13 Legitimacy, culture of political violence and violence of culture in Ethiopia

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Prologue

This chapter focuses on the paradox of Ethiopia's unprecedented longevity as one of the oldest polities in the world on the one hand and its pervasive and perennial culture of political violence on the other. To deal with the conundrum, operative Aristotelian and Weberian concepts on state formation and legitimacy are profiled. Likewise, theories of political culture and political development advanced by more recent social scientists, including Gabriel Almond, Sydney Verba and Lucien Pye, are highlighted as tools of analysis for the study. Ethiopia's historical and geographical evolution in the context of domestic, regional and colonial violence in Northeast Africa is described. The case study of the culture of political violence and violence of political culture in Ethiopia is then examined within the historical span of 1769 to 2009. The theme that shapes and informs the analysis in this chapter is why, despite its historical longevity,[1] Ethiopia has not been able to forge a peaceful, democratic or quasi-democratic political culture. To this very day political violence is the mode of attaining, sustaining and transferring 'legitimacy' and/or political power in Ethiopia, which establishes a thesis of the *violence of political culture* in Ethiopia and perhaps in other states where legitimacy is likewise routinely attained through violence.

In his book, *Africa and Africans As Seen by Classical Writers, Volume II*, historian William Leo Hansberry[2] stated:

> It is a curious fact that centuries before the geographical and historical terms Babylon and Assyria, Persia, Carthage and Etruria ... Greece and Rome had made their first appearance in the writings of classical authors; Ethiopia was already an old and familiar expression. Long after the names of Babylon, Assyria, Carthage and Etruria had become scarcely more than vague memories, preserved only in the morgue of history, the hoary designation Ethiopia continued in use as the appellation of a nation which the later writers of classical antiquity regarded as contemporary with their own native lands.
>
> (Hansberry 1977: 20)

In the ancient world Assyrians, Persians, Greeks, Romans – among others – had contacts with Ethiopia and Ethiopians. The Greeks, in particular, have left a considerable corpus of verbal and visual documentation on contemporary Ethiopia/Africa. Homer, Herodotus, Diodorus, Aeschylus, Hesiod, Heliodorus and others were prolific in their positive perceptions and portrayals of Ethiopia in their writings. In *Blacks in Antiquity* classics scholar Frank Snowden noted that although Herodotus himself did not travel to Ethiopia, he had identified its location as being "further south of Egypt." By the third century BC Greeks and Romans, including Democritus and Pliny the Elder, respectively, are said to have visited Ethiopia. Diodorus interviewed Ethiopians. And there were Ethiopian residents in the ancient Greek and Roman world as well (Snowden 1970: 186ff.). According to Greek legends their gods, including Zeus and Poseidon, went to Ethiopia for twelve days a year to feast at the "Table of the Sun" for absolution and blessing in advance of an upcoming battle or mission back home. A unique feature of Ethiopian history was that the country was never occupied by any foreign powers. Classicist Frank M. Snowden cites Greek historian Diodorus Siculus, noting:

> the Ethiopians say that they were the first to be taught to honour the gods and to hold sacrifices and festivals and processions and other rites by which men honour the deity ... they call upon the poet (Homer) who in the *Illiad* represents both Zeus and the rest of the gods with him as absent on a visit to Ethiopia to share in the sacrifices and the banquet which were given annually by the Ethiopians for all the gods together. And they state that because of their piety towards the deity they enjoy the favour of the gods ... and they have never experienced the rule of an invader from abroad.
>
> (Snowden 1970: 186)

Legitimacy of authority in political systems

The concept of legitimacy is important for understanding the basis of power and/or authority in political systems. The German social scientist, Max Weber (1864–1920), advanced a useful and still relevant typology on the subject. In one of his major works, *Economy and Society*, Weber posits that there are three "pure types" of legitimate rule (Whimster 2004). In terms of the historical evolution of the state the oldest form is the pre-bureaucratic 'traditional rule' in which the patriarch, lord or monarch claims legitimacy "on account of the particular worthiness of his person that is sanctified through tradition; The content of his command is fixed by tradition: he is obeyed out of piety and ... norms of tradition" (Whimster 2004: 135). Another source of legitimacy for Weber is the personal "charisma" of the warrior, prophet or cultural icon. The masses bestow their fealty on such an extraordinary personality, with little or no effort on his part to merit it. Weber cites as examples Napoleon, Jesus and Pericles. He adds that "charismatic authority is indeed one of the great revolutionary powers of history, but in its true form it has a thoroughly authoritarian and dominating

character" (Whimster 2004:140). A third and more modern source of legitimacy for political authority is "legal" or "bureaucratic" rule that elicits its legitimate authority over people through constitutional (legal) means. Weber is careful to point out that "any law (*Recht)* can be created and any existing law can be changed by enactment that is decided by formally correct (legal) procedures" (Whimster 2004: 133). Likewise, in a legal system of rule "it is not the person who is obeyed by his own right but the enacted rule.... Also the person who commands has himself to obey the rule – the law" (Whimster 2004: 133). As we shall see in succeeding pages Weber's typology will shed light on a contextual understanding of political developments in Ethiopia.

Historical and geographical dimensions of political violence in Ethiopia's history

Violence is a behavioral syndrome that has been part of human society and history from time immemorial. Its dimensions are many and its manifestations tend to escalate in modality and lethality. For the purposes of this discourse, our focus is on political violence as the use or threat of use of deadly force by a given group or party to attain or retain political power. The world today is replete with political violence in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Myanmar, Iraq, Israel/Palestine, Somalia, Eritrea, Sudan Congo, and Colombia, to name a few. In the contemporary world, the nomenclature term, "violence," is becoming rather mild and pedestrian, and the operative term for the dynamics of political violence is "terrorism." The phenomenon of political violence/terrorism has been the focus of academic scrutiny for at least four decades. Professor David C. Rapoport has been engaged in research and publishing on political violence during that time. He launched a new journal, *Terrorism and Political Violence*,[3] and has been its editor or co-editor ever since. Professors Rapoport and Yonah Alexander edited a volume in 1989, *The Morality of Terrorism: Religious And Secular Justifications*,[4] that explored theoretical and empirical dimensions of terrorism including, in their words, chronic terror, enlightened terror, general terror, international terror, rebel terror, religious terror, and state terror. While the foregoing helps us to put the case of Ethiopia in a world context, what one confronts in Ethiopia is the use of deadly force to wrest and/or to sustain political power *continuously*. In the period under scrutiny the dimensions of cyclical political violence germane to the Ethiopian situation include intrastate, regional and colonial armed struggles.

