
THE ETHIOPIAN PROSPECTIVE CASE

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INTRODUCTION

This chapter applies the “process” model for anticipating the incidence of ethnic conflict to the potential case of the emergence of ethnically based violence in Ethiopia. Therefore, in contrast to the two case studies presented previously, this case entails the use of the model to consider prospectively the likelihood of an ethnic mobilization turning violent. The chapter examines the case of Ethiopia from the perspective of what an intelligence analyst might conclude were she to use the “process” model. In essence, we look at the potential ethnic mobilization of the Amhara against the Tigray-dominated Ethiopian state structures in an attempt to alter the political arrangements governing Ethiopia more in favor of the Amhara. Data available as of 1997–1998 were used to conduct this analysis.

The choice of Ethiopia as a case study is in no way meant to suggest that this country is somehow predetermined to slide into ethnic tensions or strife. The choice was made on the basis of geographical diversity (as other case studies examine different regions of the world) and the country’s regional importance.

Through the use of the model, the chapter examines the potential grievances the Amhara might have against the state and the likely path that their mobilization might take. Two secondary scenarios examine the potential ethnic mobilization of the Oromo and the Somali against the Tigray-dominated state, the potential paths of the two mobilization processes, and the likelihood of strife that may

result. This orientation is in line with the focus of the “process” model on one particular kind of ethnic conflict, namely, the rise of an ethnic group challenging the state.

The reason for selecting the Amhara challenge as the main scenario stems partly from the specific influence that the Amhara have had in Ethiopia in the past, their substantial population, and some evidence of ongoing attempts at mobilization. The secondary scenarios examine the other main ethnic group (the Oromo) and a group (the Somali) that is minor in terms of population but historically troublesome to Ethiopian state authorities. The authors emphasize that, at this point of its development, the model is intended to be more suggestive than predictive. Neither the choice of the scenarios nor the potential outcomes examined should be taken to imply that the groups in question will mobilize against the government or that confrontation with the state necessarily will result in violence.

As presented in the model, the group-versus-state conflict is the simplest form of ethnic competition and, some may argue, not realistic when applied to the multiethnic conditions of Ethiopia. The authors do not deny the obvious influence that any open Amhara-Tigray competition may have on the behavior of the Oromo toward the state and other ethnic groups in Ethiopia. However, the authors believe that, for the purposes of outlining in a parsimonious manner the basic preferences that the state and the Amhara would have, the model is sufficient. And the model is sufficiently flexible to allow taking into account other groups’ impact upon the dyad in conflict if the impact is likely to be major. Finally, it is not clear whether the advantages of a multigroup model would outweigh the complexity and probable difficulty of its use.

Following the organization of the previous two chapters, four sections follow this introduction. The first section examines the structure of closure and provides an analysis of which ethnic groups appear to be privileged and which seem underrepresented in structures of power (the demographic characteristics of Ethiopia in 1997–1998, on which the analysis is based, are appended at the end of the chapter). Then it examines the strengths and weaknesses of the challenging ethnic group—the Amhara—by looking at its potential mobilization process. A shorter analysis of the secondary scenarios is included. The second section looks at the capabilities the state—

federal Ethiopia—might bring to bear in dealing with the challenging groups. The third section examines the strategic choices, arrived at on the basis of the assessments in earlier sections, that the state and the group are likely to pursue vis-à-vis each other, given their resource bases. Finally, a few observations conclude the chapter.

ASSESSING THE POTENTIAL FOR STRIFE

Closure in the Political and Security Realms

Since 1991, the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF)—the current party of government in the Ethiopian Parliament—has made an effort to open cabinet-level leadership and the composition of the army to other ethnic groups, but such measures are widely perceived as less than genuine or an outright sham. When the EPRDF won the Ethiopian civil war in 1991, it was a predominantly Tigrayan organization (having recently changed its name from the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front, or TPLF).¹ One method the EPRDF used to broaden its ethnic representation was to establish “friendly” coalition parties, drawing representation from each ethnic group. However, the ethnic parties are not necessarily representative of their respective ethnic groups. For example, the Oromo People's Democratic Organization (OPDO), formed to represent the Oromo people within the EPRDF coalition, was originally composed of captured Oromo POWs and officers. The OPDO is viewed with suspicion by many Oromo because of its origins and closeness to the EPRDF. Its main rival in representing the interests of the Oromo people is the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), a much older and well-established resistance army and political party.² This pattern of newly established EPRDF-affiliated groups, challenging older, rival parties to represent ethnic interests, is repeated in other areas.

Regional and national elections of Ethiopia's highest-ranking political authorities took place in May and June 1995. The president has

¹For a history of the TPLF, see John Young, “The Tigray and Eritrean Peoples Liberation Fronts: A History of Tensions and Pragmatism,” *Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol. 34, No. 1, 1996, pp. 105–120.

²There are also other smaller groups such as the Oromo National Liberation Front, which draw support from the Oromo population.

mainly ceremonial powers and is elected by the Council of People's Representatives. The prime minister holds most of the executive functions. The prime minister, elected by the Council of People's Representatives, appoints the 17-member Council of Ministers (subject to approval by the legislature). See Tables 5.1 and 5.2.

Representation within the highest levels of the government—the Council of Ministers and the legislature—is ethnically diverse, but the true nature of power sharing is not clear. See Table 5.3. At least five Tigrayan assistant ministers may have direct access to the prime minister, which casts some suspicion on the true integration of the

Table 5.1
Top Ethiopian Officials

Position	Name	Ethnicity
Prime Minister	Meles Zenawi	Tigrayan
President	Negasso Gidada	Oromo
Secretary of the Council of the People's Representatives	Hailu Hailifom	Tigrayan
Speaker of the Council of the People's Representatives	Dawit Yohannes	Amhara

Table 5.2
Council of Ministers, Ethnic Breakdown

Ethnic Group	Number of Ministers	Percent of Ministers
Oromo	4	24
Amhara	4	24
Gurage	2	12
Tigray	1	6
Harari	1	6
Kembata	1	6
Somali	1	6
Afar	1	6
Weleyta	1	6
Hadiya	1	6

council.³ In the legislature, the representation of various ethnic groups is large, but the overwhelming majority of the members of parliament (slightly over 90 percent) are from EPRDF-affiliated parties. Each region, which is ethnically defined, is allocated a certain number of seats within the parliament. Typically, political parties nominally controlled by local ethnic groups but under the EPRDF umbrella have taken these seats. This is due, at least in part, to the opposition boycott of the 1995 parliamentary election, in which most of the opposition parties declared themselves unwilling to participate.⁴ Thus, the parliamentary seats have been filled with people representing their particular ethnic group, yet there is substantial room for doubt as to just how much these MPs are trusted by most members of their ethnic groups.

