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Ethiopian Nationalism: an Ideology to Transcend All Odds

Belachew Gebrewold

Abstract: This paper attempts to show how nationalism has served to transcend political, social, economic and cultural challenges in Ethiopia. Nationalists in Ethiopia have attempted to harness national cohesion against threats from both within and outside of Ethiopia. External threats have always provided an opportunity to mobilize the citizens and suppress internal dissent in the name of national identity. This paper discusses different forms of nationalism in Ethiopia and attempts to demonstrate that in the conflict between Eritrea and Ethiopia, though territory and economic issues indeed played a role, to reduce the causes of conflict merely to these two factors is a mistake. This conflict has to be approached from a political-psychological aspect as well. Unless there is a change in the expression of nationalism and in the perception of national identity, it will be difficult to address the dynamic of the Eritrean-Ethiopian border conflict and find lasting solutions.

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Keywords: Ethiopia, Eritrea, national identity, territorial conflict, border

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1 Introduction

Nationalism in Ethiopia has grown out of different historical experiences: firstly, external threats from regional as well as global powers such as Egypt, Turkey or western powers during the colonial scramble for Africa, multiple conflicts with Sudan and Somalia and the independence of Eritrea and the war against Eritrea between 1998 and 2000; secondly, internal challenges to making a strong nation like recurring famine and subsequent dependence on foreign humanitarian aid, and interethnic distrust. During the imperial and the socialist period, political elites tried to “flock” all Ethiopians together through the construction of a sense of “Ethiopianness” designed to transcend ethnic differences, to mobilize the population against external aggressors and to encourage it to sacrifice economic priorities for national unity and identity. The independence of Eritrea in 1991 and the ethnic federalism introduced by the EPRDF (Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front) when it assumed power in 1991 were huge blows for nationalists in Ethiopia.

In 1991 a decisive political era occurred in Ethiopia: a coalition of various rebel groups deposed the socialist government. The new political power elites in Ethiopia argued that Eritrea’s independence was a necessity for the development of a peaceful and prosperous Ethiopia. The fact that EPRDF pragmatically gave up Ethiopia’s claim on Eritrea, stopped the conflict and also facilitated economic growth, by reducing and substituting military expenditure in favour of investment in the country’s infrastructure. For example, between 1989 and 1993 Ethiopia’s defence expenditure declined from 25 to 8 percent of the total budgeted government expenditure, while spending on infrastructure climbed from 7 to 17 percent and that on social services increased from 13 to 23 percent (The World Bank 1994). However, one should not underestimate the negative impact of the loss of the Eritrean harbours of Asseb and Massawa on the Ethiopian economy. Paul Collier has shown the impact of landlockedness on economic growth in countries like Ethiopia (Collier 2007: 56-57). For nationalists in Ethiopia this is one of the main problems with Eritrean independence. According to them, Ethiopia lost part of “its” territory and access to the sea.

The main research question of this article is: What factors in Ethiopia contribute to the deadlock in the Eritrean-Ethiopian peace process? Does and can the EEBC (Eritrean-Ethiopian Border Commission) address the core issues? The hypothesis of this article is that the peace process so far has failed because the focus has merely been on economic, territorial and historical dimensions. The political-psychological dimension in the conflict’s emergence and dynamic has not been given due consideration (Matthies 2006: 30).

Those nationalist Ethiopians who oppose Eritrea's independence, i.e. mainly Amhara elites who lost power to Tigrayan and urban elites, consider the current government a traitor of Ethiopian national identity. Though the contested frontier town of Badme is not a harbour or outlet for Ethiopian exports, it gained importance through the war of 1998-2000. As Heraclites said, "war is the father of all things". Through war the "real" value of an object will be transformed into a new reality. Similarly, the differences between individuals and groups will be transcended so that a new relationship forms as long as they fight for a common cause under the banner of nationalism. In this paper four types of nationalism in Ethiopia will be discussed. Nationalists this paper deals with are mainly educated urban elites across various ethnic groups. Though nationalists can be found predominantly among the Amhara, it would be a mistake to limit them to the Amahara ethnic group. In my research as well as in my discussions with various educated urban elites I could observe that the Tigrayans' dominance of Ethiopian politics, the issue of Badme and Eritrea's independence are three issues which many educated urban elites are not happy with, regardless of whether they are Amhara or not.

This paper is a product of my field research in November 2005 and September-October 2008 in central Ethiopia (including Addis Ababa) and in Southern Ethiopia. The field research was conducted within the framework of another research work on "conflict systems in the Horn of Africa"¹ Besides the results of the field research, some literature was analysed to understand, especially on the theoretical level, nationalism in Ethiopia since the deadlock in the implementation of the EEBC decision on border demarcation (for details see below).

