

*Review*

# Civil resistance in Ethiopia: An overview of a historical development

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**A history of anti-government opposition in Ethiopia is a very complex topic and a subject extremely difficult to investigate. It runs through the analysis of intractable social crisis of the entire feudal empire covering a wide range of historical processes across ages to the various people's movements in contemporary Ethiopia. It also involved different styles and methods over the years ranging from violent to nonviolent, and from dialogues and negotiations to conventional politics. The major purpose of this article is to provide a brief historical overview of the genesis, development, nature and dynamics of civil resistance in light of experiences ranging from the second half of 20th century to the 2015 Oromo and Amhara protest.**

**Key words:** Civil resistance, Ethiopian students movement, Ethiopian May-2005 election dissent, everyday forms of resistance, rebellions.

## INTRODUCTION

A meticulous review of a history of anti-government opposition in Ethiopia gives an expanded list of both violent and nonviolent resistance. It is also a very complex topic and has to explore the very complex crises of the feudal empire, the Military regime and the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Front (EPRDF). Although there have been many attempts by people to force these regimes to make reforms or call for a total regime change through peaceful means at different times, the subsequent regimes often used excessive force and quelled the opposition. Of course, the name Ethiopia and the territory that "modern Ethiopia"<sup>1</sup> occupies has been also a matter of contentious debate among scholars, academics and politicians over the years.

An attempt to documenting the cradles of civil resistance in Ethiopia with a common phrase of "social movement" goes back to the 1990s following the overthrow of the *Derg* (1974-1991) by academics and

some public writers<sup>2</sup>.

The materials produced at this time are important in providing vivid insights on the genesis, foundation, and radicalization of the late 1960s and early 1970s people's movements in Ethiopia. They provided critical reflections and different understandings from various angles, although paradoxical at times on mobilization, coordination, leadership, and organization of social

<sup>2</sup> Among others, *Class and Revolution in Ethiopia*, by J. Markakis and Nega Ayele (1978), *The Ethiopian Revolution, 1974-1987* by Andargachew Tiruneh (1993), *The Quest for Expression: State and University in Ethiopia Under Three Regimes, 1952-2005* by R.R. Balsvik (2007), *Radicalism and Cultural Dislocation in Ethiopia, 1960-1974* by Messay Kebede (2008), *Ethiopia: Power & Protest – Peasant Revolts in the Twentieth Century* (1991) and *The Ethiopian Revolution: War in the Horn of Africa* by Gebru Tareke (2009), *Documenting the Ethiopian Students Movement: An Exercise in Oral History* by Bahru Zwede (2010), *Ethiopia: From Autocracy to Revolutionary Democracy, 1960s-2011* by Merera Gudina (2011), and *The Quest for Socialist Utopia: The Ethiopian Students Movement 1960-1974* by Bahru Zwede (2014), and *The Generation: The History of Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party (EPRP)*, three separate volumes, by Kiflu Tadesse (1993) and *Tower in the Sky*, by Hiwot Tefera (2012).

<sup>1</sup> Taking political centralization as an objective criterion

movements against imperial authority. Since many of the writers were students themselves by the time and involved in coordinating revolts, mobilize support and design tactics, the accounts, in general, are trustworthy.

These manuscripts with few exceptions were produced decades after the movement was violently crushed. Keeping their substantive significance untarnished, all seem to have difficulties in explaining contemporary social activism in Ethiopia. They also did not support their writings on the broader understanding of conceptions of civil resistance and failed to underline the importance of civil resistance in the democratization process. This study, therefore, focusses on documenting the genesis and foundation of anti-regime oppositions in Ethiopia from the broader understanding of civil resistance beginning from the early 1970s to the May-2015 Amhara and Oromo Protest.

## METHODOLOGY

Appropriate data for the manuscript was collected through a review of nontechnical and technical literature related to social movements, revolutions and people's movements on Ethiopia and around the globe from the available literature. The collected data were analyzed through systematic categorization and interpretation of contents and themes from both primary and secondary sources. Also, it should be noted that this is part of a Ph.D. dissertation work entitled "The Dynamics of Civil Resistance and the Management of Turbulent Peace in Ethiopia: A Study of Anti-Regime Protests in Amhara and Oromia National Regional States, 2015-2018". Hence, particular emphasis is given to the analysis and interpretation of sources available from the literature and consultation of archival sources. Primary data were collected from the Institute of Ethiopian Studies (IES), the French center for Ethiopian Studies (FCES) and the Ethiopian National Archives and Library.

## Rebellions and resistance (1940s-1970s): Every day forms of resistance?

The most notable breakthrough in the annals of civil opposition in modern Ethiopia appeared shortly after the return of Emperor Haileseilasie I from his exile in Europe due to Italian colonial occupation (Tareke, 2009; Tefera, 2012). Notable individuals and petty-organized groups started to reject imperial authority afterward. *Dejazmach* Belay Zeleke, Mammo Hailu, *Bitwoded* Negash Bezabih and *Dejazmach* Takele Wolde Hawaryat (Greenfield, 1965; Zewde, 2001), who themselves were part of the aristocracy started to publicly challenge restoration of the emperor to the throne. The opposition of such kind was not common in feudal Ethiopia due to the social structure, state system, cultural values, and historical trajectories.

Although brutally crushed, they, however, broke the tradition and succeeded to become the first real internal challenges posed to the throne.

Many peasants and noble resistances prosecuted by individuals and disgruntled groups too went down in global history unnoticed as a result of such traditions, although they were first resorts in a system that is highly hierarchical and robustly structural. According to James C. Scott (1989:33), this happens for two major reasons. First, their opposition was not understood and declared in the usually understood sense of "politics"; and second, not understood and declared as group actions in the usually understood sense of "collective action". However, as many historical circumstances extrapolate such oppositions are first resorts used in situations where open political defiance is impossible and causes mortal danger (Scott, 1989). Since the distinction between everyday forms of resistance and open forms of political defiance often boils down to tactical wisdom, it has to be understood in the sense of politics for it involves defiance against an established system. Also, since they also constitute politics of struggle by oppressed groups against a functioning system, they have to be understood as a collective action.