To paraphrase historian Edward Gibbon: "the Ethiopians slept near a thousand years, forgetful of the world by which they were forgotten." In point of fact, however, Ethiopia and the rest of the world were in contact without interruption from ancient times to this day. To be sure, the relationships were checkered. More often than not they entailed malign, deadly violence to conquer and colonize Ethiopia or alienate its territory/resources. Occasionally, they facilitated benign bilateral or multilateral relations with Ethiopia. Colonialists and regional expansionists were not able to conquer Ethiopia – Mussolini's fascist Italy toiled

for five years (1936–1941), but failed. However, colonial marauders managed to nibble and alienate Ethiopian territories along the coastlines and the western borderlands, and Ethiopians paid a high price to sustain their country's extraordinary longevity.

Historically, the Northeast Africa region in which Ethiopia is located includes Sudan, Egypt, the Red Sea, Yemen, Djibouti, Somalia, Kenya, and, as of 1991, Eritrea. In the region as a whole today, nearly all the countries are or have been entirely or primarily Muslim since the rise of Islam in the seventh century AD. The only majority Christian countries are Ethiopia (60 percent) and Kenya (75 percent), while Eritrea is about evenly divided. The ruling classes in Ethiopia had adopted Judaism around 1000 BC as a result of a visit by the Queen of Sheba, or Queen of the South, to the court of King Solomon in Israel (1 Kings 10: 1–13). According to Ethiopian legend inscribed in *Kebre Negest* (Glory of Kings), King Solomon had, characteristically, the best of the Ethiopian Queen before she left for home, and a son was born (see Brooks 1995; Clapp 2001). She named him Menelik (Ibn'al Hakim) or the son of the wise – Solomon – and declared him the first king of the "Solomonic Dynasty" in Ethiopia. Subsequently, the official title of the late Emperor Haile Selassie was "Elect of God, King of Kings, Lion of Judah." and he claimed to be the 225th monarch of that "Solomonic or Jewish royal lineage." During the first century AD a representative of Ethiopia's Queen Candace was converted by Apostle Phillip (New Testament, Acts 8: 26–38) to Christianity during his visit to Jerusalem. Ethiopian Christianity is the Orthodox variety similar to that of Greece, Russia, Armenia, and Egypt.

Initially, Islam spread through Ethiopia peacefully as of its inception in the seventh century AD (Trimingham 1965). For much of the past 1,400 years, Ethiopia sustained continuous and, at times, simultaneous Muslim invasions by Ottoman Turkey, Egypt, Sudan, and, more recently, Somalia, for political or religious dominance as well as for territorial expansion. Invariably, victory on one front led to victory on other fronts. Consequently, Christian Ethiopians had to redouble their defensive struggles and they succeeded at the cost of intensifying and perpetuating the culture of violence. Until 1915 Ottoman Turkey was the dominant Muslim power for several centuries in the Middle East, North Africa, and in parts of Europe. In the mid-sixteenth century the Ottomans ventured into Northeast Africa at a time when a powerful local Muslim warlord, Ahmad ibn Ibrahim el-Ghazi (Ahmad Gurey) of the Adal/Somali region of southwest Ethiopia refused to pay taxes to the Christian overlord, Lebna Dengel (1508–1540) and decided instead to wage a *jihad* (holy war) against him. The Ottoman Turks backed Ahmed Gurey (Wallis Budge 1970: 325–336),[5] who launched his military forays deep into the Christian heartland in 1529 and conquered virtually the whole country. Meanwhile, some European Christians had an idyllic concept of a gallant Christian king whom they nicknamed 'Prester John' in the environs of Ethiopia and they decided to link up with him after an appeal for Christian help by Queen Helena, the mother of beleaguered Emperor Lebne Dengel (1508–1540). In the event, Portugal sent 400 troops of whom half were killed by

Gurey. But the Portuguese rallied and by 1543 the war was over, Gurey was killed, and his fighters were forced to retreat. This Muslim vs. Christian armed struggle – supported by elements from outside the region – was a high-profile bloody confrontation. The confessional divide and strain in the region continued to perpetuate tension and violence in subsequent years.

By the nineteenth century another genre of invaders from Europe came to the region intent on colonizing Africa, including Christian Ethiopia. Colonialism became the new plague of the region because it threatened to subdue everyone. Africans in Northeast Africa had opportunities to align with one another against common alien enemies, especially in light of the ensuing rivalries among the colonialists in the region – British, French, and, later, the Italians. Unlike situations in much of the rest of Africa, it appears that from the very beginning the influx of numerous European "travelers" or "missionaries" were regarded as advanced colonial scouts by Ethiopian rulers. One such "traveler," French-Irish Arnauld d'Abbadie, reported in 1842 the blunt nationalist words of northern Ethiopian ruler, Dejazmach Wube:

> Take care that you never again tread on the soil of my country. The English and you are confined to cursed land and you covet our healthy climate; one collects our plants, another our stones; I do not know what you are looking for, but I do not want my country to be where you find it.
>
> (Rubenson 1978: 54)[6]

As is the case of every country, Ethiopian groups engaged in internal struggles for power, which were influenced and exacerbated sometimes by concurrent regional and colonial incursions and pressures. In the latter half of the nineteenth century, Britain, Egypt, Italy, and Sudan invaded Ethiopia repeatedly and often simultaneously. In the process, domestic Ethiopian politics became enmeshed with its struggles for survival or independence in what I call a *collision-collusion* syndrome.[7] The British invasion of 1868, for instance, succeeded in toppling its *bete noire*, Emperor Tewodros of Gonder, by courting an aspirant to the Ethiopian throne, Lij Kassa Mercha of Tigray. In return for his support the British left him much of their military hardware, which assured his claim to the throne in 1872 by force of arms, like his predecessor. From that time, Queen Victoria and the Anglophile Ethiopian Emperor became hand and glove. In the 1880s and 1890s the Italians played crass divide-and-rule games with Emperor Yohannes and Tigrayans, on the one hand, and king Menyelek and the Shoans, on the other, in order to advance their desideratum for occupying the Red Sea coastal area – named Eritrea in 1890 – as a launching pad for colonizing the whole of Ethiopia.