Table 5.3
Representation in Government by Linguistic Affiliation

Language	Speakers (100,000s); Percent of Total	Number and Percent of House Seats Reserved for Their Region (n = 548)	Representation by Political Party; Percent of Total House
Amhara	15 (28.5)	147 (27)	144 (26)
Oromo	14 (26.6)	187 (34)	182 (33)
Tigray	4 (7.6)	40 (7.3)	40 (7.3)
Weleyta	2 (3.8)	NA	13 (0.4)
Somali	2 (3.8)	25 (4.6)	0
Gurage	1.5 (2.9)	NA	19 (3.5)
Hadiya	1 (1.9)	NA	9 (1.6)
Kembata	1 (1.9)	NA	5 (1.0)
Afar	0.5 (1)	8 (1.5)	8 (1.5)
Harari (Aderi)	0.03 (0.06)	1 (0.2)	1 (0.2)

³"Looking Federal," *Africa Confidential*, September 22, 1995, p. 5.

⁴Their motive for doing so seems to have been threefold: (1) to withhold legitimacy from the current government, (2) to protest restrictions placed on opposition access to the print and television media, and (3) to protest the repression that some opposition parties faced in the more remote areas of the country. See Terrence Lyons, "Closing the Transition: The May 1995 Elections in Ethiopia," *Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol. 34, No. 1, 1996, pp. 121–142. Lyons documents reports of restrictions on OLF political activities in the countryside.

Data on the ethnicity of national director-level managers are not available. Before the regime change Amhara were overrepresented in such positions, and that situation may still persist. But based on the policies of the government to equalize opportunities among ethnic groups, there may be a lessening of the Amhara influence over the director-level management of national institutional structures.

The opposite is true at the regional level, where information is available. In the regions there is a significant bias toward employing people of each region's dominant ethnic group. For example, in the Southern People's Region there has been an attempt to promote members of local ethnic groups into the offices of judge and prosecutor.⁵

In terms of closure in the security realm, top positions are dominated by Tigrayans and Amharas. The top security authorities in the country are the prime minister, Meles Zenawi, who both controls his own personal security retinue and serves as the commander-in-chief of the armed forces; the acting minister of justice, Worede-Wold Wolde,⁶ who controls the police force; and the minister of defense, Teferra Walwa, an Amhara who supervises the armed forces. Kifle Gebremedhin, a Tigrayan and the former chief of security, controls the Security, Immigration, and Refugee Affairs Authority, which previously was the Ministry of Internal Security. Kifle Gebremedhin reports directly to the prime minister, Meles Zenawi.⁷

The minister of defense, Teferra Walwa, the highest-ranking security official, is a member of the Amhara National Democratic Movement (ANDM, an Amhara party under the EPRDF umbrella). He replaced the previous minister of defense Tamirat Layne, who was fired very publicly on charges of corruption. Beyond the ministerial level, there is little information available about key security officials. In addition, the administrative responsibilities of some of the security agencies are not clear. For example, the role of Kifle Gebremedhin at the benignly labeled Security, Immigration, and Refugee Affairs Authority remains to be fully understood and yet is a key to determining the

⁵S. F. Joireman, interview with SPR court officials, Yirgalem, 1994.

⁶Justice Minister Mahetema Solomon resigned in June 1997.

⁷"Looking Federal," 1995.

relative power and control of the security apparati. As the former chief of security for the TPLF and as someone with direct access to the prime minister, his role in internal security affairs most likely equals or surpasses those of the ministers of defense and justice. Indeed, his placement as head of the agency responsible for internal security is an indication that the prime minister has viewed the greatest threat to the Ethiopian state to be internal rather than external.

Similarly, the ethnic makeup of the individuals who form the upper levels of the security apparati is not publicly known. The Ethiopian military has made well-publicized efforts to diversify the ethnic composition of the lower levels of the armed forces, but it is not clear to what extent, if any, this diversification has occurred in the officer corps. In 1995, only three of the military's nine generals were Tigrayan.⁸ However, Tigrayans are known to be widely represented in the officer corps.

Assessment of closure in the political and security realms. Closure in Ethiopia is based more on political opinion than ethnicity. The government has attempted to incorporate members of different ethnic groups into its political fold, but only insofar as they agree with the government platform and agenda. The Oromo provide an important illustration. Those Oromo affiliated with the pro-government faction, the OPDO, are represented in national and regional governments. Those in the anti-government faction (OLF members and supporters) are not represented in either chamber of the legislature and did not stand for election. We have no way of measuring support for the two Oromo factions. However, there are reports that at least some Oromo view the OPDO as "seriously compromised" due to its affiliation with the EPRDF.⁹

Unfortunately, information on the exact ethnic composition of the Ethiopian armed forces, both enlisted and officers, is not readily available. Additionally, there are no data on the composition of the regional police forces.

⁸U.S. Department of State, "Ethiopia Country Report on Human Rights Practices for 1996," Released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, January 30, 1997, http://www.state.gov/www/issues/human_rights/1996_hrp_report/ethiopia.html.

⁹Lyons, "Closing the Transition," 1996.

Since there are no formal restrictions on access to power in political or security spheres, the static snapshot of the Ethiopian system presented above appears to be dynamic enough to accommodate change. Indeed, the government has gone out of its way to be inclusive of individuals of other ethnic groups willing to cooperate with its political agenda. Ethnically based parties opposed to the EPRDF, however, face informal government pressure, general harassment, and a denial of access to the media.