The anti-imperial oppositions of the early 1940s were founded on the emperor's five-year absence (1936-1941) to command the gallant rebellion they maintained against Italian occupation (Barker, 1968; Zewde, 2001). Most of those who engaged in personal defiance were leaders of the patriotic resistance. They were praised for their bravery against enemy forces. However, due to the traditional assumption of "*the King cannot be accused as the sky cannot be plowed*" those who reportedly found challenging the legitimacy of the Emperor were sentenced death penalty and their actions subjected to heresy. Some of them were publicly hanged and some others were killed in action while fighting against the imperial army (Zewde, 2001). The action was deliberately executed by imperial order in a bid to discourage similar oppositions. Eventually, their opposition bore nationwide public awareness about existing structural oppression, ignited public resentment, and led to the formation of organized opposition throughout Ethiopia and overthrew the regime from power in February 1974. Preceded by banditries and personal revolts, three different groups of oppositions can be mentioned as important precursors of the 1974 Ethiopian revolution (Tareke, 2009; Truneh, 1993). The oppositions were primarily nonviolent and safe to say they were inspired by global social movements.

The first is the various uprisings and rebellions sprang

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in many principalities of the empire starting from the First *Woyane* Rebellion (1943), The Eritrean Labor Union strikes (1958), the Gojjam (1942, 1950, 1967), the Bale (1963, 1970), the Yeju uprisings in Wollo (1943, 1968), the *Abba Xoone* rebellion in Wallaga (1952) and the Gedeo Uprising (1960). Their questions mainly revolve around the firm grip of imperial authority on taxes and ownership of rural land (Ta'aa, 2006; Tareke, 1991; Vaughan, 2003). There were also challenges from *Mecha-Tulama*<sup>3</sup> association in the early 1960s against imperial order (Dori, 2012; Zoga, 1985). Since many studies concentrate on maintaining the status quo, oppositions by oppressed class have been ignored or given inferior ranks. Commonalities among these kinds of oppositions can be difficult to discern as they have different contexts and causes. But one thing seems certain - they were civil defiance prosecuted by the oppressed class against imperial order.

These oppositions were primarily nonviolent, prosecuted by ordinary people refused to pay taxes. They rejected local authority and also organized strikes. The Emperor, however, responded by ordering the Imperial Army to subdue them. Many of them suffered a cramping defeat by the army for demanding reconsideration of the taxation system and redistribution of provincial land to the tiller. Most of the land (60-70%) by the time was the treasury of the most notable aristocratic families of the period and the rest (20-30%) owned by the church (Rahmato, 2008). Peasants of the empire were tenants and can only cultivate land leased through one of the most complicated systems of feudal tenure. Accordingly, peasants have to give up at least three-fourth of their produces every year and subjected to pay a variety of taxes<sup>4</sup>.

The second opposition came from combined groups of the military and high-ranking members of the aristocracy. It marked as the first elite oriented opposition aimed to change the power of the absolute monarch (Tibebu, 2008), commonly referred to as the 1960 coup *d'état*. The coup was assumed to be prosecuted in a very technical manner to institutionalize a constitutionally abiding monarch. The coup was masterminded by the Neway-brothers; Mengistu and Germame Neway where the former was a Brigadier General and Commander of the Imperial Body Guard<sup>5</sup>; whereas his younger brother was western educated who returned home with a Master's degree (Greenfield, 1965; Tefera, 2012). They saw maladministration of the period, the heavy hand of the Emperor on everything as he claims to be "Elect of God" with an image of invincible persona. Their intention was not to abolish the monarchy but to limit the power of the king under some established law. However, due to their

failure to communicate their intent to the wider public and their underestimation of the contribution of the rank-and-file members of the military, they were apprehended, backfire beforehand and cost them their lives (Abadir, 2015; Zewde, 2001).

In the decades of opposition against imperial power since the 1940s, one of the major challenges was shifting opposition from the palace to the populace and from the center to the periphery. It was unlikely for the general public to break the tradition of divine authority. As vividly explained by Tareke (2009:13), the 1960 coup, however, was an important transformative event to overcome this challenge. The coup, according to Gebru "shifted the challenges to autocracy from palace to open space of society, from clandestine to overt, from parochial to popular and from peaceful to violent, from sectional conspiracies to mass-based insurgencies, and from the center to the periphery". Tibebu (2008:345) also seems to agree with the writings of Gebru arguing that the coup was a spark that added fire on the genesis of the Ethiopian Students Movement (ESM) against imperial authority. It also made the emperor's persona no longer sacred and no longer inviolable as it was believed to be (Tareke, 2009). There is no doubt that this missed opportunity has laid the foundation for the birth of the later radical and non-violent struggles in Ethiopia.

The third type of opposition came from Ethiopian Students. In addition to challenging the legitimacy of Emperor Haileseilase I and the desire to change the social order, ESM also added important issues to the already ensued struggle. Seeing themselves as the vanguard of the oppressed, students added the Eritrean question and issues of nations and nationalities (Mekonnen, 1969). Many studies indicated that the ESM was one of the few most radical student movements in Africa (Balsvik, 1998; Tibebu, 2008). The late 1950 and early 1960 was also a period where anti-colonial movements in Africa, social movements in Latin America and Far-East, and the civil rights movement in the US were flourished (Balsvik, 1998; Seymour, 2014). These developments were against tyranny and inequalities. In almost all, students reportedly played significant roles in the mobilization of social movements. For this fact, it is no wonder that the ESM has borrowed influential ideological insinuations of organizing mass movement capable of disrupting an established system. Compared to the earlier rebellions, peasant uprisings, labor strikes, and military conspiracies, the ESM became one of the most sustained nonviolent opposition against imperial authority.

The ESM first was confined in Addis Ababa and in quite a few cities such as Harar, Dire Dawa, and Dessie (Tefera, 2012). Many also lack rural experiences although the linchpins came from rural Ethiopia with a keen knowledge of center-periphery gaps. However, a factor of far-reaching significance happened in 1963 when a compulsory program of Ethiopian university students was

<sup>3</sup> An Oromo Self-help association

<sup>4</sup> Civil Code of the Empire of Ethiopia Proclamation No. 169/1960 art. 2991(1)

<sup>5</sup> The first division of the Ethiopian Army commonly called as "*Kibur Zebegna*" which provides personal security to the Emperor and serves as an elite infantry division

institutionalized (Tadesse, 1993). According to the program, students will be sent to the country sides to provide a one-year national service before graduation. Although it was initially opposed by students thinking it is the regime's plan to distant them from the capital and cool-out growing opposition; they later realized it would rather give them the opportunity to cultivate mass support (Vaughan, 2003). The service was designed for the purpose of aiding national welfare vis-a-vis to improve students' understanding of situations in rural Ethiopia. It was an important juncture for students to familiarize themselves with rural Ethiopia. They understood that the rural situation is even far worse than they imagined. They used the experience to enlighten the public and also used it to widen their network with Ethiopian students in Europe and North America (Kebede, 2008; Tibebe, 2008).