2 Types of Nationalism in Ethiopia

While discussing nationalism two aspects are important: the role that territory plays when the population is mobilized and how military expenditure consumes valuable resources. For example, Ethiopia spent USD2.9 billion between 1998 and 2000 during the brutal war against Eritrea while millions were suffering from chronic or acute hunger, diseases and poverty (Teigist Lemma 2006: 7). The following analysis of four types of nationalism attempts to show the diversity and dynamics of nationalism in Ethiopia.

1 This research project is not a third-party funded project. It is a privately conducted research project.

Permanent Popular Nationalism

Even the non-Amhara or non-Tigrayan educated urban elites consider the fact that Ethiopia was never colonized as the core of Ethiopia's national identity. In fact some elites of some ethnic groups like the Oromo argue that the Amhara or the Tigrayans are the colonizers of the rest of Ethiopia (Asafa Jalata 2005). However, from my own regional experience as a non-Amhara, non-Tigrayan and non-Oromo Ethiopian from southern Ethiopia, I can say that this argument is not very representative.

Nationalists in Ethiopia, whether they are Tigrayans, Amhara or other educated urban elites, claim that Ethiopia has a special history as the only state in Africa that successfully defeated a colonial power, namely Italy in 1896. The victory of Adwa remains politically and historically very significant for Ethiopia (Matthies 2005: 72-74). As Clapham suggested, the memories of past glories are the basis for the prophecies of future greatness (Clapham 1969). This leads to selective remembering, convenient forgetting or to the inventing of history when necessary (Sorenson 1993). The empire of Tewodros (1855-1868) will be remembered because he put an end to the hopeless anarchy of internal warlords and warded off the threat of foreign conquest; Emperor Johannes IV (1872-1889) will be remembered as the one who defended the 'unique' Orthodox Christian Abyssinia against foreign powers and religions such as Egypt and Catholicism (Rubenson 1976). The Italian occupation of Ethiopia between 1936 and 1941 could be terminated with the help of Britain, leading to Ethiopia's independence in 1941. Similarly, Ethiopia could ward off the Somali invasion of 1977-78 with the help of the Cubans (Matthies 2005: 148, 151). However, such occupation and help from outside is conveniently forgotten, as Sorenson (1993) would say.

Nationalism needs some symbols that support and sustain permanent popular nationalism. We shall discuss a few of these symbols hereafter.

Athletics

Athletics have performed a key function in the formation of Ethiopian nationalism. Abebe Bikila, a member of Ethiopian Emperor Haile Selassie's Imperial Guard, won the 1960 Rome Marathon in the capital of Ethiopia's former military occupier. Abebe Bikila made his decisive move in the race just as he passed the Axum stele that was looted by Mussolini from Ethiopia (Robinson 2008).

And when asked why he had run barefoot, he said: "I wanted the world to know that my country, Ethiopia, has always won with determination and heroism" (Anonymous 2007).

This victory became not only a sporting event but also a political event, implicitly indicating that Africans were ready for the big time (Robinson 2008).

Whenever Ethiopian athletes won a race, the victory attained a unifying character within the nation. The victories of athlete Haile Gebresellasie since 1993 as well as those of other Ethiopian Olympic and world champions have been celebrated as the victory of the whole nation. The victories of Haile Gebresellasie in Zurich and Hengelo in 1995; Atlanta in 1996; Oslo 1997; Hengelo again in 1997 (to mention just few), and those of the other athletes have always served as national symbols regardless of ethnic belonging.

In 2000 close to one million people lined the streets of Addis Ababa to welcome home the Ethiopian athletic team from the Sydney 2000 Olympics. Even the government itself encouraged businesses to suspend work, and encouraged schools and colleges to close, allowing people to join the celebrations and to congratulate the Ethiopian athletic team, which had made Ethiopia Africa's most successful nation at the Sydney games. As the athletes' plane landed at Bole International airport, three fighter jets whizzed through the air, followed by two helicopter gun ships which guided the aircraft as it landed. Similarly, more than 100,000 Ethiopians packed the streets of Addis Ababa to welcome the athletic champions of the world returning from Edmonton, Canada, in August 2001. This event was celebrated as much as the victory of Ethiopia over Eritrea after the two-year war. When on September 3, 2003 Ethiopian athletes arrived from Paris following the World Athletics Championships, where Ethiopia was the best African country and third in the overall medals table behind the US and Russia, the event was accompanied by a famous Ethiopian victory song against the Italians. On August 27, 2008 thousands of cheering Ethiopians, including the Prime Minister Meles Zenawi, lined the streets of Addis Ababa to welcome the Ethiopian athletes participating in the Beijing Olympic Games.