A formal process for the replacement of political elites—including a challenge along ethnic lines—exists, but opposition groups have not taken the opportunity, restricted though it may be, to express their dissent through the electoral process. Opposition groups have repeatedly refused to participate in elections, the most recent of which occurred in 1995.¹⁰ This has placed both the government and the country in an odd position. There is a means to replace the current ruling group, but thus far the opposition has made no concerted attempt to take advantage of it; since the means has not been tested, its genuineness is unclear.

There are informal barriers to political participation. There is some suppression of overt dissent in Ethiopia.¹¹ The threat of government intolerance to political opposition is real, highlighted by the assassination or imprisonment of vocal opposition leaders within Ethiopia. The government appears willing to tolerate quiet and reasoned dissent, but when the opposition becomes passionate, the authorities crack down.

There are no formal rules restricting the access of any ethnic group to power at a national level in Ethiopia. But informally, EPRDF has made no secret of its desire to keep a monopoly on power. Moreover, as stated earlier, within the regions there is an explicit preference for officials from ethnic groups indigenous to the regions.

¹⁰S. F. Joireman, "Opposition Politics in Ethiopia: We Will All Go Down Together," *Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol. 35, No. 3, September 1997.

¹¹There have been two notable instances of repression of dissent under the current government, both involving demonstrations by university students. The first occurred in 1991 shortly after the EPRDF entered the capital, and the second occurred in March 1997. "University Students Released," *Addis Tribune* (Addis Ababa), March 28, 1997.

Individuals from minority groups within regions will experience barriers to government or administrative services.

Closure in the Economic Realm

There is very little subnational data available on the economic sector in Ethiopia. The results of the 1994 census, if they are ever fully published, may shed more light on the topic. Agriculture is the foundation of the Ethiopian economy. It accounts for approximately 43 percent of the gross domestic product and most of the country's export income. It is the primary source of employment in the country: 80 percent of Ethiopians are engaged in it. Apart from farming, the state apparatus and the military are the next-greatest sources of employment in the country.¹²

There is no explicit information available on the distribution of income within Ethiopia. Keeping in mind that neither farming, working for the government, nor being a soldier pay particularly well, we can guess that the upper tier of the Ethiopian economy is composed of people who are engaged in business pursuits. We can also posit that the wealthiest in the society are urban Amhara (because the majority of the educated, urban dwellers in Ethiopia are Amhara).¹³

Although there are no official figures available on the distribution of wealth in the population as a whole or with regard to ethnicity, the population of Ethiopia is generally extremely poor. The World Bank's estimate of the Ethiopian GNP per capita in 1996 (latest available) was \$110, placing the country among the poorest in the world, at about the level of Somalia and Bangladesh.

However, we can make a few general observations about relative wealth. First, because coffee is grown as a cash crop in the south,

¹²World Bank, *From Plan to Market: World Development Report 1996*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1996, p. 188.

¹³Recent census information puts the Amhara population at 49 percent of the total population of Addis Ababa. Transitional Government of Ethiopia Office of the Population and Housing Census Commission, Central Statistical Authority, *The 1994 Population and Housing Census of Ethiopia Results for Addis Ababa*, Volume I—Statistical Abstract, Addis Ababa: Central Statistical Authority, 1995.

southern peasants who grow coffee are slightly better off than their northern counterparts. Those lucky enough to have a college education or a job in the capital city or another urban center are better off than the farmers in the countryside. With improvements in administration and efficient reinvestment of resources, the Southern Nations and Oromo Regions should be the most wealthy in the country due to the coffee and tea production there.

Assessment of closure in the economic realm. Again, it is extremely difficult to make any conclusive statements on the structure of wealth in Ethiopia. The only statement that is supportable (and only on the basis of anecdotal evidence) is that because of their overrepresentation in the urban areas and because of the preferential access they have had to education over the past century, the elite of Ethiopia tend to be Amhara.

Is there a mechanism at hand for changing the static snapshot presented above? There are no formal restrictions on access to wealth in Ethiopia. The only barrier to economic activity that is enshrined in the political structure (albeit informally) is the restriction on agricultural investment in regions other than the home region of a particular ethnic group.¹⁴ Additional problems may develop in the realm of land allocation and land reform. There is currently no market for land in Ethiopia, and regions are in the process of developing policies for land allocation and transfer. Should these policies tend to exclude minority groups in the regions, there would be tremendous potential for conflict. There are no identifiable restrictions on wealth access that may disadvantage individuals of a particular ethnic group.

Closure in the Social Realm

Status distinction in Ethiopia is a prominent issue, and both status and ethnicity have become more controversial since the 1991 regime

¹⁴Sarah Gavian and Gemechu Degefe, "Commercial Investors and Access to Land," in Dessalegn Rahmato (ed.), *Land Tenure and Land Policy in Ethiopia after the Derg*, Trondheim, Norway: Working Papers on Ethiopian Development, No. 8, 1994.

change.¹⁵ Status at the national level only partly reflects political dominance. The EPRDF is predominantly Tigrayan, but the Amhara still retain the preeminent social position. A status stratification map for Ethiopia might work out as illustrated in Table 5.4.

The Amhara and Tigray fill the top two places of the stratification map for three historical reasons: nobility, mobility, and Christianity. Both groups trace their ancestry back to the Abyssinian Empire of the 12th century AD.¹⁶ Their joint cultural myth extends back even further, dating the origin of these peoples to the meeting between King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba (an Abyssinian).

Mobility also explains the dominance of the Amhara and Tigray peoples. In the 19th and 20th centuries the two groups moved out of their traditional lands in the northern highlands of Ethiopia and took over a large portion of the fertile coffee lands in the south. This

Table 5.4
Status Stratification

Ethnic Group	Status
Amhara	++
Tigrayan	++
Aderi/Harari	+
Gurage	+
Oromo	-
Somali	--
Afar	--

++ = high status; -- = low status
(compiled on the basis of data
presented earlier).

¹⁵The reasons are primarily tied to the “nation-building” endeavor by the government. John Markakis, “Ethnic Conflict and the State in the Horn of Africa,” in Katsuyoshi Fukui and John Markakis (eds.), *Ethnicity and Conflict in the Horn of Africa*, Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1994, pp. 217–237.