Even though the ESM went on colliding ruptures, it managed to become one of the major catalysts for the 1974 Ethiopian revolution (Balsvik 1998). Most revolutionary members, editors of the clandestine pamphlets that were used to enlighten the public such as *Democracia*, *Forward*, *New Ethiopia*, *Abyot* (Revolution), *Voice of the Mass*, *Challenge*, and *Struggle*, as well as the most prominent party leaders of the revolution, came from ESM. Later, they were also able to form political parties such as the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party (EPRP), All Ethiopian Socialist Movement (AESM), *Waz League* and Marxist-Leninist Revolutionary Organization (MLRO) (Ottaway, 1978). For the obvious reason of "student matter", however, the emperor was not concerned about ESM demands (Tareke, 2009; Tefera, 2012). For this fact, no one expected ESM to imprint an indelible mark in the history of organized opposition (Berhe, 2008; Tefera, 2012).

Many questions were raised by ESM (Ruytar, 2011). But the most influential markers that shimmered the 1974 revolution include the abolition of multiple land tenure system, self-determination for nations and nationalities and total abolition of the age-old monarchy (Tadesse, 1993). However, in a state where political consciousness is lacking due to the majority of populations are agrarian with a hand-to-mouth economy, the issue of "land to the tiller" and abolition of the tenure system apparently cultivate mass support (Tibebe, 2008). Nonviolent research also affirms that leaders of civil resistance narrate a story in a fashion that apparently helps to mobilize mass support (McAdam, 2009). "Land to the Tiller", therefore, was one of the few carefully crafted and vividly narrated tactics by ESM to mobilize support from their understanding of the long-lived agrarian crisis. There were no considerable differences among the student body about those issues in the beginning. All aspired transformation into a socialist system as a panacea. But irreconcilable differences in "tactics" were pending to be conceived in a short period following the 1974 revolution.

In the absence of a strong middle class, students assumed the role of awakening the public by articulating narrative stories about how the imperial system exploited the hard labor of Ethiopian masses. They interpreted existing social injustice from Marxist-Leninist perspectives and vividly explained existing capitalistic exploitation. Initially, ESM operation was limited to forming underground groups, study circles, and pamphlets dissemination (Vaughan, 2003). The purpose was to raise consciousness about extravagant ecstasy of the royal family at the expense of the extreme impoverishment of the mass so that they could mobilize the general public. They carefully selected strategy of mobilization to take formidable steps. They organized public demonstrations and sit-ins in universities, high schools and in front of Ethiopian embassies abroad and the parliament at home (Ruytar, 2011; Tefera, 2012). They were banned many times including the emperor's televised statement made in 1969 (Ruytar, 2011), suggesting that this kind of uneducated and immature way of trying to resolve highly intractable and complicated social, economic and political issues is extremely dangerous in countries like Ethiopia (Tadesse, 1993). The methods used by ESM include, but not exclusively limited, making demonstrations, picketing, hoisting placards, painting graffiti, distributing leaflets, school boycotts, sit-ins, petitions, honoring the dead, and hosting drama and arts on student day ceremonies in the presence of royal families.

While hosting drama and the arts, they use metaphors in the tradition of *semena worq*<sup>6</sup> (wax and gold) to vividly explain the misery of the mass. However, ESM activity was radicalized following the publication of an article "On the Question of Nationalities in Ethiopia" by student activist, Walleigne Mekonnen in November 1969 (Tadesse 1993). The article transformed student activism into action. Articles ancillary to the former were also published afterward on students' magazine called *tigelachen* (our struggle) with Marxist flavor *yetecheqqonena yetebezebeze hizeb mametse biret mansat gidetawu new* (meaning it is inevitable for an exploited and oppressed people to rise an arm) mainly to prepare the student body and the public forthcoming armed struggle. Waleign (1969:3) clearly argued that both the peasant uprisings and the military coup had they been successful, could have not changed the oppression for they are led by the aristocracy with insignificant mass support. They could only have changed the person.

Walleigne's supposition shows that nonviolent methods have been tried for decades since the demise of the five

<sup>6</sup> To recall some of the ironic poems presented in student day ceremonies Dehaw Yinageral by Tamiru Feyesa, Milasen Tewulegn & Mute Wokash Metahu, by Abebe Worke, Meda Yequerehewu by Melaku Tegegn, Yegedel Sir Atenet & Esti Teteyeku by Yohanes Admasu, Nuro by Yilema Kebede, Ethiopiawi Manew by Ebsa Gutema, Leresash Eshalehu by Walleign Mekonnen were prominent

years' Italian colonial occupation and change has never come. Accordingly, now, he argued is the time to rise an arm against tyranny for a true social change to come from mass participation not from the aristocratic military overtaking or by few peasant rebellions led by disgruntled members of the aristocracy (Mekonnen, 1969). Supporting Walleligne's idea, some radical student groups also wrote "Tilahun Takele", a pseudonym was given to represent Takele Woldehawariate, a member of the royal family and renowned leader of the Black Lions who challenged the emperor since his exile, and Tilahun Gizaw, student activist of the mid-1960s. The article was published after the failed attempt of hijacking the Ethiopian Airplane and aimed to symbolize the two generations of opposition against the Emperor (Tibebu, 2008). The hijacking team including the writer of the controversial article "on the Question of Nationalities in Ethiopia", Walleigne Mekonnen was killed<sup>7</sup>.

After observing the radical activities of students, the regime issued statements in a bid to alienate them from the general public. The regime accused ESM as foreign stooges, exercising street hooligan and irresponsible acts of vandalism aimed to destroy the system accepted by people, threaten the unity of Ethiopians, disavow religion and divide the country along tribal, religious and cultural lines (Balsvik, 1998). Despite those red lines, students furiously tried to enlighten the public. However, exactly a month after the publication of Walleigne's article on 29 December 1969, one of the student leaders, Tilahun Gizaw was found dead (Tadesse, 1993; Tefera, 2012). The death of the student leader had significant consequences for the radicalization of ESM. ESM leadership that lacks centrality from the outset shifted to high school students and those who came from abroad. As a result, two radical parties were formed: EPRP & AESM.