Religion

Though Ethiopia is a multi-religious country, it is usually regarded as a Christian country and among the Christians, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church has held a dominant role (Pankhurst 1990: 178-207). Nationalist Ethiopian Orthodox Christians consider other religions and faiths as not patriotic enough and call them “mete”, which means “newcomers” or “non-autochthons”. Though the Muslim population makes up roughly 50 % of the total Ethiopian population, nationalist Orthodox Ethiopians, tend to regard the Muslim community as a minority. Protestants are considered as people without true Christian identity mainly because they do not adore Holy Mary mother of Christ. The Catholics, on the other hand, are associated with Italy the invader and colonizer. Since most Ethiopian emperors

were Orthodox Christians and there was no separation between Church and state, basically Orthodox Christianity has been the official religion of Ethiopia.

Invasions by Somalia in the 16th century, Egypt in the second half of the 19th century, and the Sudanese Mahdists in the second half of the 19th century have contributed considerably to the perception of Ethiopian national identity (Sorenson 1993). Especially the Wahhabites looked at suspiciously by Ethiopian Orthodox tradition. The fear is that advocates of Wahhabism, with their radical elements in Islamic communities who are often aided by funding from Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States, could lead to the collapse of traditional Ethiopian religious tolerance (Shinn 2005). Since the 1990s, Islamic NGOs have emerged and have brought Islamic ethics, law, politics and economics for disenfranchised communities and individuals to the Horn of Africa (Salih 2004: 152). Whereas in 1980 there was no Islamic NGO in Ethiopia, in 2000 there were already at least 13 Islamic NGOs; and by 2004 various Islamic intergovernmental organizations and transnational organizations such as Islamic African Relief Agency, Muslim World League, Organization of the Islamic Conference, International Islamic Charitable Foundation, Mercy International, etc. were active in Ethiopia (Salih 2004: 170-171). When the billionaire Mohammed Al Amoudi started his investment in Ethiopia in the early 1990s, many Ethiopians were in a dilemma: his investment was welcomed from an economic point of view, but many were suspicious that he was going to systematically expand Islamic influence and culture from Saudi Arabia.

Culture

The Socialist government, until its demise in 1991, was conscious of how Orthodox Christianity was influential in Ethiopian culture and politics. Hence, it avoided confrontations with the Ethiopian Orthodoxy, the dominant religion in Ethiopia since the 4th century. One of the reasons why Orthodox Christianity could easily spread in different non-Amhara or Tigray parts of Ethiopia was that Ethiopia did not categorically reject the traditional local religious elements; unlike the Catholics or Protestants, who rejected the local belief systems as superstitions (Pankhurst 1990: 178-207). The Stelae of Aksum became part of Ethiopian Orthodox Christian heritage and national identity, although they had pagan or pre-Christian origin. It was taken by the Italian troops in 1937 to Rome where it stayed despite a 1947 UN agreement for its return. The Ethiopian Ambassador to Rome once said that the Axum stele will be transported to “Africa”, instead of saying to “Ethiopia”, in order to lend it broader significance. The 1,700 year-old monument arrived at Axum in 2005. On its arrival the monument was blessed by an Or-

thodox Bishop as a national religious treasure through which it became part of the religious rituals of the Ethiopian Orthodox Christian tradition.

Opposition parties take advantage of such “national” symbols that constitute permanent popular nationalism in order to discredit incumbent governments as non-patriotic. They try to mobilize the population by presenting themselves as more patriotic than the government, which cannot guarantee the territorial integrity of the country.

Oppositional Nationalism

Since the EPRDF came to power, opposition political parties have been trying to harness a broader opposition against the government which they consider to be non-patriotic or even a traitor to the nation. Its objective is to weaken the legitimacy of the incumbent government, which the opposition parties accuse of election rigging in May 2005 and violence afterwards. The opposition nationalists fear that the incumbent government most probably will not leave office after elections to be held in 2010. In order to defeat it, six opposition parties including the United Ethiopian Democratic Forces (UEDF) and the Unity for Democracy and Justice Party (UDJ) in February 2009 created an alliance called Forum for Democratic Dialogue in Ethiopia.