¹⁶For further information on Ethiopian political history, see Edmond J. Keller, *Revolutionary Ethiopia: From Empire to People's Republic*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988; and Harold G. Marcus, *A History of Ethiopia*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994.

movement into the southern marches of the Ethiopian Empire resulted in the enserfment of the peoples who already lived on the land. Those enserfed were the Oromo, Gurage, Gedeo, and Wolaita people, among others. When the Amhara and Tigrayans moved into these areas they brought the apparatus of the state with them and enforced tax collection and the speaking of Amharic as the language of administration within the country.

The third reason that both the Amhara and Tigray peoples are at the higher end of the stratification map is that both groups are predominantly Orthodox Christian. This gives them a higher status due to the ancient history of Orthodox Christianity in the region. The presence of the religion has meant that there has been a written record in Ethiopia since the 12th century, along with manuscripts on both religion and politics. This ancient record is combined with a modern sense of the importance of a “Christian” Ethiopia as a bulwark against Islamic influence.

Until recently, the Amhara had unquestioned social dominance. There was a separation between the Tigrayans and the Amhara during the early part of the 20th century as fighting developed between Ras Hailu, the Tigrayan aspirant to the throne, and Haile Selassie, an Amhara. As Haile Selassie’s rule solidified, so did the iron grip of the Amhara over the political and economic institutions of the country. When the revolution came in 1974, Haile Selassie was succeeded by Mengistu Haile Mariam, who, though of mixed parentage, identified himself with the Amhara. Mengistu ruled until 1991.

The long stretch of Amhara leaders in Ethiopia has led to two inaccurate and insidious ideas among the Amhara. The first is the association of a particular Amhara “type” with the definition of Ethiopian: by this notion, an “Ethiopian” is a slight, light-skinned, Christian, Amharic-speaking farmer. The second is a sense of manifest destiny: an idea that the Amhara are somehow ordained to rule a “Greater Ethiopia.”¹⁷ These ideas are insidious because they give no quarter to the majority of the population who do not fit this “type” linguistically, religiously, or ethnically.

¹⁷“Greater Ethiopia” is a term used to include Eritrea, the state to the north of the current Ethiopian border (along the Red Sea Coast), that recently gained its independence.

It used to be the case that Amharans saw the Tigrayans in a consanguineal fashion, but political differences made ethnic distinctions grow. Tigrayans spoke a different language, but it was understandable to Amharic speakers, and their cultures were virtually indistinguishable. The rift between the two groups was exacerbated in the mid-1980s, when the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF) became a thorn in the side of the Mengistu regime. As the TPLF began its advance on the capital city of Ethiopia and then took it over in 1991, the Tigrayans ceased to be cousins and became "foreigners" in the rhetoric of the radical Amhara.

The Aderi, also known as the Harari, are aligned with the Tigrayans on the stratification map, just as they are in government. The Aderi are a population of approximately 26,000 who reside in and around the ancient Islamic city of Harar in southeastern Ethiopia. They have a high social status within the country because they are regarded as distinct, refined, and ancient in their origins. The Aderi are overrepresented in parliament and the Council of Ministers, as they are given one representative in each body for a group that is 0.0005 percent of the Ethiopian population. Other groups, with larger populations, don't have any representatives in the Council of Ministers. This overrepresentation is due to the particular status of Harar, along with Addis Ababa, as a designated multiethnic city-state, independent of any regional government.

The Oromo and Gurage are both historically oppressed and predominantly Islamic southern peoples.¹⁸ Amhara and Tigrayan northerners enserfed large numbers of Oromo peasants in southern Ethiopia until 1974. Even after 1974, the Oromo and Gurage were forced to learn Amharic in order to achieve any sort of educational or vocational success. The Gurage are slightly higher on the social

¹⁸There are an increasing number of studies on the history of the Oromo and Oromo nationalism. Asafa Jalata, "Sociocultural Origins of the Oromo National Movement in Ethiopia," *Journal of Political and Military Sociology*, Vol. 21, 1993, pp. 267–286; Asafa Jalata, *Oromia and Ethiopia: State Formation and Ethnonational Conflict, 1868–1992*, Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1993; P.T.W. Baxter, "The Creation and Constitution of Oromo Nationality," in Fukui and Markakis, *Ethnicity and Conflict in the Horn of Africa*, pp. 167–186; Edmond J. Keller, "The Ethnogenesis of the Oromo and its Implications for Politics in Ethiopia," *Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol. 33, No. 4, December 1995, pp. 621–634; and Asafa Jalata, *Oromo Nationalism and the Ethiopian Discourse: The Search for Freedom and Democracy*, Trenton, NJ: Red Sea Press, 1997.

stratification map than the Oromo because they are associated with positive qualities based on their perceived business acumen.

The Somali and Afar peoples bring up the lower segments of the stratification map because, in addition to being predominantly Islamic, they are pastoralists. Pastoralism is viewed in Ethiopia and throughout Africa as being less prestigious (even less human) than settled agricultural practices.

What are the implications of this status distribution? At the national level, there are no tangible benefits or disadvantages to being of a particular ethnicity. In the regions there is a specific preference for those of the local ethnicity to fill positions in the regional administration. Linguistic groups are not discriminated against in their regions, but non-Amharic speakers may find themselves disadvantaged if they interact with the bureaucracy of the national government. Informally, a whole range of biases and perceptions surrounds status hierarchy, with members of the less urbanized and non-Christian groups seen as less sophisticated or cultured. Such biases have a self-perpetuating and self-reinforcing component and affect myriad everyday decisions.

The fact that there is very little movement between status groups attests to the lack of a mechanism for change within the Ethiopian social stratification system. Indeed, the norm for social tolerance is changing toward a greater degree of intolerance and ethnic solidarity. Since the ratification of the new Ethiopian constitution, ethnic group and ethnic identity have become fundamentally important on a political and social level. Ethnicity defines regional appointments, political sympathies, and party affiliation.