As noted earlier, the fundamental defining sinews of the persistent culture of political violence in Ethiopia are intrastate, regional, and colonial factors. The intrastate elements of political violence involve brute struggles for the pinnacle of political power by aspirants mainly of Amhara, Tigreyan, and Oromo ethnic groups from among Ethiopia' sixty ethnic groups. Intrastate struggles have also

been aligned along localized geographical entities such as Shoan in mid-Ethiopia, Gonder, or Gojjam in northwestern Ethiopia, all of which are basically Amhara territories that pursued intra-Amhara rivalries for power. Tigrean ethnic groups in northern Ethiopia in Tigray and Mereb Melash – better known today as Eritreans – also carried on rivalries across the Mereb River which delineates part of the northern border between them. The Oromo people of Ethiopia, who comprise the largest ethnic group and are spread throughout the country, have been power brokers for the past few centuries. Somali nomadic clans inhabit a very large span of territory in eastern Ethiopia and in the Red Sea and Indian Ocean littoral as well as the Ogaden.[8] By the end of the nineteenth century however, the British, Italians and French had colonized nearby coastal Somali lands. In the 1950s and 1960s the British were campaigning for a Greater Somaliland comprising their colony and Somali-inhabited Ethiopian Ogaden – under their tutelage, of course. This notion became an irritant in Somalian–Ethiopian relations and on occasion sparked armed skirmishes between them.

Islamic Egypt, Sudan, and Somalia have conducted forays from time to time into Ethiopia. In 1977 Somali President Siad Barre invaded Ethiopia, sending his troops some 700 kilometers to the Ethiopian capital, Addis Ababa. It was the peak of the Cold War and the United States and the Soviet Union took sides to arm and cheer the struggles at the expense of Somalis and Ethiopians. The Russians supported Siad Barre even though they were virtually allied to Mengistu Hailemariam's regime in Ethiopia. Then the Soviets switched sides and some of the same Russian officers who masterminded the Somalian invasion became part of the Ethiopian defensive struggle. More importantly, it was Cuban intervention on Ethiopia's side that turned the tide and the Somalis retreated behind their borders in 1978. As Cuban leader Fidel Castro,[9] who was enthusiastic about the Ethiopian Revolution, put it, "We fought in Ethiopia, pushing back the aggression launched by Siad Barre against the revolution there" (Castro and Ramonet 2004: 261). The umbilical cord of friendly relations between Ethiopia and the United States had snapped following the 1974 revolution, its bases and establishments in Ethiopia were vacated, and the United States consistently opposed Mengistu Haile Mariam all the way to his fall in 1991. In the polluted atmosphere of the Cold War, preposterous pronouncements were sometimes made. During the Somalia invasion of Ethiopia in 1977 to 1978, Dr. Zbigniew Brzezinski,[10] national security advisor to President Carter, said that "Détente (between the Soviet Union and the United States) lies buried in the sands of the Ogaden" (1985: 189). The Carter administration did not oppose Somalian violation of Ethiopia's territorial integrity, but warned Ethiopia and its allies not to trespass Somalia's international borders in hot pursuit. In 2007 the current regime in Ethiopia invaded Somalia, exacerbating the long-simmering Islamic Somalia–Christian Ethiopia confrontation. It is important to point out here that regarding Egypt and to an extent, Sudan, the leitmotif for their continuous pressures and aggressions against Ethiopia has to do with the flow of the Blue Nile emanating from Ethiopia and possible control of the sources of the river, which provides more than 80 percent of water, as well as silt, for Egypt. Their fears about the

Table 13.1 Colonial and regional expansionist wars against Ethiopia, 1868–1896

Location	*Invader*	*Date*	*Outcome*
Meqdela	Britain	April 1868	British victory
Gundet	Egypt	November 1875	Ethiopian victory
Gura	Egypt	September 1885	Ethiopian victory
Kufit	Sudan	March 1876	Ethiopian victory
Dogali	Italy	January 1887	Ethiopian victory
Sahati	Italy	March 1888	Italian victory
Metemma	Sudan	March 1889	Sudanese victory
Amba Alage	Italy	December 1895	Ethiopian victory
Meqele	Italy	January 1896	Ethiopian victory
Adwa	Italy	March 1896	Ethiopian victory

water have been promoted by British colonial agents in those countries. Colonial incursions and their Machiavellian tactics exacerbated internal dissensions and struggles for supremacy, which were also exploited by regional expansionists. Ethiopians were awash with arms from Europeans that were used to determine internal political struggles, external wars, and the struggles against imperialists and regional expansionists. However, Emperor Menyelek (1889–1913) and Queen Taitu applied the colonial playbook of *divide et impera* to their colonial adversaries by using Italian-supplied weapons to attain a series of ignominious defeats, culminating in the famous "Battle of Adwa" on March 1, 1896 (see Abdussamad and Pankhurst 1998; Ayele 1999). In the course of these interminable battles for independence, Ethiopian patriotism was defined in terms of armed resistance and victory in the field of battle. Hence, martial prowess or political violence became a *sine qua non* in Ethiopia's political culture. It should also be noted that Ethiopia and the region of Northeast Africa was replete with European arms that were distributed or sold to different states and to various internal elements with the aim of having them fight with one another or to protect colonial interests against local or other colonial challengers. Table 13.1 summarizes the Expansionist Wars Against Ethiopia (1868–1896) culminating in the victory over the Italians.