In various discussions with Amhara and Tigray nationalists and urban elites who oppose Eritrean independence, one can observe that the current government of Ethiopia, following the outbreak of the war with Eritrea, is viewed as a Trojan horse to Ethiopian integrity. In spite of the coalition with many non-Tigrayan parties from different parts of the country, the governing party is still designated as “Weyane”, a Tigrayan monopoly and agent of the Eritreans against Ethiopia. During their independence struggles and since the foundation of TPLF (Tigrayan Peoples Liberation Front) in 1975 the EPLF (Eritrean Peoples Liberation Front) and TPLF have created a tactical alliance in order to topple the Ethiopian Socialist regime (Matthies 2006: 29). The aim of both parties was Eritrea’s and Tigray’s independence from Ethiopia, though the latter changed its mind later on under pressure from Isayyas Afewerki (the leader of the EPLF). His argument was that only Eritrea had the right to independence, not Tigray (Tekeste and Tronvoll 2000: 83). Of course, all Tigrayans were not striving for independence; however, the intention to become independent originally existed at least among the leaders of the TPLF. Ethiopian nationalists use this fact as another means to delegitimize the current government of Ethiopia.

To understand the Eritrean-Ethiopian conflict the political-psychological aspect is at least as important as the territorial-economic aspect. For many nationalists in Ethiopia the loss of Badme after the Eritrean Ethiopian

Border Commission of 2002 is emblematic of the loss of Eritrea in 1991 (ICG 2003). Badme, where the war began, acquired a symbolic importance entirely out of proportion to its size and population (ICG 2005).

The Ethiopian government has been afraid of a faithful implementation of the Algiers agreement on the grounds that it could hasten its demise and produce a much more nationalist successor (ICG 2003: 13; Matthies 2006: 30). Ethiopian opposition parties such as the Coalition for Unity and Democracy (CUD) denounced the handling of the entire border conflict and the EEBC's decision, which according to them violated Ethiopian sovereignty (ICG 2005: 6).

The Boundary Commission's decision, revealed on April 13, 2002, was based on two principles: the colonial treaties; and whether either party was established by administration, a claim so strong as to supersede the provisions of the treaties. The Commission concluded that according to the Treaty of 1902 Badme was in Eritrea, and Ethiopia's administrative claims were not strong enough to supersede the Treaty. Ethiopia claims, however, that it had administered Badme, collected taxes, established elementary schools etc. Though the EEBC acknowledges that there was some evidence of administrative activities by Ethiopia in the Badme area in 1972-1973 and 1991 and 1994 it concluded that it could not find evidence of administration of the area sufficiently clear in location, substantial in scope or extensive in time to displace the title of Eritrea that had crystallized as of 1935 (EEBC Decision Chapter VI, 5.94, Chapter VI, 5.95).

The EEBC decision enhanced the popularity of the opposition parties and government critics in Ethiopia. Negussay Ayele argues that "the relationship and historic link between the Afar people of the wider Asseb region on the Horn and the rest of the Ethiopian people is one that transcends the artificial colonial boundaries and divisions and creation of Jibouti, Somalia, Eritrea and Sudan". He even claims to trace back the roots of these relations four million years to "Lucy" of Hadar. According to Negussay Ayele, the Afar inhabited Asseb region had been nominally part of colonial Eritrea for only forty six years from 1890 to 1936, but for centuries before that period and from 1952 to 1991, the Asseb region had been part of Ethiopia; and that even during the four decades of Italian colonialism the region of Asseb had no economic, political, cultural or any other meaningful relations with the rest of colonial Eritrea (Negussay Ayele 2000).

The difficult issue in all the debate about Badme is what is the "real" cause of the conflict? Whereas Medhane Tadesse (1999), an Ethiopian, stresses the economic aspect, Tekie Fessehazion (1999), an Eritrean, stresses the non-economic aspect. He claims that

Definitely it's not about that obscure border town called Badme. It's not about economics or disputes about the introduction of Eritrea's national currency. It's not about the inflexibility of two proud former comrades in arms. Or it's not about that awful but clever cliché; the one about 'two bald men fighting over a comb.' No, the war has never been about any of these. Make no mistake. Regardless of what the learned scribes say, this is not a border war; this is not a conflict about economics. Something much larger, more fundamental is at stake (Tekie Fessehazion 1999, web blog).

What is the fundamental issue? The whole conflict's dynamic shows that it is about more than mere territory or economic issues (Matthies 2006: 29). This aspect will be discussed in detail below.

Nationalists consider the current government to be the cause of the "Ethiopian failure". In the Failed States Index Ethiopia has ranked at the top end, 18th in 2007, 16th in 2008. Such negative records are exploited by the nationalists, who interpret state failure as regime failure. Alemayehu Gebremariam (2008) argues that Ethiopia has been re-certified as a failed state because of famine, gross human rights violations, violence based on ethnic federalism, stolen elections and poverty, caused by a failed leader and a failed regime. Unpatriotic elements include rigged elections like that of May 2005; failure on the economy; failure on human rights; failure on health etc.