Overall Assessment of Closure

Based on the information presented above, Table 5.5 summarizes the degree of closure (in an overall sense as well as in the political, economic, and social realms) experienced by Ethiopia's main ethnic groups. To reiterate, closure in Weberian terms refers to the "process of subordination whereby one group monopolizes advantages by closing off opportunities to another group." In the table, a group experiencing a "low" degree of closure has the most opportunities open

Table 5.5
Patterns of Closure by Ethnicity in Ethiopia

	Political	Economic	Social	Overall
Amhara	Low	Low	Low	Low
Tigrayan	Low	Low	Low	Low
Aderi/Harari	Low	Moderate	Low	Low
Gurage	Moderate	Low	Moderate	Moderate
Oromo	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate
Somali	Moderate	Moderate	High	Moderate/High
Afar	Moderate	Moderate	High	Moderate/High

to it. A group experiencing a “high” degree of closure has opportunities largely closed off.

The Amhara and Tigrayans show a consistent pattern of privilege, and the Oromo and (especially) the Somali and Afar peoples are experiencing a moderate degree of closure in Ethiopian social and economic life. Politically, Tigrayans are dominant, but they do share power to a moderate degree with other ethnic groups.

Nevertheless, poverty is a great equalizing mechanism among the various ethnic groups. People in the countryside do not suffer high degrees of relative deprivation. In the urban areas, however, the Amhara and Tigrayans are present in greater numbers, and they are more educated and better employed than the Somali and Afar. Yet even if we take the differences between ethnic groups in the urban areas into account, the relative deprivation between groups is quite low.

Issues of closure in Ethiopia are primarily historic in their origin, but they are changing, and we should expect to see changes in the economic and social positions of the ethnic groups in this generation. Indeed, as the EPRDF political institutions take root, we should see some groups, particularly the Oromo, gain in political power. As they become politically powerful, we can expect their social position to improve. Thus, the stratification patterns have some flexibility.

A final ranking of groups along the lines of privileged to dominated—in relative terms—is given in Table 5.6. The specific placement of ethnic groups on the privileged-dominated scale is not evenly

Table 5.6
Ranking of Ethnic Groups in Ethiopia

Privileged	Amhara
	Tigrayan
	Aderi/Harari
	Gurage
	Oromo
↓	Somali
Dominated	Afar

spaced, and the overall differences between the top and bottom rankings are not extreme.

TRANSFORMING POTENTIAL STRIFE INTO LIKELY STRIFE

As a prospective case study, this section focuses on the process of potential mobilization of one of the main ethnic groups against the state. Three distinct potential processes of mobilization are sketched out, each based on one of the ethnic groups. The primary scenario focuses on the Amhara, and that mobilization process is sketched out in full. The secondary scenarios, focusing on the Oromo and Somali, are discussed in a briefer format.

PRIMARY SCENARIO: AMHARA MOBILIZATION

The Amhara are among the most privileged ethnic groups in Ethiopia. However, there is a critical disjuncture between Amhara social and economic power and their current political weakness. Resentful of their fall from power, suspicious of the current regime, distrustful of any attempts at inclusion, and possessing a mythology of a “right to rule Ethiopia,” the Amhara are in a position to be mobilized for political action along ethnic lines. The abrupt change in power relations in Ethiopia left the Amhara embittered, hostile, and in search of a scapegoat.¹⁹

¹⁹Scapegoats have been found alternatively in Eritrea and the United States.

Incipient Changes

The ethnically inclusive declaratory policy of the current government, as well as a strong Tigrayan role in the government, points to longer-term trends under which the Amhara could see their relative share of power draining away. These trends put in place an ever-present source of concern among the Amhara for their social and political position in the country.

Sudden or at least less-expected changes, caused by centrifugal tendencies in other regions of Ethiopia, also could spark greater Amhara mobilization. For example, there have been rumors of a referendum on independence for Oromia.²⁰ Although such a referendum would be unlikely to succeed, given the composition of the regional assembly, public discussion of such a thing will almost certainly incite Amhara anger and provide fuel for mobilization. While many Oromo see the 19th-century Amhara/Tigrayan expansion as colonial, Amhara tend to view “the conquered lands” as an inalienable part of Ethiopia and would resist their dispossession.

Tipping Events

Galvanizing or tipping events might involve the release of Amhara firebrands from prison or restrictions on Amhara media. The most famous of the major recent attempts to mobilize the Amhara are Professor Asrat Woldeyes’s efforts to incite the rural Amhara to the same level of fervor as radical urban Amhara. His efforts in this regard led to a jail sentence of five and a half years for attempting to incite ethnic violence. Professor Woldeyes, viewed by many as the spokesperson for the radical Amhara, faces additional charges associated with a prison escape in 1994, which resulted in the death of several prison guards. Extended detention or lack of a trial for Woldeyes might prove a galvanizing factor in group mobilization.

A second possible tipping event would be a restriction on the publication of opposition newspapers such as *The Addis Tribune* and other Amharic or Amhara-targeted papers. Amhara opposition groups are already extremely sensitive to government censorship,

²⁰“TPLF talks with OLF,” *Ethiopian Review*, May–June 1997, p. 12.

due to the fact that many of the journalists who have fallen afoul of the government are Amhara.²¹

Leadership

Because the urban Amhara tend to be better educated than members of other ethnic groups, there are many present and potential leaders. Some Amhara activist leaders, such as Asrat Woldeyes and Taye Woldesemiat, are already in jail. Both men were university professors dismissed with 39 others in 1991 for their political activities. In addition to these 41 activists are other urban educated Amhara who have been working for the government or in the private sector and have the knowledge and awareness of organizational techniques to be more than able to lead an opposition group. Thus the leadership potential among the Amhara is deep, though the emergence of a specific individual as the leader is difficult to predict.

Resources and Organization

There seem to be ample resources available to the Amhara relative to other groups (that is, within the overall constraints of an extremely poor country). Radical Amhara groups within Ethiopia draw their support primarily from the population of Addis Ababa. The urban Amhara are among the wealthiest groups in Ethiopia, and they potentially provide a large resource base. There are signs that Amhara activists are already using resources to obtain arms; the Ethiopian government has uncovered one Amhara attempt to cache arms.