Culture of political violence in Ethiopia (1769–2009)

The concept of 'political culture' gained currency and high visibility as a paradigm for political analysis principally with the publications of Almond and Verba's *The Civic Culture* 1963 (see Almond and Verba 1989) and of Lucian Pye and Sidney Verba's *Political Culture and Political Development* (1966). At times, one sometimes wonders how much or how little Western political thought has advanced from Aristotle's thoughts and typologies some 2,300 years ago. In Book III of his *Politics* Aristotle noted that "Governments which have regard to the common interest, are true forms; but those which regard only the interest of the rulers are all defective and perverse forms, for they are despotic, whereas the state is a community of freemen" (Jowett 2000: 114). The "true forms" of governments are those governed by one (monarchy), by a few (aristocracy) or by many (constitutional government) in the interest of all. These forms of government can also have perversions; royalty can be perverted to tyranny, aristocracy to oligarchy, and constitutional government to democracy/anarchy.

The Almond/Verba/Pye theory of political culture as predisposition and relation of people to political processes and institutions is reminiscent of Aristotle's paradigms. In essence, the modern notion of political culture posits that one can identify three forms and/or levels of political orientations by people in relation to government. These are: (1) traditional or parochial levels of minimal awareness of political phenomena and virtually no role in governmental activities; (2) some basically subdued awareness of political matters and rights, and remaining subject to authoritarian centers of power; and (3) the highest form of citizenship and participation, as in modern democratic governments. The third or highest form of a citizen-participatory political system is highlighted in their earlier work, *Civic Culture*. Their models are the United States, Britain, Germany, Italy, and Mexico. Nearly two decades later, Almond and Verba published *The Civic Culture Revisited* (1989),[11] a collection of essays reflecting the strengths and weaknesses of their work.

What can we learn about Ethiopia's political culture if we apply a blend of Aristotle's rendition on politics and the state on the one hand with modern notions of political culture *a la* Almond and Verba? For the most part, Ethiopia has had monarchic authority systems buttressed by feudal, aristocratic coteries, which, more often than not, have exercised tyrannical or absolute rule over the masses to this day. For centuries the Ethiopian people have had little or no say, role, or share in governing or political participation. The people were subjects, not citizens. The people's attitude toward politics was, for the most part, parochial and to some extent subdued obeisance. On occasion, an ambitious personality who covets high office gathers followers and launches armed rebellion and becomes a *shifta*, i.e., an armed rebel. If he succeeds, he wipes out the incumbent and takes over. Almost invariably, the new ruler becomes a carbon copy of the one he supplanted and thereby subject to being hounded in turn. Ultimately, the path to political ascendancy and retention of power is paved with arms and political violence. Generally, kings and emperors claimed to have been chosen by "God" to rule, not by the people. Hence, *the political culture of Ethiopia emanates largely from the hoary history of its culture of political violence.* It has been developing over centuries of simultaneous and continuous internal, regional and colonial armed conflicts, battles and wars.

It is evident that in the period under review nearly all the rulers in Ethiopia assumed power by removing incumbents by political violence. A qualified exception is the case of Empress Zewditu Menyelek, who was called upon to assume the throne in 1916 following a *coup d'etat* – not of her own making – that deposed Lij Iyasu. When one turns to the mode of rule, the use of political violence by the autocratic feudals, fascists, military rulers, and the current regime is unmistakable. These autocrats ruled and still rule by the gun with only lip-service to "constitution," "peace," "parliament", "power to the people,"

"election," "democracy," "socialism," "federalism" "Ethiopianism," etc. Any claim to legitimacy in the Ethiopian political system does not emanate from the will of the people, but is arrogated by the rulers, who claim that their right to rule comes from "divine," rather than human sanction. Emperor Haile Selassie in effect ruled Ethiopia for nearly six decades (1916–1974).[12] Applying Weber's terminology, we find that Haile Selassie's hybrid mode of rule reflected all three types of authority. The Emperor fits partly into the "pre-bureaucratic" traditional type "that is sanctified by tradition" – in this case the Solomonic dynasty – and therefore he was "to be obeyed out of piety and norms of tradition." At the same time, he had also benefited from his charismatic personality at home and abroad. In addition, the Emperor was also a skillful autocrat who "legalized" his legitimacy for authority. During his reign he proclaimed two Imperial constitutions, one in 1931, which was revised in 1955. Thus, he covered all bases politically to portray his rule as traditional, charismatic, and legal. In the 1960s, however, the Emperor had a close call when his own security chief, his Imperial body guard leader, as well as his younger brother and other elements, staged a coup attempt while he was on a visit to Brazil. Thanks to America's discreet intervention and church and army opposition, he survived the attempt. Nevertheless, throughout the 1960s there was sustained militant opposition to imperial rule led mostly by university and high school students at home and abroad. These movements against the Emperor and his government reached a crescendo in the 1974 popular revolution when the Emperor was dethroned relatively peacefully, and monarchic rule was eliminated (see Selassie 1997; Tareke 2009; Ayele 1980/81).

The mode of rule in Ethiopia was, until 1974, feudal and semi-feudal, characterized by total anarchy at one end of the political spectrum and centralized rule at the other. The vast majority of the Ethiopian people have chafed under a mostly regimented, blatantly militaristic, minority hegemony for centuries that continues to this day. (A qualified exception occurred in the waning years of Emperor Menyelek (1889–1913) who ruled with more civility than his predecessors, even if the semi-centralized feudal system was still in place.) Three chronic problems for Emperor Haile Selassie and his successors were the secessionist movement in Eritrea, Somalia's irredentism in the Ogaden, and persistent radical student opposition to his rule. He retained the title of Emperor – which meant "king of kings" – even though he had abolished kingships (see Caulk 2002).

The question of Eritrea

The empire had cracks, and one of them was in the Red Sea "province" of Eritrea, which was detached from Ethiopia and colonized by Italy in 1890. When Mussolini's fascist Italy was defeated in Ethiopia in 1941, the British became Ethiopia's caretakers until a post-war spoils-of-war settlement system for colonies of Axis powers was worked out. Subsequently, when the United Nations was formed in 1945, it assumed the responsibility of determining the future of Eritrea, Somalia, and Libya. In the event, the UN established a Commission to study the situation in Eritrea to ascertain the wishes of the inhabitants, consult

with the Ethiopian government, and submit a report and recommendations to the General Assembly for its deliberations and voting on the matter.