The opposition group "Kinijit" compared the victory of Adwa (against the Italian colonizers in 1896) with the elections of May 2005. As far as they were concerned since colonial aggressors were fought by mass mobilization, the post-2005 "authoritarian regime" could be unseated by massive turnout. Whereas Italy was aggressor to the Ethiopian nation, the EPRDF is the "betrayed" of the nation (Kinijit 2008). The EPRDF for its part referred to Kinijit as "terrorist", "street boys", and as a remnant of the former dictatorial socialist regime attempting a coup d'état (Smidt 2008: 137-138).

As the victory of Adwa was a victory of the whole nation, the opposition suggests that everything which undermines the current nation undermines the established nation defended by the spirit of Adwa. Therefore, the current regime is depicted not only as non-democratic but also "anti-Adwan" (i.e. unpatriotic and non-nationalist) (Matthies 2006: 30-31), because this historic event was a national victory with a wider African and indeed world significance (Kinijit 2008).

Finally, EPRDF's ethnic-federalist approach is criticized by nationalists as facilitating disintegration through ethnic nationalism. Since EPRDF enabled the independence of Eritrea, caused the allocation of Badme to Eritrea and some parts of Ethiopia to Sudan, for opposition nationalists the government is clearly "unpatriotic" (Ethiopianguasha 2008).

Ethnic Nationalism

Ethnic nationalism implies the mobilization of one's *own* and other ethnic groups against marginalization by a third ethnic group. The Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) has been pursuing this. The Anuak are doing the same. Various ethnic groups have been mobilizing marginalized ethnic groups to fight against what they call "Tigrayan dominance". For example, the Anuak addressed the Oromo Community in Minnesota on 08.04.2007 saying "If Woyane [Tigray] Can Unify, Why Can't We?" (Metho 2007).

Ethnic nationalism emerged right after the EPRDF took power in 1991. Some violent interethnic conflicts in Ethiopia have been taking place between the Surma and the Dizi, the Shaka and the Bench-Maji, Borana and Guji, Anuak and Nuer, between Somali on the one hand, and the Afar and Oromo on the other. Late in 2003, in Gambela state, a conflict broke out among Nuer, Anuak and highlanders resulting in the death of at least sixty-five persons and the displacement of more than 9,000 (Shinn, 2005). The Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) and the OLF, supported by Eritrea, seek ethnic national independence or autonomy (Connell 2005; Matthies 2005: 113). Since its establishment in 1984, the ONLF has been fighting against the Ethiopian government, which it says marginalizes the Ogaden region. In April 2007 it killed 65 Ethiopians and nine Chinese oil workers in the area. The discovery of gas and oil has indeed brought new hopes *and* has also helped to fuel the conflict. In an interethnic conflict, primarily triggered by the construction of a new borehole, in the arid borderlands of southern Ethiopia and northern Kenya in March 2009, a conflict between the Borana and Somali killed at least 300 people and displaced some 70,000 (BBC 2009).

Even if the EPRDF pretends to be an inclusive political organisation it is obvious that it is dominated by Tigrayans. This has created a serious rivalry between the Amhara (an ethnic group that dominated Ethiopian history for centuries) and the Tigrayans, and has increased the discontent of the Amhara and Oromo. The Amhara are discontent because of the political power they have lost, the Oromo are discontent because of their continuous marginalisation though they form the majority ethnic group in Ethiopia. A spiralling dynamic can be observed: the more public discontent, the more *Tigrayanisation* of Ethiopian politics; the more Tigrayanization, the more other ethnic groups become discontent.

The Oromo, the biggest ethnic group in the country, has been disadvantaged, just like many other ethnic groups. The OLF, established in 1974, claims to address this problem (Asafa Jalata 2005). Even Oromo elites in the present government are complaining that the oppression of the Oromo has not yet come to an end (Asafa Jalata 2005: 211-222; Smidt 2008: 136).

Armed conflict between OLF and government troops is still going on. The OLF, has been pursuing its uncompromising and unqualified demands for Oromia liberation by military means (Lyons 2006); it was accused of orchestrating the bomb attack on the railway between Addis Ababa and Djibouti on June 24, 2002. On the September 11, 2002 another bomb exploded in Tigray Hotel in Addis Ababa, which again the OLF was blamed for. Consequently, the Ethiopian government characterised the OLF as a “terrorist” organisation and demanded that parliament adopt radical action against it. However, nowadays all violent political activities against governments are characterised as “terrorism”. Whether they are OLF or ONLF they are easily designated as terrorists (Smidt 2007; Smidt 2008: 136-137).