Political parties such as the All-Amhara People's Organization provide organizational structures for Amhara dissent and potential political violence. An antigovernment urban terrorist group active in Addis Ababa called the Ethiopian Patriotic Front offers an even more radical vehicle for violence, and it apparently has mastered the

²¹The government has imprisoned 15 journalists in 1995–1996 for violation of the press law. Some have been imprisoned for inciting ethnic hatred, but others are in prison for violating accepted standards of decency. "Journalists Under Fire: 27 Dead, a Record 183 Jailed in '96," *The Washington Post*, March 15, 1997.

organizational skills required of a conspiratorial group.²² With some of the most educated elite of Ethiopia, the Amhara would have ample access to organizational skills, and would probably be the source of a relatively large share of the overall availability of such skills in Ethiopia.

A chauvinistic Amhara movement has moderate to high organizational potential. Perhaps its greatest obstacle is that the numerically large Amhara population in the countryside is difficult to mobilize. In addition to the normal conservatism that might be expected from any peasant group, the Amhara peasants also experienced far more of the last civil war than their urban counterparts did and may still perceive the Tigrayan-dominated government as “Ethiopian” rather than ethnic antagonistics.

Foreign Element

The most significant foreign influence on ethnic relations in Ethiopia comes from Amhara abroad. The revenues collected overseas for the Amhara cause, particularly in the United States and the Scandinavian countries, are probably the most important source of support for the radical Amhara. In addition, Amhara groups in the United States give aid to the mobilization process in the form of intellectual justifications against the present status quo, disseminating them in Ethiopia through both hard-copy publications and the Internet. There is currently an effort to raise money in the United States for the Ethiopian Unity Front (EUF), an Amhara insurgency movement.²³ It is unclear at the moment whether the EUF has started activity within Ethiopia, but the organization appears to have a ready cadre in the United States.

A full-blown Amhara mobilization could count on little support from neighboring governments. Eritrea does not want to see the Amhara back in power, since it will then become a target of Amhara irreden-

²²Security forces within the capital city have stopped the open activities of this group. The police continue to crack down on its remnants, one of whom, Assefa Maru, was killed while allegedly resisting arrest in May 1997. “ETA Executive Committee Member Shot,” *Addis Tribune* (Addis Ababa), May 9, 1997.

²³This group has been raising money in various U.S. cities. It is associated with the Amhara-dominated party COEDF.

tist aspirations (an irony, given the denunciation of Tigrayans as foreigners by radical Amhara). Somalia is no longer a functioning state and does not seem likely to become one in the near term, ruling out its likelihood of being able to spend resources to support a major social movement in Ethiopia. Sudan is something of a wild card. Its Islamic government is unlikely to support any faction in Ethiopia except the Oromo. Sudan currently finds Ethiopia a convenient scapegoat and blames it for the recent offensive of the Sudan People's Liberation Army—Sudan's own ethnic insurgency movement.

Overall Assessment of Mobilization

Strength of leadership will determine the intensity and effectiveness of Amhara mobilization. Small cell groups that try to spearhead a mobilization have formed already among the Amhara; at least some of these cells are prepared to use violence in the pursuit of their goals. With stronger leaders or, more specifically, leaders able to gain the support of the countryside, the potential for effective and widespread mobilization would escalate greatly. But the other elements of mobilization (resentment over perceived status usurpation, access to resources both at home and abroad, strong organizational potential) are in place, and the Amhara could command a powerful movement.

SECONDARY SCENARIO: OROMO MOBILIZATION

Numerically the largest ethnic group in Ethiopia by many estimates, the Oromo have never been influential in Ethiopian government and they have a low status in contemporary Ethiopia. The Oromo face a moderate level of closure and can point to some real grievances. The primary problem that sustains the continuing low status and influence of the Oromo is their weak leadership. With a cohesive leadership, the Oromo probably would be the single most powerful ethnic group in Ethiopia. But so far, the leaders of the various Oromo factions have been unable to agree on either goals or tactics.

The Imperial Ethiopian government (before 1974) imposed brutal sanctions on the Oromo as a group. The Oromo obtained access to greater economic, if not political, benefits under the Derg government (1974–1991). In the early 1990s, the Oromo Liberation Front

(OLF) worked with the EPRDF to facilitate the overthrow of the Derg regime. It was there, however, that their trouble with the current government began, as two opposing factions developed within the Oromo. The first faction wanted some type of cooperation and participation with the EPRDF. The second favored secession from the Ethiopian state and the establishment of an independent “Oromia.”

The EPRDF’s creation of the Oromo People’s Democratic Organization (OPDO) under the EPRDF umbrella exacerbated the rift within the Oromo. This group, in collaboration with the EPRDF, drew power away from the OLF. The OPDO, representing an Oromo minority, participated in the elections of 1992 and 1995 and won all of the Oromo seats because the OLF declined to participate. The OLF remains organized in the countryside and retains control of weapons and men. There have been reports in 1996–1997 of OLF-initiated hostilities in the Oromo region. In other words, there is a dedicated cadre—willing to use violence—in place, and it could spearhead the mobilization process. If the rumored referendum on the independence of Oromia were to occur, a more powerful and united Oromo movement would emerge no matter what the outcome of the vote might be.

The splintering and weakening of the Oromo as an ethnic group organized for political ends could all be changed with the appearance of a young and charismatic leader. Youth is a necessity because of the leadership conflicts and struggles for power that have divided the older Oromo leadership. An Oromo mobilization might be aimed at either a substantial share of political power within Ethiopia or an outright independent Oromia.

In an overall sense, the mobilization potential of the Oromo would face resource problems. However, in the extremely poor conditions of contemporary Ethiopia, the pure force of numbers could offset some of the resource problems.

TERTIARY SCENARIO: SOMALI MOBILIZATION

The Somali population (part of the Ogadeni clan) is numerically small but inhabits a compact area. The Somali face a moderate level of closure and have real grievances against the government. A Somali mobilization would have limited resource potential, espe-

cially vis-à-vis the relative resource levels available to the Ethiopian state. But if there were sudden changes in the balance of power in Ethiopia (arising, for example, from one of the two scenarios described above), the mobilization might be successful. Foreign assistance—from Somalia—is a crucial variable that could augment substantially the resource base of the Somali in Ethiopia.