Consequently, on December 2, 1950 the UN General Assembly passed Resolution 390A (V) (see *Final Report of the United Nations Commissioner in Eritrea* 1952; Ayele 2003; Medhanie 1986). The Preamble and the First Article declares:

> Taking into consideration, (a) The wishes and welfare of the inhabitants of Eritrea, including the views of the various racial, religious and political groups of the provinces of the territory, and the capacity of the people for self-government, (b) The interests of peace and security in East Africa, (c) the rights and claims of Ethiopia based on geographical, historical, ethnic or economic reason, including in particular Ethiopia's legitimate need for adequate access to the sea, *The General Assembly recommends that Eritrea shall constitute an autonomous unit federated with Ethiopia under the sovereignty of the Ethiopian Crown.*

The concept of federation was not familiar to the people concerned, and neither the Ethiopian government nor Eritrean activists called for it. The options on the table were either for unity or for independence. Consequently, neither the Ethiopian government nor Eritrean proponents of unity or independence were satisfied with the Resolution.

Regardless, the UN implemented the federation scheme in 1952. The federation was wobbling from the start, and by the early 1960s there were armed skirmishes between Eritrean secessionist elements and Ethiopian government forces. By the late 1970s the struggle for Eritrean secession from Ethiopia had reached a critical level with the emergence of a single guerrilla force, the Eritrean Peoples Liberation Front (EPLF), which gained momentum in the 1980s with the active support of a Tigrayan anti-government movement to the south of Eritrea, the Tigrayan Peoples Liberation Movement (TPLF), which was patterned after and tutored by the EPLF. The majority of the people in both territories are Tigrigna speakers and share other historical and cultural commonalities. They joined forces and gave the Derg, the military government in Ethiopia, a run for its life climaxed by total victory. The rebels occupied Asmara (Eritrea's capital) and Addis Ababa in May 1991. In the decades of struggle between the guerrillas and Ethiopian forces, the rebels had the logistical support of Sudan; the financial support of Islamic countries such as Saudi Arabia, Syria and Pakistan; and especially after the fall of the Emperor and souring relations with the military government (Derg) in Ethiopia-American support to enemies of the Derg, were critical factors in the success of the TPLF and EPLF.[13] Here then is another facet of the culture of violence in Ethiopia that features intrastate, regional, and colonial/external elements in play at the expense of hundreds of thousands of lives and the desolation of the land. Table 13.2 features the interplay of forces and factors in the making and entrenchment of Ethiopia's culture of political violence.[14]

The culture of political violence and the violence of culture in Ethiopia

It stands to reason that in a system where multifaceted political violence is continuous and pervasive, transfer of power from one regime to the next has nearly always been by force of arms. Under the heading "Transfer of rule" in Table 13.2, incumbents are subdued, assassinated, toppled, beheaded, ousted, or forced out of the country to make room for armed victors and their retinue. Intruding or invited foreign powers and entities have also had direct and indirect roles in transfers of power in Ethiopia besides being the ones availing the military hardware to combatants. Such incursions include those of the British in 1868, the Sudanese in 1889, the Italian fascists in 1936, and the Soviet military intervention in Somalia and then in Ethiopia in 1977 to 1978. Lij Iyassu was dethroned, jailed (1916), and later died in undisclosed circumstances. In an act of poetic justice Lij Iyasu's jailer, Haile Selassie, was in turn incarcerated in 1974 and died in shady circumstances in 1975. Haile Selassie in 1936 and Col. Mengistu Haile Mariam in 1991 were self-exiled. Only two Ethiopian rulers, Emperor Menyelek and his daughter Empress Zewditu, died of natural causes. The cycle of internal, regional, and colonial/neocolonial/Cold War political violence in Ethiopia and Northeast Africa continued unabated. Consequently, in the very long stretch of its history, Ethiopia became a poster child, not only for its famines in the 1960s and 1970s, but also for its debilitating culture of political violence.

The perpetual culture of political violence in Ethiopia poses a conundrum. On the one hand, Ethiopians are entitled to savor their capacity to maintain their independence in spite of continuous regional and colonial assaults – more so than other polities in Africa. On the other hand, how can one explain Ethiopia's incapacity over many centuries of its existence to generate a civil political system in which martial prowess is no longer the road to ascend to power, to rule, and to maintain power? Why has it been impossible to end the long cycle of culture of political violence and mutate to a *quasi* democratic political system? As noted above, Ethiopia was not an isolated polity. Consequently, it had opportunities to share its good with the outside world and, besides arms, adapt some good from others in the social and political realms. After Mussolini's "rape" of Ethiopia in 1936 Emperor Haile Selassie seemed interested in "modernizing" his country to bring it up to par with advanced countries (see Sbacchi 1985). He started by sending young Ethiopians for education abroad, and he offered concessions for oil and gas exploration in Ethiopia to the United States. But in the political field the Emperor's five-year sojourn in London led him to adopt British royal attire and protocols but not their democratic system. The Emperor served as head "Marshal" of the Ethiopian armed forces. He had virtually absolute power which he exercised with relish during his second phase of rule of forty-four years following the fascist invasion in 1941. His almost absolute rule was sustained by a feudal coalition consisting of the monarch, the aristocracy, and the clergy. Despite muted suggestions, including gentle nudging by his