Various incidents are testimony that the Ethiopian government is not able to control the situation in the country, leading to Ethiopia being labelled a failed state (Failed States Index 2008). The conflict between the Sheko-Mezengher and other ethnic groups over the political control of Tepi, a town in southern Ethiopia, left at least 128 people dead. In the same way, the conflict between the Sidama and Wolayta in May 2002 left at least 24 people dead. The Sidama feel disadvantaged because Awasa, a town within their territory has been made the capital city of the Southern Peoples. Many Oromo are rebelling violently against the status of Addis Ababa as neutral national capital, demanding that it should be their capital since it is within the Oromo territory. Conflict has escalated between Anyuak, resettled highlanders, and Nuer, at the Sudanese border since the end of 2003; nearly 200 people were killed and 10,000 were displaced at the end of January 2004 in that area. One of the main causes of the conflict is the fact that for more than two decades the population has been steadily increasing and overcrowding has become a serious issue in the Gambella region. Since the 1980s, many highlanders have been resettled in this fertile western part of the country. Moreover, the influx of Nuer refugees from eastern Sudan has contributed to population overcrowding in the area. However, the conflict is not only between the Anyuak and resettled highlanders/Nuer; the Anyuak have been accusing the Ethiopian government of helping the resettled highlanders, who control both political and economic resources in the area (Hagmann and Mulugeta 2008). Besides this, the Ethiopian government has been attempting to explore oil in the region. The Anyuak feel that they are being gradually displaced from their traditional lands. Moreover, in December 2003, when the highlander turned on the Anyuak, about 300 people were killed.

During the local elections of April 2008 Prime Minister Meles Zenawi's EPRDF coalition (dominated by the Tigrayans) won. While its candidates stood unopposed in many places, opposition parties complained they suf-

ferred harassment, intimidation, attack and arrest during campaigning. Bulcha Demeksa, leader of the opposition Oromo Federalist Democratic Movement (OFDP), said his party had only been able to put forward 2 % of the 6,000 candidates it wanted to because they had been threatened by government supporters. Similarly, the UEDF said that of its 20,000 candidates who attempted to register, only 10,000 succeeded, and only 6,000 of those actually had their names placed on the lists at polling stations. As a result, EPRDF won all but a handful of local council and parliamentary seats following an opposition boycott of the poll, and it regained control of the capital Addis Ababa and won all but one of the 39 parliamentary by-elections. Ultimately, the EPRDF won more than 3.5 million of the 3.6 million seats.

Though the EPRDF attempts to integrate non-Tigrayans into the government, it is accused by many Ethiopians of being a Tigrayan dominated government.

Nevertheless, in cases of external aggression, all the parties flock together to create the kind of universal nationalism which happens only in emergencies.

Universal Emergency Nationalism

By universal emergency nationalism I mean a form of nationalism that in cases of foreign aggression draws together including the government, opposition and population. In universal emergency nationalism the confrontation between the incumbent regime and nationalist opposition will not be eradicated, but postponed. In the conflict between Eritrea and Ethiopia between 1998 and 2000, the ruling Tigrayans (derogatively called “Weyanes” by nationalists) were turned overnight into the defenders of Ethiopian national identity against Eritrean invaders (Gemencho 2008). The Ethiopian population as well as the political opposition supported the counter attack without any hesitation. Ethiopia deployed 300,000 to 350,000 troops (Matthies 2005: 113).

Universal nationalism presupposes a universal perception of national identity and of the object of the conflict. However, the perceptions of outsiders and nationalists in Ethiopia regarding the value of the fought-for object and the causes of the conflict are diametrically opposed. Outsiders judge conflict merely from a materialistic point of view. Hence, the fought-for piece of land is designated very often as geographically small and economically valueless (Clapham, 2003), “remote pockets of barren land” (Blair, 2005). Further, Clapham designated the disputed territory as: “relatively small and economically valueless strips of territory along their undemarcated frontier” (Clapham 2003). David Blair says that the quarrel between Ethiopia and Eritrea is “over a few remote pockets of barren land” (Blair 2005). But for nationalists it is “fertile”, “rich”, as significant as Adwa, Maichew, etc.,

where Ethiopian nationalism was resurrected and celebrated (Medhanie 2007). It is about national identity and pride. Billig says,

losing a part of the imagined homeland is worse than merely losing an ear: in the case of territory, the lost ear always turns up on someone else's face (Billig 1995: 75).

Hence, losing Badme makes the lives of the Ethiopian soldiers who died in the 1998-2000 war meaningless. Moreover, losing territory is the equivalent to losing that which constitutes the group identity (Goemans 2006). For all Ethiopians Badme became a *symbol* of their nation, leading to the death of at least 70,000-90,000 soldiers (on both sides), the displacement and death of civilians, and destruction of the economy (again on both sides). The opposition, the government and indeed the population rejected the EEBC decision because Badme provided the symbolic focus of the conflict (Clapham 2003; Matthies 2006: 29).