These parties were formed in Marxist-Leninist fervor. They thought they were helping the Provisional Military Administrative Council (PMAC) who took control of power in early 1974 to establish a "provisional people government" (PPG). The parties considered themselves as vanguards of the revolution and urged the *Derg* to institutionalize PPG. Some, such as the AESM, *Woz* League and MLRO for instance, allied with the *Derg* under the intermediary organ called Provisional Office for Mass Organization Affairs (POMOA) hoping the military will transfer power to a civilian by conducting a nationwide election. The military instead formed a clandestine squad called "Revolutionary Flame" to eliminate people and institutions considered to be threat to PMAC (Tibebu 2008). Furthermore, *Derg* effected a national ban on public assembly, peaceful demonstration, protests and open meetings without the knowledge of

PMAC on 16 September 1974 (AI, 1977; Tefera, 2012). Such movements considered direct threats to the revolution, and if found, the government will use any force necessary to subdue (Tefera, 2012).

In order to effectuate this, *Derg* amended certain articles of the Penal Code of Ethiopia to include the death penalty against those crudely defined as counterrevolutionaries (Tefera, 2012). When revolutionary surge intensified, *Derg* further declared its tactical defensive struggle changed to offensive moves on 6 February 1977 in *Abyot* Square when Colonel Mengistu Hailemariam, president of the *Derg* smashed bottles filled with red liquid to signal the beginning of the "Red Terror" (Tadesse, 1993; Tefera, 2012). The move resulted in the death of tens of thousands of intellectuals, school children and civilians in a situation that seems "mopping-up operation" and termed as the "Ethiopian Holocaust" (Balsvic, 2009; Tadesse, 1993; Truneh, 1993) or *Netsa Ermija* (Griswold, 1978; WPF, 2015; Zewde, 2001). The annihilation of revolutionary groups shook the country to its core. First, all Marxist-Leninist groups allied against one of the pioneer revolutionary groups of the ESM; the EPRP. When they were done with EPRP, then the rest allied against AESM, then against *Woz* League...and lastly against MLRD. They all fall like autumn leaves.

Despite the oppositions made by revolutionary groups through petitions, demonstrations and writing articles, declaration of a state of emergency by the *Derg* with a consequent ban on demonstration and protest in early February 1974, and legalization of heinous counter-revolutionary measure in February 1977 against all Marxist-Leninist groups severely hampered realization of PPG (Balsvic, 2009; Ruytar, 2011). As clearly stated by Hiwot Tefera, they were hoodwinked by *Derg* in beckoning one another until all became dysfunctional. The civil struggle that descended across decades since the early 1940s, unfortunately, came down quiet in brawls among revolutionary groups in the so-called "Red Terror" that took the lives of elites of the generation (Tadesse, 1993; Tola, 1991). In spite of violent repression, however, there were many credible pieces of evidence indicating the opposition was nonviolent until the failed assassination attempt on Col. Mengistu Hailemariam, Chairman of the *Derg*, on 23 September 1976 (Tola, 1991). This has profoundly affected the whole picture of nonviolent struggle. Aghast by the horrors of the "Red Terror", the public perception, dynamism, and hope of bringing social changes through nonviolent means crumbled. It epitomized a travesty of a social movement with no or little backfire effects.

At one point, in 1973, violent repression against ESM by imperial authority yielded international sympathy, turning the situation in favor of students (Ruytar, 2011), after appearing on front pages of the *Frankfurter* and the *New York Times*, followed by a three-hour sit-in made by students in Ethiopian Embassies in Moscow, Belgrade,

<sup>7</sup>The hijackers include, Walleigne Mekonene, Marta Mebrahtu, Amanuel Yohannes, Getachew Habte, Yohannes Befekadu, Tesfaye Birega. and Tadelech Kidanemariam (only survivor) on 07 January, 1973

Paris and Washington DC (Ruytar, 2011). The government of Sweden also officially threatened to cut off ties with Ethiopia if it continues repressing students' demonstrators (Ruytar, 2011; Smith, 2007). However, in the absence of centralized leadership among ESM and widened fissure between radicals and the leftist, especially after the 1974 revolution, backfire had never worked in favor of ESM. Almost every demonstration students were held cracked by regime security which apparently made maintaining nonviolent discipline extremely unlikely. The cases used by students to bring social change and reach a wider audience to meet their ends also subtly vary from time to time. It dynamically ranges from simple student matter to nationality issues, from territorial secession to Pan-Ethiopianism, and from land distribution to deposing highly entrenched autocratic regime (Tadesse, 1993). Failure of the civil resistance echoed against the emperor by students for nearly two decades was hijacked by the military and forced the country to experience decades of armed struggle.

#### CIVIL RESISTANCE IN POST-1991 ETHIOPIA

Following the overthrow of the *Derg* by a coalition of revolutionary forces called the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), interest groups were invited to participate in a "National Conference on Peace and Reconciliation" in July 1991 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. The conference was the first dramatic development in Ethiopia since the far-remote-millennial (Lakew, 1992). The Conference, however, was only attended by parties formed shortly after the overthrow of the *Derg*. With the exception of the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), participant parties have a short period of preparation for the conference. Parties that have a fairly longer existence and experience were prohibited from partaking in the conference (Gudina, 2011; Tuso, 1997). Some who came from abroad were also arrested (Tuso, 1997). Nonetheless, participants accorded on two salient political agreements; adopted the Transitional Charter, and the transitional process agreed to last for two years (Mengisteab, 1997; Ottaway, 1995). To effectuate the transitional process an 87-member Council of Representatives (CoR) was created. Almost half (42) of the members of the Transitional Government of Ethiopia (TGE) were from war exultant party EPRDF, 12 of them were from OLF and the rest (33) were shared among the 20 smaller parties (Mengisteab, 1997).

EPRDF, in what is called a non-competitive election of 1995 won the unsurprising majority and become ruling authoritarian elect (Gudina, 2011a). Given the nascent nature of political oppositions and the early withdrawal of OLF from partaking in the national election (1992), it was crystal clear that EPRDF would be the only alternative at the ballot. The election was a mere formality and a symbolic exercise conducted in the absence of proper

public debate between contenders (Ottaway, 1995). Accordingly, the experience shows that spirit of democratic transition is lacking from the beginning. Following the 1995 election, the old regime of unitary state culminated and ethnic-federalism was introduced (Hagmann and Abbink, 2011).

Framing regional administrative territories and forming political parties on the basis of identity was banned by many post-colonial African states such as in Ghana<sup>8</sup> and Kenya<sup>9</sup> for it is tribal and causes fragmentation (Abbink, 2011) than national cohesion long before Ethiopia's adoption. Since Ethiopia was transitioning from military dictatorship to civilian authority, the first transitional election has a significant influence on the process of democratization. Although election is one of the basic indicators, preparation and results of the first transitional election highly determine future courses (Ishyama, 2007). Whoever wins the transitional election has the opportunity to rewrite rules where others play subordinate roles. Also, those who did the dearly in the armed struggle will have the opportunity to get elected.