Table 13.2 Rise to power, mode of rule, transfer of rule in Ethiopia, 1769–2009

Period	*Rise to power*	*Mode of rule*	*Transfer of rule*
1769–1855	Zemene Mesafint war of all against all	Total autarchy under local warlords	Gonder rebel Kassa subdues warlords
1855–1868	Tewodros II becomes Emperor of Ethiopia	Semi-centralized semi-feudal rule	British invasion of Ethiopia; suicide of Emperor Tewodros
1868–1872	Gonder pretender attempts to rule	Brief, weak, unstable rule	Violent overthrow of ruler by Kassa M
1872–1889	Tigre rebel becomes Emperor Yohannes IV with **British** support	Semi-feudal rule semi-centralized rule	**Sudanese** dervishes behead Emperor Yohannes IV in Metemma
1889–1913	Menyelek II of Shewa becomes Emperor **Italians** in Asmera	Semi-centralized semi-feudal rule	Natural death of Emperor Menyelek II
1913–1916	Nominal succession of grandson Lij Iyasu	Ras Tefari and supporters launch *coup d'etat*	Lij Iyassu ousted, jailed
1916–1936	Zewditu Menyelek is Empress; co-ruler; Tefari later crowned Emperor Haile Sellassie	Semi-feudal, more centralized rule	Natural death of Empress Zewditu
1936–1941	**Mussolini** invades and occupies Addis Abeba; Emperor self-exiled in London.	Brutal Italian fascist violence and protracted resistance by Ethiopians	Ethiopian patriots defeat and oust **Italians** with some **British** support
1941–1974	The **British** escort Emperor to Addis Ababa; Cold War draws **USA/USSR** to Ethiopia	H.S.I. restores centralized rule; promulgates Imperial constitution	People's revolution *cum* military mutiny topples Emperor HIS
1974–1991	Military group (Derg) under Major Mengistu H.M. takes over; socialist orientation	Centralized military rule, continuous internal wars; **Somalia** invades Ethiopia	**USSR** and **USA** carry on proxy Cold War in Somalia/Ethiopia
1991–2009	EPLF &TPLF occupy Addis Ababa and Asmera, supported by **Sudan**, United States	Meles Z. carries on ethnic based reign of terror in Ethiopia **TPLF** invades **Somalia**	Col. Mengistu HM flees to Zimbabwe; Eritrea secedes **EPLF vs. TPLF** border war

Note
Colonial violence sources are highlighted with *bold* letters while all forms of intrastate and regional political violence are identified with underlining.

American friends and protectors that he voluntarily hand over power to Crown Prince Asfa Wessen, the Emperor refused. A short-lived coup spearheaded by the Emperor's own imperial bodyguard in December 1960 named the crown prince as the new Emperor (see Greenfield 1965).

Professor Donald Levine of the University of Chicago studied Ethiopic lingua franca, did field research in the 1950s and shortly thereafter published an important study, *Wax and Gold* (Levine 1965) on Ethiopian culture and the *double entendre* of Ethiopic, specifically Amharic language. He summarized "Cult of Masculinity" traits among a representative cross-section of Ethiopian peoples in his book, *Greater Ethiopia: The Evolution of Multiethnic Society.*[15] Table 13.3 shows excerpts from "Cult of Masculinity" representing the majority of the Ethiopian peoples.

In the past three and a half decades there were at least two historical occasions that promised to break the cycle of political violence and facilitate a democratic system. The first was in February 1974 when a genuine people's revolution occurred in Ethiopia. Without any organized leadership, the rank-and-file students, peasants, workers, Christian and Muslim clerics, military and police elements in Addis Ababa and throughout the country spontaneously marched in the streets. They called *for fundamental change in the political leadership, land to the tiller, power to the people and accountability of civil and military officials.* In the event, non-commissioned and lower rank military elements organized themselves into an "interim" council, or Derg, ostensibly to ensure the security and territorial integrity of the country as it went through its revolutionary convulsions. The genuinely popular Ethiopian Revolution was peaceful, euphoric, and hopeful. People's power was palpable and most observers, especially in the socialist/Marxist world, believed that Ethiopia was embarking on a positive, egalitarian, and representative future, that it would never be the same again. For several weeks there was a power vacuum as the Emperor's powers were being peeled off to the core like an onion. Meanwhile, the military committee (Derg)

Table 13.3 Selected Pan-Ethiopian traits in cult of Masculinity

Cult of masculinity traits	*Peoples in Ethiopia who exhibit cult of masculinity*
Special status accorded to killers	Afar, Amhara, Arsi, Borana (Oromo), Dorze, Hadiya, Konso, Konta, Kunfel, Marya, Mensa, Somali, Tigrean
Special genre of songs to praise warriors	Afar, Amhara, Bilen, Borana, Dorze, Gurage, Kefa, Konso, Marya, Mensa, Somali, Tigrean, Tulema
Use of stelae or stones to honor brave heroes	Afar, Amhara, Beni Amer, Bilen, Dorze, Gurage, Harari, Kefa, Konson Mensa, Sidamo, Tigrean
Strongly pejorative images of woman	Amhara, Beni Amer, Bilen, Dorze, Gurage, Harari, Kefa, Konso, Somali
Exclusion of women from public assemblies	Afar, Beni Amer, Borana, Dorze, Guji, Kefa, Konso, Kunama, Nara, Sidamo, Somali

gained substantial visibility as it carried out arrests of high officials who did not voluntarily give themselves up at designated camps. Derg representatives shuttled in and out of the Imperial Palace, negotiating with the Emperor to turn in millions of dollars that he had allegedly hoarded in Swiss secret bank accounts. Finally, on September 12, 1974 Emperor Haile Selassie I was driven to a military barracks in an old beetle Volkswagen as he was jeered and derided by onlookers. He was kept under house arrest until his death (under suspicious circumstances) in 1975.

The next phased task of the revolution was to establish a transitional government. To its credit the military initially asked young and old educated elites to get ready to select leaders for the country. But the educated elites were unable to pre-empt a military takeover, because they could not get their act together. In short order, the so-called "creeping coup" developed as the military, riding the waves of revolution, obliged and assumed power. Despite the Derg's announcement that its slogan of rule would be "*Yaale menem dem, Ethiopia tiqdem*" – "Let Ethiopia advance without the shedding of blood" – the gap and tension between military and civilian elements – especially the young educated groups – widened, and full-scale armed struggles ensued. The civilian combatants, young and old, gave as much as they got from the military.

While the ruling military remained more or less united at first, the civilian elites were increasingly fragmented into splinter parties, resulting in internecine fratricide. More critically, the ethnically based guerrilla movements, such as the Eritrean EPLF and the Tigrayan TPLF, stoked and exploited the bloodletting in Ethiopia for their own secessionist and ethnic agendas, which they realized in 1991. Consequently, an opportunity to break the cycle of political violence was lost. In fact, the seventeen-year tenure of the Derg was a period of unrelenting violence on many fronts and intensities.