Meles Zenawi, Ethiopian Prime Minister, in an interview pointed out that the issue is more than about territory.

Q: But Eritrea will never accept that Badme is in Ethiopia. It seems an intractable situation.

A: [...] When we were told Asmara is not Ethiopian, when we were told Asseb is not Ethiopian we said - sure, if the Eritrean people think that Asseb is Eritrea and not Ethiopia, that's alright. And we went to Asmara and celebrated with the Eritreans the independence of Eritrea. Badme is not bigger than Asmara. Badme is not more important than Asseb by any stretch of the imagination. It is some godforsaken village. So it's not about territory. According to the latest rendition of the Boundary Commission, Badme would be 800 metres inside Eritrea. What's 800 metres in a country as big as Ethiopia? What's 800 metres compared to what we willingly and happily gave up as Eritrea? It's nothing. But it is 800 metres which we are told is something it has never been, and something that it will never be. That's the point. That's the crux of the matter (IRIN 2003).

The issue is rather political-psychological: the object of the conflict, the self and the other are defined anew in the current conflict. This is in line with the general findings of many authors. Kelman and Fisher (2003) suggest that self image and enemy image are mechanisms of normative and perceptual processes for promoting conflicts. Normative processes consist of the formation of collective moods through mobilisation of group loyalty. As a consequence, decision making processes in a conflict situation tend to inhibit the search for alternatives because of zero-sum thinking in negotiation and bargaining processes. Through structural and psychological commitments to

mobilise group loyalty and diabolisation of the enemy, the conflicts will be maintained as a source of profit, power, status, or *raison d'être*. Through the formation of mirror images and the resistance of images to contradictory information, the processes of conflict formation will be perpetuated (Kelman and Fisher 2003: 322-325): “Both parties tend to develop parallel images of self and other, except with the value reversed” (Kelman and Fisher 2003: 326). The other is aggressive, hostile and evil, whereas self is peaceful and ready for compromises (*ibid*: 326). Kelman and Fisher (2003: 327) suggest that, “the concept of selective exposure, selective perception, and selective recall all point to the fact that our attitudes help determine the kind of information that is available to us”.

Nationalists attempt to make group members aware of the shared group membership, their common enemy or opponent. They politicize group members so as to control, influence, or enlist for their collective interests (Simon and Klandermans 2004: 455). This politicized collective identity fosters (self-)stereotyping processes at the cognitive level, prejudice process at the affective level, and conformity and discrimination processes at the behavioural level (*ibid*: 459).

The permanent construction of national identity and stereotyping is a characteristic element of nationalism. Nationalism is procreated by continuously pointing at a real or imaginary enemy of the collective, for example. This process creates a dualistic world of “Inside” versus “Outside”, “We” versus “Them” as analysed by Janis (1982) in his *Groupthink*. As Elwert suggests, homogenisation of a group *for* violence happens *through* violence against another group: unification of individual perceptions and interests into common objectives through coordination of actions, persuasion and coercion (Elwert 2002: 340-343).

This inside-outside categorization is based on collective memory, which stores and recalls past information. The *Self* is constituted by this information and common memory. In this process, the recognition and awareness of one’s own memory and of one’s self constitutes identity (Deutsch 1974: 178). “Invented permanencies” (Billig 1995: 29) help to transcend the intragroup differences. These permanencies are collective memory and this consists of remembering which is simultaneously a collective forgetting: the nation, which celebrates its antiquity, forgets its historical recency as well as the violence which brought it into existence (Billig 1995: 38).

Hayes suggests nationalism is a historical process which establishes nationalities as political units; which forms modern institutions out of tribes and empires; which indicates the principle and historical process; which intensifies the consciousness of nationality and a political philosophy of the nation state; which insinuates that loyalty to the ideal or to one’s national

state is superior to all other loyalties. Pride in one's nationality and belief in its intrinsic excellence and in its "mission" are integral part of nationalism (Hayes 1966: 5-6).

As Walter would say, territorial attachments and people's willingness to fight for territory should not be reduced to the material value of land since such land has much more to do with the symbolic role it plays in constituting people's identities and providing a sense of security and belonging and defining one's social, spiritual, and communal world (Walter 2006: 288-89). Hence, conflict analysis and the practical peace process for Eritrea and Ethiopia should go beyond measuring the value of land strictly in terms of its tangible assets, border length and placement, and the distribution of natural resources and making them the basis of a settlement. Rather it has to deal with the deep psychological bonds as well (Walter 2006: 294).