Ethiopia conducted two 'periodic' national elections with insignificant participation of oppositions before the conduct of the most controversial election of June 2005 (Smith, 2007). Despite tempting demagoguery by state media and eminent personalities of EPRDF as to how free and fair those elections were, the number of opposition seats in the 547-seat parliament remained 12 until the 2005 national election (Gudina, 2011a). This seems to happen for two basic reasons; First, as it has been clearly described earlier above, the first party elected in the transitional election which obviously did the dearly in the armed struggle wrote the rule of the game and got elected (Ishyama, 2007). Second, people and opposition parties were also apathetic to participate in an election to bring meaningful changes due to the fact that there were no favorable conditions for a real democratic transition to take such as the balance of power between oppositions, change in the balance of forces where people are able to swap their choices between parties, the prevalence of strong civil society and political cohesiveness (Ottaway, 1995). These are key prerequisites for a democratic transition to take place which are apparently absent in Ethiopia not only by the time of the first "transitional" election but also in the second and subsequent national elections.

The 2005 national election, on the other hand, was one of the transformative events in the annals of political opposition in Ethiopia. Compared to the two earlier 'periodic' national elections, the May-2005 election was a truly competitive multiparty election the country has ever seen (Arriola, 2008). More than seventy political parties registered for the election and also got a 'fair' (44% for EPRDF and 56% for Oppositions) access on state media

<sup>8</sup> The 1992 Ghanaian constitution, article, 55(4)

<sup>9</sup> The 2010 Kenyan Constitution, part 3 (91/92)

in promoting party programs to the general public (EU-EOM, 2005). However, EPRDF, Coalition for Unity and Democracy (CUD) and United Ethiopian Democratic Forces (UEDF) turn out to be the highly dominant parties (Arriola, 2008). The pre-election period was relatively democratic. Opposition parties got the opportunity to promote their alternatives in national media and campaigns. Many election observers and CSOs also came to Ethiopia to observe the election (NORDEM, 2006). Ironically, some domestic and international CSOs were also banned by the ruling party from the election observer list close to the Election Day<sup>10</sup> (Abbink, 2006; Gudina, 2011b).

Despite little progress in the pre-election period, the post-2005 election saw a different turn of events. During campaigning, the focus was on issues than on personalities. After the election, however, it becomes clear that the focus shifted from national matters to personalities where hatred and xenophobic speeches against opposition candidates broadcasted on state media. Hours prior to closing the election, and before the National Electoral Board of Ethiopia (NEBE) publicized results, dispute sprung between the ruling party and opposition about the results and spoke of publicly as they have won the election (Samatar, 2005). When the results were announced, out of the 547 constituencies, fraud was reported in 299 (EU-EOM, 2005). It took three months to inspect rigging and eventually recasting was accorded on 31 constituencies.

The May 2005 electoral dispute, for some reason, was between EPRDF and one of the major opposition coalition; the CUD (AHRE, 2018). This is because of EPRDF's understanding and interpretation of CUD's position on the idea of ethnic federalism. In their election manifesto issued in April 2005, the CUD made crystal clear that ethnic federalism is a major political blunder EPRDF adamantly instituted in Ethiopia for it incites conflict among groups<sup>11</sup> (Tuso, 1997). Studies also confirmed that the adoption of identity-based federalism is a serious threat to Ethiopia's democratic survival and corporate existence (Cohen, 1995; Keller, 2002). CUD and other multinational parties believe that economic, political and social injustices simmering in post-1991 Ethiopia rooted from ethnic-federalism.

Whereas EPRDF believes that Ethiopian federalism is not only unique but also not 'ethnic' (Akanji, 2015; Turton, 2005) It is unique in the sense that it fosters national unity and advocates self-determination of all nations and nationalities including up to secession (Cohen, 1995;

Mengisteab, 1997). It is not also ethnic because there are many linguistic groups living outside of the region where their major ethnic groups are found (Turton, 2005). With such sharp differences on the structure of the state as "ethnic" or "multinational", EPRDF saw post-election violence and fraud reports by opposition groups as an attempt to veer votes lost in the election. All the post-2005 national election disagreements, hatreds, and accusations were contained in this discourse. Since people have genuinely participated in the May-2005 national election for the first time rejecting their earlier apathetic feelings, many came to streets to oppose results and demanded recasting in disputed constituencies. Voters' registration and turnout was high because of the prevalence of relatively free and open public debate between parties. The pre-election campaign also generated hope and dynamism among the public to expect fair results by far compared to the two previous national elections. When election results show high irregularities and rigging, people organized protests against the incumbent and demanded to recast of disputed constituencies. They also hold the National Electoral Board of Ethiopia (NEBE) responsible for allowing the ruling party to forge election results.

EPRDF, on the other hand, pointed its finger on major opposition leaders for inciting post-election violence and accused them on state media that 'they' wanted to cultivate *Interahamwe* in Ethiopia. There were also differences in reports of international election observer missions about rigging election results and denying access for oppositions to make election campaigns in some areas weeks prior to deadlines of the election campaign (Smith, 2007). Despite public resentment, EPRDF responded violently and crack down the dissent. Security forces used live bullets and armored vehicles (AHRE, 2018; HRW, 2006) in the process of cracking dissent in Addis Ababa and major cities in Amhara, Oromia and SNNP regions. Opposition leaders earmarked for post-election violence (Reporter, 2007). In Addis Ababa alone, 193 people were killed by security forces, several hundreds were injured and more than 30,000 people were jailed (EU-EOM, 2005; Smith, 2007).

Most were released a month after while others charged with criminal offenses. Among detainees, there were eleven high-level political oppositions most of whom were elected candidates in various constituencies. In late June 2007, Federal High Court found some thirty-eight members of leading oppositions guilty. Although the prosecutor's office sought the death penalty, the sentence handed down was life in prison. However, through negotiation by informal leaders, EPRDF granted pardon on August 18, 2007<sup>12</sup> (Reporter 2007). Oppositions claimed to have won the entire election but denied the victory and when they demand recasting of the votes in 299 disputed constituencies, complaint's

<sup>10</sup> These were a consortium on NGOs funded by the US government and who came to Ethiopia to observe election two years prior to the election and conducting their assessments concerning the fairness of election in Ethiopia. These include International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES), the National Democratic Institute (NDI) and the International Republican Institute (IRI).