Since the British relinquished the territory in 1955, the Ogaden has been the focus of several military conflicts between Ethiopia and Somalia (1960, 1964, 1973, 1977, and 1996).²⁴ Since 1991, the Ethiopian government has engaged the armed Ethiopian Somali group Al-Ithad Al-Islam in the Ogaden and across the border in Somalia. The 1992 elections in the area had to be postponed because of regional insecurity. The goal of the Al-Ithad Al-Islam—a group that could lead the mobilization process—is openly secessionist, as the group has tried to detach the Ogaden, now called the Somali region, from the Ethiopian state. The Al-Ithad group has been implicated by the government of Ethiopia in several bombings in 1996–1997 in the capital city of Addis Ababa.²⁵

Currently, the Ethiopian government maintains control of the Ogaden through administrative and police means, keeping any mass mobilization at bay. But if the Somali state were to again become viable, the situation might change. Moreover, if the Somali state were to resurface with a ruler from the Ogadeni clan, the stability of the Ethiopian Somali region certainly would be at risk. The area also may have potential for oil production. It was, in fact, rumors of oil discoveries in the Ogaden that led to the 1973 conflict between Ethiopia and Somalia. Further discoveries or rumors of discoveries may exacerbate the conflict that already exists.

In an overall sense, the mobilization potential of the Somali is constrained by resource problems. But the situation could change in the relative sense—in case of ethnic mobilization within Ethiopia by another, major group—and in the absolute sense, by way of assis-

²⁴For more background information, see Patrick Gilkes, *Conflict in Somalia and Ethiopia*, New York: New Discovery, 1994.

²⁵But it should be noted that in the investigation of at least one of the bombings, the Al-Ithad Al-Islam might have been used as a convenient scapegoat by the police. "Explosions in Addis Ababa, Dire Dawa," *Ethiopian Review*, May–June 1997, p. 12.

tance from Somalia. The clan-based structure of the Somali provides effective channels of organization through which to funnel and use the resources. The clan structure also provides a means of legitimization for a potential Somali leader (assuming skillful leadership that could unify the various factions within the clans). Moreover, a moderate to high degree of closure provides readily identifiable grievances around which to mobilize the group. The potential of a windfall from natural resource exploration could fuel further the mobilization.

ASSESSING THE STATE

Accommodative Capability

How inclusive and responsive are Ethiopian political structures to the general population? The political institutions in Ethiopia are ostensibly democratic and inclusive, though in practice they have failed to fulfill their functions, as few opposition groups so far have chosen to participate formally in the electoral process. The view of the governing structure as essentially a sophisticated fig leaf for Tigrayan control has discouraged widespread participation. The goal of the opposition parties that do not agree with EPRDF policies is to “deny legitimacy” to the government.²⁶ The clearest example of group exclusion concerns the Oromo Liberation Front. The OLF has opted out of the formal political process since 1991 and the formation of the transitional government of Ethiopia. This is troublesome because the Oromo are the single largest ethnic group in Ethiopia. But if they want to participate in government, non-Tigrayan groups are required to accept a strong Tigrayan role in defining Ethiopia and its political agenda. Many organizations may not relish cooperation of this sort, since their constituents may interpret it as collaboration, with all the attendant negative repercussions.

Is there potential for change in Ethiopian political structures? Mechanisms for conflict resolution and institutional change are built into the Ethiopian constitution. According to it, questions of federal and regional laws that contradict the constitution are sent to the upper chamber of the parliament (the Federal Council) for resolution. Pro-

²⁶Lyons, “Closing the Transition,” (1996).

posed amendments to the constitution follow a more complicated process through the regional councils and then both national houses of parliament.²⁷ The constitution includes a process by which ethnic groups may secede from the Ethiopian state.²⁸ Because the constitution has been in force only since mid-1995, its provisions for conflict resolution remain to be tested. In other words, they exist in theory but have not yet been practiced.

In short, it is too early to assess whether the channels for institutional change are effective. Nominally, the political system is inclusive, and its decentralization aims at a high level of participation (from at least the major ethnic groups). But the inclusiveness for now is embedded in the larger context of Ethiopian recent history, that is, within the constraints of a completely new system of governing set up by an ethnically defined group that won a lengthy civil war. As such, the system has not managed to convert the skeptics, as most of the non-Tigrayan population appears to view it with a measure of distrust, a Tigrayan creation. As the system develops and matures, the opposition parties may decide to “legitimize” the political process with their participation. The election in the year 2000 will be key in determining the relative inclusiveness or exclusiveness of the regime.

In terms of prevailing norms of governance, neither the autocratic imperial Ethiopian government (pre-1974) nor the Derg (1974–1991) were tolerant of opposition. The Derg used widespread violence and repression to deal with any kind of dissent, real or imagined. In comparison with such a past, the post-1991 norms of governance have been remarkably tolerant and inclusive, even though there has been some retrenchment since 1994.²⁹ Initially, the EPRDF made a

²⁷The Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, 1995.

²⁸Some have argued that the constitution reflects the very nature of the Tigray rise to power and its attempt to redefine the state as one comprising many distinct cultures; thus, the right to secede is a fundamental aspect of the TPLF view of Ethiopia. Assefaw Bariagaber, “The Politics of Cultural Pluralism in Ethiopia and Eritrea: Trajectories of Ethnicity and Constitutional Experiments,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol. 21, No. 6, November 1998, pp. 1056–1073.

²⁹Since 1994 and the end of the transitional charter, the government’s behavior toward groups that opposed or declined to participate in the political process has shown a trend toward less tolerance, with incidents of intimidation and force used against domestic opponents. The incidents include the arrest and imprisonment of journalists, a public war of words with opposition groups, and crackdowns on demon-

distinct attempt to include other groups, such as the OLF, in the governing coalition. It also allowed a free press to flourish and sought the political opinions of the populace (i.e., the constitutional “discussions” that occurred at the neighborhood level). Thus, the governing structure set up by the EPRDF has tried for inclusiveness in a way that showed a real break with the previous patterns of governance, even if the limited participation by non-Tigrayan groups in the governing process so far suggests their persistent distrust. In addition, the ethnically based federal structure shows the vitality of ethnically defined collectivist norms. Finally, for many Ethiopians, including members of the Oromo and many smaller groups, an Ethiopian identity is weak and secondary to their ethnic attachments.³⁰

What is the level of cohesion among the ruling elites? Little information is available about the inner workings of the EPRDF government, but there are some signs of discord. The discord may center on policy differences rather than fundamental issues on the setup of the state. The very public firing in 1996 of the deputy prime minister and minister of defense, Tamirat Layne, may be an indication of a power struggle. Whether this was the elimination of one individual or an indication of deeper splits and factional power struggles within the ruling coalition is uncertain. Adding to suspicions of conflict within the party was a purging of OPDO party members in April 1997. Eighty OPDO members were subsequently placed in custody. This development suggests that cohesion among the EPRDF coalition partners is declining and that the EPRDF is willing to take action against partners who are not toeing the party line. The trend appears to be toward a more isolated Tigrayan-based governing coalition. Whether the trend means an increase or decrease in leadership cohesion is impossible to say at this time.