The war between Eritrea and Ethiopia is called a "fraternal war". If they are "brothers", why do they fight? Or do they fight because they are "brothers"? Georg Simmel suggested that antagonism is usually involved as an element in intimate relationships. Simmel asserts that it is similarity that exacerbates a conflict not difference. A conflict is more passionate and more radical when it arises out of close relationships: deepest hatred grows out of broken love which results in denial of one's own past and change of feeling (Simmel 1964: 47-48). The negated similarity results in radicalised difference and brutal conflicts. Hence, it is not a pre-existent difference that ignites conflicts. The Eritrean independence struggle is basically the process of denying the similarity usually known as "Habesha identity" (Trivelli 1998: 268). Ethiopians stress their similarity with Eritrea in order to gain back Eritrea, but at the same time they stress the difference in order to underline the "superiority" of Ethiopian history as a non-colonized nation. Eritreans, however, stress their difference from Ethiopia because in spite of (or probably as a result of) colonization they feel more civilized than the Ethiopians.

3 Conclusion

Nationalism is about how a nation fulfils its need to be good, right and just. Through nationalism a nation becomes something bigger than it is in reality. The nation becomes rigid, is unwilling to compromise, glorifies the past and exposes the population to economic hardships and conflict. Nationalists in Ethiopia have drawn their ideology from various political, religious and cultural experiences of Ethiopia, internally as well as externally. For nationalists, memories of past glory, independence and victory over a former colonial power have served as the core of national ideology.

Nationalists in Ethiopia try to transcend the political challenges that affect their national identity through remembering the past; re-emphasizing the “common” history. But this *commonness* is not self-evident since there are ethnic nationalisms in Ethiopia. There is mistrust between various ethnic groups such as Oromo, Tigray, Amhara etc. Mengistu tried to overcome this by suppressing it, whereas EPRDF tries to overcome it through ethnic federalism. Because of this the EPRDF government is considered by many Ethiopian nationalists, including Amhara and urban elites, as unpatriotic or even treacherous. The current leadership is accused by nationalists of having facilitated ethnic nationalisms in Ethiopia. Various nationalists in Ethiopia have been trying to mobilize all Ethiopians to overcome ethnic nationalism and unseat the current regime through democratic mobilization, reinvention of permanent popular nationalism and by harnessing a universal emergency nationalism in the face of external aggression. This project has worked during the war against Eritrea. But ethnic nationalism cannot be easily transformed into permanent popular nationalism. Only if there is aggression from the outside could this be easily achieved, as the conflict with Eritrea has shown. However, such mobilization and galvanization of universal emergency nationalism has a negative impact on attempts at a peaceful resolution of the border conflict. As long as the constellation and attitude of nationalism in Ethiopia does not change, the chance for a peaceful solution is very slim, at least from the Ethiopian side (Matthies 2006: 32).

This article has shown that the border war between Eritrea and Ethiopia is about prestige, sovereignty and national identity, not merely about economic benefit. As Smidt suggests, since conflicts can emerge as a result of unrecognized claims or as an expression of a need for change as well as an instrument of change, or as an expression of subjective threat perceptions (Smidt 2007: 7-8), conflict resolution should take into account not only the material but also political-psychological aspects. In the case of Ethiopian nationalism and the Eritrean-Ethiopian conflict this is an aspect which should not be neglected.

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Äthiopischer Nationalismus: eine Ideologie zur Überwindung aller Widrigkeiten

Zusammenfassung: Dieser Aufsatz will aufzeigen, wie Nationalismus dazu nützlich war, politische, soziale, wirtschaftliche und kulturelle Herausforderungen in Äthiopien zu überwinden. Nationalisten in Äthiopien versuchten, sich den nationalen Zusammenhalt gegen interne und externe Bedrohungen zunutze zu machen. Bedrohungen von außen haben stets eine Möglichkeit geboten, die Bürger zu mobilisieren und interne Auseinandersetzungen im Namen der nationalen Identität zu unterdrücken. Der Aufsatz behandelt verschiedene Formen des Nationalismus in Äthiopien und will darlegen, dass im Konflikt zwischen Eritrea und Äthiopien, in dem territoriale und wirtschaftliche Fragen zwar tatsächlich eine Rolle spielten, es gleichwohl falsch ist, die Ursachen des Konflikts allein auf diese beiden Faktoren zu reduzieren. Dieser Konflikt muss ebenso von einer politisch-psychologischen Seite behandelt werden. Ohne einen Wandel der Formen des Nationalismus und der Wahrnehmung der nationalen Identität wird es schwer sein, mit der Dynamik des Konflikts zwischen Eritrea und Äthiopien umzugehen und dauerhafte Lösungen zu finden.

Schlagwörter: Äthiopien, Eritrea, nationale Identität, territorialer Konflikt, Grenze