<sup>11</sup> Kinijit, Election Manifesto. *Unofficial Translation*, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia issued 1 April 2005.

<sup>12</sup> Proclamation no. 395/1996

review<sup>13</sup> accorded recasting on 31 constituencies; the result turned out to be even more fraud and EPRDF won all seats. Frustrated by awaiting the release of official results, people organized a series of protests in the capital, Addis Ababa and some other major towns. Despite public optimism and dynamism in the so-called “Ethiopia’s landmark election”, the aftermath bore a return to an authoritarian rule where the majority of the seats in the House of People’s Representatives (HPR) are fallen under EPRDF. Nonetheless, the May-2005 election dissent bare deeply entrenched patterns of political repression, human rights abuses, and economic exclusion. The heavy hand of the regime on those matters was disclosed following a suspension of basic human rights such as the right to life, free from torture and dehumanized treatment<sup>14</sup> and all kinds of political rights such as the right to assembly, influencing public policies through petition and demonstration<sup>15</sup>. It, on the other hand, shows growing mindfulness of the public to use nonviolent methods to demand for constitutional rights.

#### **WHAT CAUSED THE POST-2005 PARLIAMENTARY ELECTION DISSENT?**

Competing explanations were given by scholars who follow contemporary political developments in Ethiopia in relation to factors that caused the post-May-2005 election dispute and the dissent afterward. The conundrum was not also limited to what factors but also why the wider public cast its vote against EPRDF in a very sudden shift compared to previous elections. Although, it all started following the speculative election results of ‘winning’ both by the ruling party and oppositions a bit earlier the announcement of results by NEBE, many attached causes of post-2005 public dissent to election fraud. However, since the foundation of TGE in 1991 and promulgation of FDRE in 1994, various deep-rooted issues have been simmering for over a decade. As evident in the Transitional Charter (1991) and also in 1994 FDRE Constitution, EPRDF has promised political and economic liberalization to Ethiopian public by adopting a multiparty system, respect for human rights, equality of citizens, free, fair and periodic election, and decentralized system of governance (Gudina, 2011b; Ottaway, 1995). Despite promises, what actually happened was a decade of food insecurity, floundering public health, a rising figure of unemployment, urban poverty, human rights abuses, glaring ethnic tensions, rising public discontent, agricultural stagnation, lack of government accountability and transparency on serious national matters, and policy unpredictability (Abbink,

2006).

There have been extreme gaps between public expectation and reality on the ground over other matters too. Above all, people were highly convinced that there was TPLF dominance over important facets of the state (Gudina, 2011a). One of the highly debated matters among Ethiopians and Ethiopian diaspora was the dominance of TPLF over other People’s Democratic Organizations. Tadesse and Young (2003:390), while they were discussing the unexpected disintegration of TPLF politburo members in 2001 over matters related to the conduct of the Ethio-Eritrean war of 1998-2000, asserted this reality. Although the rift goes back to the mortal war years, it was actually intensified in the early 1990s when Meles Zenawi, the then Prime Minister once made an unexpected suggestion that “parties shall be organized on the basis of ideology rather than ethnicity in the long run”.

Some members thought the suggestion will result in loss of TPLF’s grip over Ethiopian politics, and also undermined the prime intent of the last armed struggle. The politburo was divided between dissidents and supporters of Prime Minister, Meles (Tadesse and Young, 2003). The rift was further escalated when Eritrea invaded the Hanish Islands of Yemen in 1994. Since Eritrea and Ethiopia have signed a defense pact, some TPLF members saw Eritrean action as an invasion of sovereignty and argued that Ethiopia shall revisit the pact (Milkias, 2005). However, the Meles group not only disagreed but also suggested that Eritrea’s action does not concern Ethiopia. Five years after the Hanish incident, Eritrean forces seized territories belonging to Ethiopia in May-June 1998. The rift got worse and TPLF was on the verge of collapse. Even though there were also considerable differences among the factions over the conduct of the war against Eritrea, the actual split happened as a result of the recommendations made by the Organization of African Unity (OAU) to end the war. The faction from the other side of Meles rejected Technical Arrangements<sup>16</sup> laid by OAU (Tadesse and Young, 2003).

As a result, Twelve TPLF politburo<sup>17</sup> members were denounced and expelled from membership in Cadre conventions held at Mekelle on 16 March 2001 (Milkias, 2005; Tadesse and Young, 2003). The dissidents rejected the armistice because it infringes on Ethiopian sovereignty. Some liberal figures outside TPLF also objected the unlawful dismissal of TPLF politburo

<sup>16</sup> In an intention to find a peaceful and lasting solution between Ethiopia and Eritrea, the OAU in its 35th ordinary session of the Assembly of Heads of States and governments held in Algeria, Algiers from 12-14 July 1999 laid down some important arrangements. Of these arrangements, the cession of all armed air and land attacks, the cession of actions impeding the implementation of the technical arrangement was highly contested by the dissidents.

<sup>17</sup> Regardless of the decision of the Audit Commission of the TPLF and despite they were able to score 17 to 13 in the TPLF politburo, eventually the Meles group succeeded disbanding 12 members of TPLF politburo as dissidents, rotten tomatoes and Bonapartists entertaining anti-democratic tendencies

<sup>13</sup> Ad-hoc committee established to investigate election rigging

<sup>14</sup> FDRE Constitution art. 10(1&2), art. 14, art. 15, art. 18

<sup>15</sup> FDRE Constitution art. 30, art. 31

members including the then FDRE President, Dr. Negaso Gidada [3], the Chief of Defense Staff, Lt. General Tsadekan Geberetinsie, and Chief Executive of Southern Ethiopian People's Democratic Front (SEPDF) and president of Southern Nations Nationalities and Peoples Region Mr. Abate Kisho were relinquished from their respected positions (Africa Bulletin, 2001; Milkias, 2005). This clearly shows the unbridled dominance of TPLF over Ethiopian politics with reference neither to Ethiopian people nor the PDOs it created (Berhe, 2008; Milkias, 2005; Tadesse and Young, 2003). Following this historic incident, the public saw that Ethiopia is nothing but a mosaic of nations under the control of TPLF.

