently and permanently and that 'the costs of such solution are born by the victims'. In addition, when the victims are located outside the perpetrators' society, which had often been the case historically, the perpetrators' material benefits have been often enormous. However, Jonassohn also notes that the victims of genocides, particularly of those committed for ideological reasons, are often located within or are part of the perpetrator state and society. Consequently, the costs and benefits of such genocides have to be absorbed by the perpetrator societies. He maintains that 'An empirical study of relevant cases will show that the costs of ideological genocides are enormous, but also that it takes a very long time to recover from them' (ibid: 416). Using these propositions as analytical tools I will discuss very briefly the costs and benefits of genocidal killings committed by Ethiopian rulers in the past. Obviously, my analysis concerns the gains made or the costs incurred by the perpetrators, that is, the Abyssinian-cum-Ethiopian state(s) and its agents.

In three out of the four Ethiopian episodes described above, the genocidal atrocities perpetrated by the Abyssinian-cum-Ethiopian rulers were committed to solicit ideological conformity from victims located within or on the fringes of the perpetrators' society. This was particularly the case with those committed by Emperors Tewodros II and Yohannes IV to create a homogeneous Abyssinian nation. The costs of their unsuccessful nation-building project were borne not only by the victims, as intended by the emperors, but also the Christian community. In the case of Tewodros, his cruelty against Muslims spilled over to the society he aimed to benefit, thereby causing resistance to his rule. Although not studied or apparently not even recognised by researchers, there are indications that his violence had damaging effects on the economy of northern Abyssinia. For centuries, Muslim merchants were responsible for the long distance trade on which the traditional Abyssinian state survived. Therefore, the prosperity of Gondar, the capital city of Abyssinia, was mainly based on the activities of its large Muslim community (Bruce, 1805: 386-387), which exported African products, both from Abyssina and the surrounding countries, and imported foreign goods. As the destruction of this trading community that was started by Tewodros was exacerbated by the religious policies of Emperor Yohannes, the long distance trade centred on Gondar dwindled decades before the railway redirected international trade to Djibouti on the Gulf of Aden. Politically, the violence of Tewodros also erased the importance of Gondar not only as a seat of power but also as the traditional cultural capital of Abyssinia.

Although the resistance of the northern Oromo to religious conversion was quite successful, the long-term effects of the assault perpetrated on them by the two emperors were socio-politically and economically disastrous. One of the effects of the onslaught on the Wallo, Yejju and Raya Oromos is the perpetuation of famines in these areas. For decades, the provinces of Wallo and Tigray

became the location of what journalists have designated as ‘the Ethiopian or African famine’ (cf. Sorenson, 1993). In the two provinces, the *awrajas* (sub-provinces) suffering the highest number of famine deaths have also been those that were repeatedly ravaged by the armies of emperors Tewodros (1855-1868), Yohannes (1872-1889), Menelik (1889-1913) and Haile Selassie (1930-1974).

The economic and subsequent political consequences of the onslaught on the northern Oromo were profound. The depletion of resources and destruction of the environment caused by the many invasions resulted in a regional chronic food deficit which quickly develops into famine during the periodic droughts affecting Northeast Africa. When the terrible pictures of the hidden famine taken by a BBC journalist was broadcast on the Ethiopian television on the eve of the Ethiopian new year in September 1974, the nation was shocked. The famine, as portrayed by the film, not only made a terrible dent in the national pride and citizens’ self-respect, but also brought about radical changes in Ethiopia’s national politics. The traumatised nation not only despised the aging Emperor, but also revolted against the system that he represented. The military leaders exploited the trauma and anger caused by the pictures from the famine affected areas to de-legitimise the old system. Haile Selassie was made to pay for his ‘murderous neglect’ of the plight of his subjects. It was claimed that the emperor wilfully left the Wallo and Raya peasants and herdsmen to their sorry fate to punish them for having opposed his regime in the past (Lefort, 1983: 44-45). He was deposed, arrested and put in prison the morning after the BBC’s film was broadcast on Ethiopian TV.

Regime change did not help to mend the social, demographic and productive fabric that was torn asunder repeatedly by genocidal violence of the past governments. The structural changes brought about by the nationalisation of land did not result in increased food production or income for the peasants and herdsmen. As the owner of land, the state replaced the former landlords as their exploiter. As mentioned above, the policies of the Dergue even exacerbated the violation of human rights in Ethiopia. Ten year later, in October 1984, it was again the BBC that took the initiative and brought the horrifying images of famine from the same region and site, the town of Korem, to startled television viewers around the world. As was the case in the past, other regions were also affected by the drought, but the famine killed more people here than elsewhere in the country.

An assessment of the costs incurred by the country as the consequence of the policies of the Dergue needs an extensive investigation that cannot be made here. Therefore, I will make some remarks on only damages caused by the Red Terror to the socio-economic development of the country through its assault on educated men and women who provided the society with skilled personnel. As mentioned above, the Red Terror not only killed people but also sent into exile thousands of citizens, many of them with vital skills and education needed for

Ethiopia's socio-economic development. The consequences of the reign of terror become clearer if we compare the post-1974 behaviour of Ethiopian youth and intellectuals with their pre-revolution attitudes towards their country. Although we lack statistics, it is common knowledge that the vast majority of the Ethiopians who studied overseas before the mid 1970s returned, while almost all who graduated from local institutions of higher education stayed at home and served the country. In this respect the consequences of the reign of terror have been dramatic. Targeted by the Red Terror, the preoccupation of most of most men and women with higher education and skills became staying alive. Those who were outside the country decided not to return, while those inside used all available means to get out of the country.