The Eritrean and Tigrayan armed forces toppled the Derg, occupied Addis Ababa, and severed Eritrea in May 1991. The TPLF promised a season of peace and democracy. The first thing they did was to disarm the population so that they retained a monopoly of deadly force. They refashioned Ethiopia's internal boundaries along major ethnic lines, necessitating massive forced population movements of people who had lived for centuries in what they believed was Ethiopian territory. They deliberately and gratuitously made Ethiopia landlocked. In reality, the TPLF agenda was to lay the foundations of ethnic Balkanization in Ethiopia for a divide-and-rule policy while they were in power or disintegration when they no longer ruled.

The second opportunity to break the culture of political violence cycle came in 2005. Under some pressure from European countries and the United States, the TPLF regime allowed democratic parties to participate in an upcoming election in May 2005. It was too good to be true, but the challenging parties were ready to campaign vigorously. *Kinijit* (the Coalition for Unity and Democracy) quickly gained support. Just days before election day an estimated two million people filled the city of Addis Ababa cheering for *Kinijit,* whereas the ruling junta could not muster even a quarter of that number with carrots and sticks.

Ethiopia had never in its history witnessed such enthusiasm and hope attached to an election. When the votes were counted, alternative parties in general and *Kinijit* in particular won hands down in Addis Ababa and nearly everywhere except in Tigray – which, for all intents and purposes, has become a self-governing "state" without a seat at the United Nations General Assembly.

In an act of highway robbery, the TPLF autocrats scrapped the actual election results and decreed themselves the winners, making the election a zero–sum game for the democratic challengers. When people came out to the streets to protest the action, they were shot dead indiscriminately. At least 193 people were killed by regime gendarmes. Shortly thereafter, the regime incarcerated 131 mainly *Kinijit* leaders, academics, journalists, and activists for over a year and a half. Once again, political violence was used to retain power, despite the loss of an election.[16] The Ethiopian scene was back to square one, validating the hypothesis of *the violence of culture* as an outcome of a long-standing *culture of political violence*, as we have seen above. More often than not, political violence has become the preoccupation of a "culture of masculinity," which is often proudly acknowledged by its practitioners. As depicted in Table 13.3, which represents at least 80 percent of the population, the culture of masculinity is embedded as a "default" norm of male behavior. It remains the manifest expression of the long history of Ethiopia's culture of political violence perpetuated in the unrelenting violence of political culture.

Illustrative of the theme of this chapter is the phenomenon of how "death" or *moat* permeates even casual conversations, especially in northern Ethiopia. People prepare for death more than they do for life. Those who are demeaned, slandered, and spat upon when alive are saluted with a sense of reverence and serenity when dead – even by people who did not know them. If one wants to be believed about anything, one vows to speak the truth on pain of one's own death or of one's interlocutor, one's mother, or father (*ene lemoot, moot, enate temoot, abate yemoot*). During the lifetime of Emperor Haile Selassie, saying "*Haile Selassie yemoot*" (Let Haile Selassie die)[17] was the ultimate assurance. If a hostess wants to feed a guest who declines her offer, she will say *"Afer Sehon"* (Let me become dust, i.e., please accept my entreaty). All this may sound frivolous or unremarkable when first encountered, but it is a window to a political culture in which death, killing, and dying have been seared into the Ethiopian subconscious from generation to generation – including that of the current regime.

Epilogue

The culture of political violence is an intrinsic and inevitable reality in Ethiopia. It has been and remains the normative mode of exercising political power in the country's very long history. Politically minded, Westernized Ethiopians aspiring to the throne or political summit more or less assume political violence to be the means of attaining power, using power, and retaining power in the country. Under such circumstances the question of legitimacy of authority is not even

raised or discussed by power seekers or power brokers. Challengers for the hot seat of power know that ultimately they have to wrest power by force of arms – no matter their rhetoric to the contrary – and no one begrudges them or considers the exercise of political violence as illegitimate or immoral. To be sure, Ethiopia is not the only country in history where political violence is the final and certain arbiter. Whether one thinks of the countries of Europe, Asia, Latin America, the Middle East, the United States,[18] or other African countries, political violence has figured in their historical past. But most of these countries have more recently made transitions to relatively civil, peaceable, and democratic governance. In the contemporary world one has become inured to active and bloody political violence in Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan, Somalia, and, off and on, in Israel/Palestine. What makes the Ethiopian case sadly unique is that in its hoary history *it has not shed the culture of political violence, and is still ruled by political violence today.* No one has been wearing new attires of power in Ethiopia, only the same centuries-old, bloodstained, hand-me-down ones–including the present-day dictators in the twenty-first century.

As I write, Somalia in particular presents a tragic example of the ultimate consequences of the "violence of culture." Since 1991, Somalia has been without a viable, functioning government and has suffered unabated internal wars.[19] The international community has not been able to contain the colossal carnage in Northeast Africa. The long, continuous trail of the culture of political violence in Ethiopia predisposes it to be another Somalia, unless victims, academics, and all peoples of goodwill begin to deal with not only the processes of culture of political violence but with the understudied theme of *violence of political culture.*

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Notes

1 In early October 2009 paleoanthropologists announced the discovery of a 4.4 million-year-old hominid, *Ardipithecus ramidus*, in the Afar region of Ethiopia in the environs of the 1974 discovery of the 3.5 million-year-old fossil, *Australopithecus afarensis*, nicknamed Lucy or *Dinqnesh* hominid fossil ancestor. Ethiopia is not a parvenu nation-state, but has persisted independently for millennia in Northeast Africa. For more on the subject see Edey and Edye (1981), Johanson and Shreeve (1989), White *et al.* (2009). These scientific findings help put Ethiopia's history in the larger perspective of human evolution.

2 See Hansberry (1977: 20). For a comprehensive history of Ethiopia see Wallis Budge (1970). The period between 1769 and 1855 is referred to as the "era of the princes," characterized by no central government, but autonomous principalities all over the country. Autarchy was the order of the day, laced with the usual political violence everywhere in small doses. It came to an end when in 1855 an ambitious aspirant to the throne from Gonder in northern Ethiopia managed to defeat enough of the princes to establish himself as Emperor Tewodros II. For more on the subject, consult Abir (1968).