This eventually led to the development of feelings of resentment against EPRDF for it is less important than one of its unit; TPLF, in deciding over grave national security concerns. TPLF, of course, is the one that did the dearly in the armed struggle (Berhe, 2008) and seems to believe that other PDOs of the coalition lacks moral integrity and political consciousness to weigh over national security concerns. Those who tried to breach this tradition have been accused of narrow nationalists (referring Oromo<sup>18</sup>) and *nefetegna*<sup>19</sup> (referring Amhara<sup>20</sup>). In the process, many were expelled from their parties, positions, jobs, incarcerated, tortured, and faced forced withdrawals from their representations. For such and related facts, there have been clear feelings of political exclusion and economic marginalization among Ethiopians. TPLF, however, continues to mock EPRDF and the Ethiopian public for "they" are blessed to celebrate *Ginbot 20* (May 27) and *Hidar 29* (December 09) canonizing TPLF for revamping the ideal state of "Garden of Aden". The former commemorates the day that heralded the demise of *Derg*, and the later for TPLF's generosity promulgating the Constitution of Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples. Second, Samatar (2005:470), despite his taunted view against Christianity and his orthodoxy claim on Amhara domination in Ethiopian history, suggested that one of the many factors causing public dissent in the aftermath of the May 2005 election was the issue of ethnic identity. He argued that people were simply convinced to choose parties based on their ethnic loyalties and aspirations rather than genuine consideration of the objective reality. He further supported his claim suggesting that parties also believed to cultivate support if they appeal to "improved group" statues and focused on areas where they can command such appeal. They estimated that people are more concerned about ethnic identity than nationality issues.

Since the state structure is delineated along ethnolinguistic contours, the Constitution also seems to advocate for parties that are formed on the basis of

identity although it does not formally thwart formations on other grounds. Accordingly, this not only disputes with democracy and constitutionalism is concerned but also became an irrevocable source of new majority-minority relations (Kefale, 2009). This is because there are people in Ethiopia who live outside of the region where their major ethnic groups live and considered as "secondary citizens" in their country of origin. Despite the fact that the majority of the parties were ethnic-oriented and may have favored ethnic-federalism during the May-2005 election, there were also parties running for election with Pan-Ethiopian fervor such as CUD and UEDF (Arriola, 2008; Clapham, 2005). They drew votes by articulating Ethiopianism and cultivated their support across the country rejecting the idea of ethnic favoritism. Despite the fraudulent election results, CUD that favors Pan-Ethiopian was the party with the second-highest votes in the election (EU-EOM, 2005). This also shows how much the public felt disappointed with ethnic-federalism and favoring Pan-Ethiopian parties. Some also suggested that people chose oppositions only to cast their votes against EPRDF. However, it was one of the typical events showing that people have been bored of EPRDF.

Third, others turn the subject from explanations of identity-based politics to EPRDF's aspirations for dominance (Abbink, 2006). Since the first transitional election, EPRDF maintained a firm grip over Ethiopian politics through neo-patrimonial political culture. Neopatrimonialism is a particular variant of patrimonialism attuned to the analysis of politics in most post-traditional societies where there is an acute lack of institutionalism (Bach, 2011). It is characterized by a hybrid model of rule in which informal political ties and exchanges suffuse the management of a state (Bach, 2011; Barton, 2011). To secure its neo-patrimonial lineage, EPRDF has instituted a five-tire structure ranging from local-to-federal levels (Abbink, 2011; Gudina, 2011a). Formally, the networks were designed to serve the interest of the public. In an actual fact, however, they are rather EPRDF's structural instruments instituted to control the grassroots from the center (Aalen and Tronvoll, 2009). People in those networked positions are appointed based on their loyalty to EPRDF. They are simply organizational vehicles manipulated by whoever controls EPRDF. Whenever election comes, rigging is not even the focus. Their primary role is preparing the public to elect EPRDF.

According to prior elections, results are supposed to be announced by the NEBE, starting from the closing of Election Day up to the day reports of each constituency are given. What happened following the 2005 election, however, was a complete departure. The ruling party claimed major victory hours prior to the official closure of casting and while people were still lined up in a long queue for voting in many constituencies in Addis Ababa and other parts of the country (Gudina, 2011b; Smith, 2007). A similar move was also taken by one of the major oppositions, the CUD. Moreover, towards the closing of

<sup>18</sup> An ethnic group with the highest demographic size accounting about 34% of Ethiopia's demography

<sup>19</sup> Machismo with a nostalgic mentality to restore the old imperial order

<sup>20</sup> An ethnic group with the second-largest demographic size accounting nearly 30% of Ethiopia

the election, the Prime Minister made a televised statement banning public demonstrations and outdoor meetings for thirty days in Addis Ababa and its environs (Abbink, 2006; Gudina, 2011a).

To effectuate the ban on demonstration, Addis Ababa Police came under the direct command and supervision of the Prime-Minister (Aalen and Tronvoll, 2009) with the power to incarcerate and kill anyone suspected of making an activity crudely defined as 'threat' to national security. The Prime Minister also extended the release of official election results (Arriola, 2008). The extension was seen by others as the regime's plan to get enough time to manufacture fraudulent and upset opposition parties to use violence in the streets to make them easy prey to domestic and international criticism for failure to admit 'democratic' election results. Addis Ababa University students were the first to publicly defy the demonstration ban on 4 June, 2005 (Lyons, 2005). They organized a peaceful demonstration and demanded the recasting of disputed constituencies. However, using the ban as a pretext regime security forcefully wiped peaceful demonstrators from the streets (Gudina, 2011b).

The protest continued on 6 and 8 June 2005 in Merkato, Piassa, and Mexico areas in Addis Ababa with security forces shooting, incarcerating and killing of demonstrators involved (HRW, 2006). Later, dissent continued in Kotebe Teachers College when arrested student demonstrators were shipped to the federal detention center in armored vehicles (Lyons, 2005). Student demonstration was not even anti-government. It was rather a campaign organized to urge publicizing election results and recasting of the votes in some disputed constituencies. However, since the regime was on the verge of inciting violence to blame political oppositions, it ordered the use of maximum force against demonstrators. Following this, public demonstration became common from June up until November 2005 throughout the country where more than Two-hundred civilians and Eleven politicians were killed, hundreds of others were injured, and more than thirty-thousand were arrested (Reporter, 2007).