The flight of this category of men and women from Ethiopia not only continued in the post-Dergue period, it intensified during the last ten years. This is reflected in the behaviour of the present generation of Ethiopians, called by observers the 'exit generation' (Shinn, 2004). According to some observers, the behaviour of the 'exit generation' is characterised by a combination of a 'breakdown of basic principles', cynicism and a compelling desire to leave their country (*ibid.*). No study has yet been made of the phenomenon. However, one plausible explanation could be the trauma caused by the violent disruptions caused by the Dergue's reign of terror and the severe social, political and economic problems the country continues to face even today. Thus, the 'brain drain' triggered by the Red Terror increased throughout the 1980s and 1990s and has now developed into a debilitating haemorrhage. Here are some indicators of this trend. Of the 22,700 students who went abroad for higher education between 1980 and 1991 only 24.4 percent returned to Ethiopia (Sethi, 2000). More than 75 percent stayed abroad. About 37 percent of staff of Addis Ababa University who went abroad between 1981 and 1997 failed to return (Mengesha, 2000). Some institutions were affected more than others. It was reported for example that of the 20 staff members of the physics department of the university, not a single one returned. A third of Ethiopia's doctors have left the country (Tadesse, 2002, cited in Shinn, 2004), and hundreds of those trained abroad since the mid-1970s did not return. According an official of the International Organization for Migration (IOM), today Ethiopia is ranked first in Africa for losing highly trained professionals to other countries (Sethi, cited in *The Daily Monitor*, 8 November, 2002). Since Ethiopia is among the countries with the lowest literacy rates, it is needless to underline the dire consequences of this brain drain on its socio-economic development. For a country with a doctor-population ration of one to 300,000 and where millions of citizens are infected and dying of HIV/AIDS, the loss of such a large proportion of its physicians is calamitous.

While the socio-economic and political consequences of the violence perpetrated by emperors Tewodros II, Yohannes IV, Haile Selassie I and the Dergue were negative for the state and society at large, the violence of Menelik's

conquest in the south was enormously profitable both to himself, his followers and, by and large, to the Abyssinian state. From the king to the ordinary fighter, the conquerors gained enormous benefits, not only in terms of territorial expansion and farm and pasture land that were confiscated from the indigenous populations, but also in terms of the size of movable property looted and captives marched to the north to be kept as slaves or sold. However, this does not mean that the negative consequences of the conquest was and will be limited to the conquered areas. As reflect in the many uprisings in the past and current conflict in the Somali (Ogaden), Sidama, Oromo and currently also Gambella regional states, there is a simmering residue of bitterness from the conquest and the subsequent ethnic oppression. Unless the problem is addressed properly, it may develop into a war, causing unprecedented destruction that may have political and economic repercussions far beyond Ethiopia's borders.

Concluding Remarks

The history of genocide often reflects the history of state and nation building, the ideology and strategy of political elites, who dominate a polity with ethnic and religious diversity, and of the institutionalised means of dealing with diversity. As discussed in this article, it reflects the authoritarian behaviour and coercive methods used by leaders who would build a nation and state that reflects the culture, language and identity of the dominant group. Thus, the genocidal violence perpetrated by Tewodros and Yohannes was designed to settle religious and ethnic differences and create a homogenous Abyssinian nation and state. They perceived the Muslim as aliens, who not only did not fit into the national whole as perceived by the emperors, but whose very existence, they deemed dangerous to the state. Both used violence to realise their conception of the new social order, perpetrating the mass killings and displacement of Muslim populations within Abyssinian state or in its eastern peripheries. Their successor, Menelik, used genocide to subjugate, control and exploit the peoples he had conquered. As Helen Fein (1993) argued, colonial rulers and masters act not only as oppressors and exploiters but also as enemies of the peoples they colonise. Consequently, killing and terrorising the colonised subjects has been also the *modus operandi* of the rulers of the empire state of Ethiopia.

As mentioned above, the victims of state-sponsored violence were not only the non-Abyssinian subject populations. Those who belonged to the dominant group were also affected, albeit less frequently. This was particularly the case during reign of the Dergue. In an attempt to construct a new social order – a 'socialist' state and society – the Dergue used brute force and often terror almost indiscriminately. The regime believed that its vision of an Ethiopian state and society could be established quickly, using violence when needed,

and that in doing this the ends justified the means. Thus, while implementing their brand of Ethiopian nationalism, the regime made few substantial compromises with existing conditions and groups, but went ahead with impunity to realise the model of society and state they aspired to establish, and which they believed was for the good of the country.

The Dergue also carried out deportations and forced relocations of populations, causing the death of thousands of citizens in the process. Though the motives for moving populations on such a massive scale were mixed, it is plausible to argue that the primary objective was political. The short-term political objective was to control the growth of dissident nationalism by curtailing insurgent mobility among the population and depriving them of sources of material and human support. It was thought that by placing armed settlers (who depended for their survival on government) among the indigenous population, the state would have better control. The long-term political objectives were to change configurations of popular memories, cultural repertoires and moralities of the different ethnic groups in the country by breaking down social solidarities that had evolved historically. The attempt was to realise a vision of a homogenous nation which previous Ethiopia rulers failed to achieve. In general, excessive coercion and mass murder did not produce acquiescence or stop collective action among the target groups. Instead, it seems that coercion rekindled the indignant memories of the oppressive past and strengthened opposition to the state authorities. As peasants' sympathy for the liberation fronts increased, the demise of the Dergue was accelerated. The end of the Dergue did not stop political conflict and mass murder. The question remains then: How long does it take to change the ethos and the political culture? Can the South African model of truth and reconciliation be applied to lay bare past misdeeds, heal old wounds and prevent an eruption of genocide in Ethiopia in the future? These and other questions concerning the issues of democracy and citizenship need to be addressed by researchers and policy makers.

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Mekuria Balcha
Maelardalen University and Uppsala University
Sweden