3 The invaluable quarterly, *Terrorism and Political Violence*, edited by Professor Rapoport and colleagues, is published by Routledge (Taylor & Francis Group).

4 *The Morality of Terrorism* was published by Columbia University Press in 1989. Professor Rapoport has identified what he called "four waves of terrorism" since the threshold of the twentieth century. By "waves," he means "activities in a given time period." The four waves of terrorism in chronological sequence are Anarchist, Anti-Colonial, New Left, and Religious. See also Freilich *et al.* (2009).

5 The period of the "Mesafint," or "era of princes" (1769–1855), was characterized by an absence of central governance manifested in Balkanized autarchy with the usual political violence in smaller doses. This came to an end when an ambitious aspirant from Gonder in northern Ethiopia rose to power by force of arms in 1855. See Abir (1965).

6 Rubenson closes his excellent coverage of Ethiopia in its regional and international relations in the nineteenth century with these words:

> By the end of the century, it was an axiom in Europe that "Africans have no fatherland." The Ethiopians did not know this, and although they paid dearly by gradually losing Eritrea, neither diplomatic nor military means sufficed to impose foreign rule on the nation as a whole.

7 The expression, 'collision-collusion' syndrome characterizes the manner in which the elements of collision and collusion are simultaneously manifested in the behaviors of Ethiopian ruling elements, on the one hand, and regional and colonial elements, on the other. Just as the colonialists tried and at times succeeded in using their divide-and-rule policies in Northeast Africa and elsewhere, at times the local rulers also tried to collude with one another to fight against a worse alien colonial enemy. See Ayele (1988). Note that Ethiopians do not have a last-name system as in the West. A person's second name is a father's first name and lasts only for his or her lifetime, as each generation has different second names.

8 The Ogaden is a large swath of territory in southeastern Ethiopia inhabited mostly by Somali peoples of Northeast Africa. Over the years the Somali term, Ogaden, has become a name of choice used by Somalis, Ethiopians, and foreigners to refer to that part of Ethiopia.

9 In a speech on March 15, 1978 defending Cuba's intervention in support of Ethiopia against Somalian invasion, Fidel Castro said, "Our revolution isn't seeking glory or prestige; it simply fulfills its internationalist postulates and principles" (Taber 1981: 119). See also Gott (2004: 250ff.).

10 The author says that at one point, as National Security Advisor to President Carter, he "advocated that we send in a carrier task force in reaction to the Soviet deployment of the Cubans in Ethiopia." That is why he made the statement that SALT (Strategic Arms Limitation Talks between the United States and the Soviet Union) "lies buried in the sands of the Ogaden" (Brzezinski 1985:189). For all its implacable hostility to Col. Mengistu, the United States ended up arranging his safe self-exile to Zimbabwe in May 1991.

11 Almond refers to the concept of "political culture" as "not a theory [but] a set of variables which may be used in the construction of theories" (Almond and Verba 1989: 26).

12 From 1916 to 1930 the Emperor had the title of "Regent Teferi Mekonnen" in Empress Zewditu's government. In actuality, he was the day-to-day decision-maker in consultation with the Empress. With the passing of the Empress he assumed sole power with the throne name of Emperor Haile Selassie I in 1931. His tenure was interrupted by Mussolini's invasion of Ethiopia in 1936 and he subsequently went into exile in London. However, the Emperor continued his struggles, maintaining contact with Ethiopian patriots fighting Italian fascist forces. In 1941, with some logistical help from the British he was escorted back to Addis Ababa and resumed his imperial rule until 1974. He died in 1975 (see Clapham 1969).

13 The vaunted military establishment of the Mengistu regime collapsed like a house of cards during the combined EPLF and TPLF onslaught with American and Sudanese logistical support. An interesting detail of the fall of Mengistu in May 1991 was how the United States helped plan and ensure his peaceful exile in Zimbabwe. Part of the reason was to make sure that 14,310 Ethiopian Jews, known as Falasha in Ethiopia and self-described of late as Beit Israel, would have safe departure from Addis Ababa airport before the rebels took Addis Ababa. For more on this aspect of the turbulent events of 1991, see Spector (2005).

14 A careful scrutiny of the data in Table 13.2 reveals the complex, perennial, preponderant culture of domestic, regional and colonial political violence in the past 240 years of Ethiopian and Northeast African history.

15 Table 13.3 is a subset of the traits of masculinity listed on pp. 62–63 of the second edition of Levine's *Greater Ethiopia* (2000).

16 For a summary of the 2005 elections in Ethiopia see Eskender Nega, *Mercha 97: Merejanna Tenetanay* (in Ethiopic Addis Ababa 1997/2005). Ethiopia follows the Julian calendar, which is eight years earlier than the Gregorian calendar.

17 The Ethiopic or Amharic expression "*moot*" means "you die"; "*ene lemoot*" means "let me die"; "*ennate temoot*" means "let my mother die"; "*abbate yemoot*" means "let my father die." Ethiopians also swore by invoking the name of the Emperor during his lifetime, saying, "*Haile Selasie yemoot*," meaning "let Haile Selassie die." Ethiopians of all ranks, gender, age, or ethnic background or status pinned the veracity of their claims or promises on pain of the death of the most revered and feared Emperor and father figure in the land.

18 In its relatively short history the United States is no stranger to political violence. From the moment of its formation the first act of political violence in the country was the enslavement of African peoples. Then, it was engaged in expanding the territory of the United States 'from sea to shining sea' crushing indigenous peoples until the twentieth century. From then on, American political violence became outward bound in the inter-European wars (World Wars I and II), as well as in Asia and the Caribbean. It is still at war in Iraq and Afghanistan. It sustained an unprecedented destructive suicide attack by al-Qaeda at home on September 11, 2001. See Johnson *et al.* (1998), Lance (2003), Zinn (2003).

19 For a concise summary of political violence in Somalia today, see Pirio (2007).

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