The violent crackdown used by regime security in the post-2005 electoral dispute changed not only the nature of civil opposition but also affected the notion of election and ideals of democracy. It was the same government that drafted and adopted the edicts of emancipation from a military rule with a full-flagged provision of freedoms and rights officially suspended them by ordering violent repression against peaceful demonstrators a decade after the promulgation of FDRE. Following the May-2005 election, Ethiopia went down into an authoritarian state where political oppositions and CSOs<sup>21</sup> also suffered heavy clampdown. Civil opposition has never been

possible unless called by EPRDF; in fact, many times, to denounce US Congress (HR reports) and Human Rights Watch statements concerning human rights status in Ethiopia. Frightened by consequences of absenteeism, people participate in regime summoned demonstrations lifting caricatures, placards, and chant over megaphones recanting statements of HRW and US Congress. The space to participate in Ethiopian politics was also severely hampered. EPRDF changed parliamentary codes<sup>22</sup> in a bid to thwart opposition members' influence.

In an attempt to depress civil opposition, EPRDF also used other methods of terrorizing and fraternizing the public. It manipulated state media and broadcasted documentaries showing that protest groups are linked to different international terrorist organizations such as *Al-Qae'da* and domestic armed groups such as OLF, ONLF, *Ginbot 7*, Ethiopian Patriotic Revolutionary Front (EPRF) and Afar Revolutionary Democratic Unity Front (ARDUF). Documentaries such as *Addis Ababan ende Bghdad* (Addis Ababa as Baghdad), *Yeqelem Abiyot Selebawoch* (Martyrs of the Color Revolution), *Akeldama* (Fief of Blood), and *Jihadawi Harekat* (Jihadist Magpies) were produced by Walta Information Center and broadcasted through state media. Among those documentaries, *Yeqelem Abiyot Selebawoch*<sup>23</sup> (Martyrs of the Color Revolution) was specially prepared and narrated to weaken genesis, growth, and development of civil resistance in Ethiopia. The narrators deliberately misread the notion of "Color Revolution" using experiences referred to as "failed revolutions". Examples included were Georgian Rose Revolution (2003), Ukrainian Orange Revolution (2004), and Kyrgyz Tulip Revolution (2005). In the documentary, Color Revolution was defined as unlawful and violent removal of legitimate regimes was unfriendly to the West. It further stated that peace, democracy, and prosperity have no place in Color Revolutions and do not represent the interests of the public. Instead, those who participate in such revolutions are non-other personal automatons of the West.

In the narration, USA-based global pragmatic nonviolent advocates and democracy promoting institutions such as Albert Einstein Institute (AEI), National Endowment for Democracy (NED), International Foundations for Electoral Systems (IFES) and the Freedom House were pigeonholed as institutions funding and promoting such 'violent' groups across the globe. The term "color" in color revolutions, however, is used to represent the different color shirts protesters wore during revolutions and has nothing to do with violence as stated in *Yeqelem Abiyot*

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the Civil Societies and Charities Organization in Ethiopia. The proclamation has limited the smooth operations of charities and civil societies in Ethiopia.

<sup>22</sup> Following the 2005 election dissent, the minimum requirement to table an issue raised to 2/3 of the assembly which was not the case in pre-2005. (See HPR working regulation no. 2/2005 art. 32/4)

<sup>23</sup> The documentary is available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0LyolYk48ac>

<sup>21</sup> This led to the preparation and adoption of the Charities and Societies Proclamation no. 621/2009 to provide details for registration and regulation of

*Selebawoch*. Since it is prosecuted by civilians, it represents the interests of the public. The revolutions in the regime called Eurasia in the early 2000s starting from Slovakia (1998), Croatia (2000), Serbian Bulldozer Revolutions (2000), and followed by others such as Georgian Rose revolution, etc. succeeded ousting totalitarian governments. Regimes in this region were known for rigging election results to stay in power (Wolchik, 2012). Of course, there were also some such as in Armenia (2003 & 2008), Azerbaijan (2003, 2005) and Belarus (2008) where regimes retained power and became more authoritarians.

This does not mean that nonviolent groups cannot be used by those who chose armed struggle as an alternative to further their interests. But EPRDF incessantly accused nonviolent protesters as sympathizers, lackeys, and dupes of terrorist groups and those who seem to have historical adversity with Ethiopia such as Eritrea and Egypt. It further went on to legislate the most controversial Anti-Terrorist<sup>24</sup> Proclamation (ATP) and succeeded incriminating domestic armed groups such as OLF, ONLF, *Ginbot 7*, and international terrorist networks such as *Al-Qaida* and *Al-Shabab* as “terrorist groups” by the HPR on 28th August 2011 pursuant to article 25 of the ATP. Adoption of the ATP<sup>25</sup> allowed the regime to accuse and incarcerate individuals and groups on the grounds of suspicion of “planning to execute” unconstitutional change of government<sup>26</sup> or for having a connection with groups labeled as terrorists without credible foundations. Hence, it was very difficult for people to even “think” about staging protest let alone go to the streets and participate in demonstrations. This is one of the major factors that led to civil resistance in Ethiopia to go down latent since the post-2005 election carnage until 2015.

## CONCLUSION

Nonviolent anti-regime opposition has been one of the major alternatives people took as a course of conflict action in Ethiopia since the restoration of Emperor Haile Selassie I into the throne in the early 1940s. However, oppositions were not well organized in the sense of collective actions and in the sense of politics due to the assumption that they were sporadic protests and prosecuted by individual revolts and rebellions. Towards the 1970s, however, an organized form of resistance emerged and succeeded ousting the Emperor from power. However, the force that demised the imperial system almost nonviolently failed to establish the long aspired civilian authority and Ethiopia relapsed into a far more autocratic state, the *Derg*. Civil resistance was

never possible during the period of the *Derg* due to the ruthless measure taken against nonviolent movements. The regime often used national security to crush any sort of civilian opposition. No street demonstration was allowed. This led to an armed struggle by disgruntled groups that took seventeen years of conventional civil war. The *Derg* was finally overthrown by Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Forces (EPRDF) in 1991. Although the victory resulted in the establishment of an elected government, people were dissatisfied with some of the arrangements from the beginning. They started clamouring for reforms through proper institutional channels and later through the mobilization of people in the streets. But the regime was adamant to people’s demands. Like its predecessors, EPRDF also used the national security to crack down civil resistance especially following the May-2005 election dissent. Civil resistance went latent for over a decade after that and resumed in 2015 following the Amhara and Oromo staged series of oppositions against EPRDF. The common theme that can be discerned across those oppositions, however, was protesters were nonviolent until the regime scorned them down violently.

## CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The author has not declared any conflict of interests.

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<sup>24</sup> The Ethiopian Anti-Terrorism Proclamation no. 652/2009.

<sup>25</sup> ATP proclamation no. 652/2009

<sup>26</sup> ATP Proclamation no. 652/2009, Part Two art. 3 sub-articles 1-6 & art. 4

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