In conclusion, the accommodative capability of the Ethiopian state is difficult to assess in an unequivocal manner because of the ambiguities surrounding it. The institutional structure of the state seems

strations. In part at least, the more forceful government reaction is a response to the non-participation of other groups in the process. S. F. Joireman, “Opposition Politics in Ethiopia,” September 1997; “Students Say No to Petition and Remain in Detention,” *Addis Tribune* (Addis Ababa), April 4, 1997.

³⁰See the Afterword to this chapter for potential changes to this situation.

viable for an inclusive and responsive system, but the legacy of a long period of interethnic tensions and distrust remains a practical obstacle to achieving the democratic potential of the institutional structure contained in the constitution. A move by the coalition toward less inclusiveness of other groups may, in fact, have the effect of strengthening the internal cohesion of the ruling group.

Fiscal and Economic Capability

The fiscal health of Ethiopia shows serious strains, and the mainstay of the economy—agriculture—is subject to weather- and climate-induced disruptions. However, the macroeconomic indicators have stabilized and the economy has registered consistent growth since the end of the civil war (1.7 percent in 1993–1994 and 4.9 percent in 1994–1995). The state’s economic targets through 1999 include 6 percent real GDP growth, limiting the external current account deficit to 9.2 percent of GDP, and maintaining low inflation. Although the goals are ambitious, they are realistic, assuming no major drought and/or worldwide recession.

The state has followed a consistent pattern of deficit spending. In the fiscal year 1994–1995, the Ethiopian budgetary deficit reached 3.8 percent of GDP. Ethiopia also has a heavy debt; the World Bank rates Ethiopia as severely indebted and “possibly stressed” regarding the sustainability of its debt burden.³¹ In 1995, approximately 13.6 percent of Ethiopia’s earnings from exports went to the payment of the interest and principal on debts.³² Ethiopian gold reserves have remained steady, and its foreign exchange position has improved significantly since 1992. The state also has further loans it could call on from international lending institutions. See Table 5.7.

Widening the tax base and improving tax collection remain central objectives of the government. Customs duties and sales taxes remain important for revenue generation. Taxes on personal and business income and profits have risen substantially. Both trends imply an improved tax-collection system. There is some potential for the

³¹World Bank, *Global Development Finance*, Volume 1, Washington, D.C.: The World Bank, 1997, p. 43.

³²*Ibid.*, p. 216.

reappropriation of funds within the state budget. Although health and education have registered substantial growth since 1992 and strict defense expenditures have gone down to 13 percent of the current expenditures in the 1994–1995 fiscal year, there seems to be enough leeway for further shifting of funds on a short-term basis. See Table 5.8.

The wealth of the core constituency of the ruling elite does not differ at all from the wealth of the general population. Neither this group nor any other in Ethiopian society faces a disproportionate tax burden. Some accusations have surfaced that a disproportionate amount of development aid is directed toward the Tigray region, but since Tigray received little development assistance from the government between 1984 and 1991, even if this were to be the case it would

Table 5.7
Ethiopian National Bank Reserves (in US\$ million)

	1993	1994	1995
Gold (national valuation)	11.4	11.4	11.4
IMF special drawing rights	0.3	0.4	0.3
Reserve position in IMF	9.6	10.2	10.5
Foreign exchange	445.9	533.6	760.8
Total	467.2	555.6	782.9

SOURCE: IMF, International Financial Statistics.

Table 5.8
Ethiopian Government Expenditures (in millions of birr)

	1992–1993	1993–1994	1994–1995
Total	6,054	7,492	8,152
Capital expenditure	2,150	3,018	3,077
Current expenditure	3,904	4,474	5,075
State administration, defense, and police	1,173	1,453	1,561
Education and health	583	742	936
Interest and charges	530	952	855

SOURCE: National Bank of Ethiopia

hardly change the wealth of Tigrayans vis-à-vis other Ethiopian ethnic groups.

In sum, in an absolute sense, the fiscal capacity of the Ethiopian state is weak. But within the constraints of being one of the poorest countries in the world, Ethiopia's state policies of economic liberalization have borne some fruit. Although the fiscal and economic resources and capabilities available to the government remain low, the situation is improving.

Coercive Capability

Cabinet ministers, subordinate to the prime minister, control the police and the armed forces. The police are under the control of the Justice Ministry. The minister of defense (Teferra Walwa) is constitutionally required to be a civilian.³³ In addition, Prime Minister Meles Zenawi has his own security team headed by TPLF Central Committee member Mulugeta Alemseged. Rather than an instrument of control over portions of the population, the team is oriented more toward the protection of the top leadership. Formally, there is constitutional provision for a state of emergency; at such a time, there is a restriction on "fundamental political and democratic rights." The Council of Ministers can declare a state of emergency when there is danger to the "constitutional order" that cannot be brought under control by means of normal law enforcement. The Chamber of People's Representatives must approve any declaration of a state of emergency, though under the conditions of near-complete EPRDF control of the legislature, this provision is not a major obstacle. In practice, despite the formal rules restricting the use of force, extrajudicial killings and disregard for civil rights and due process within the country have grown in number.

Who serves in the apparati of violence? Although the government has attempted to form a "multiethnic defense force" consisting of all of Ethiopia's ethnic groups, the armed forces continue to be based on the armed wing of the EPRDF (and especially the TPLF) that won the civil war. A substantial number of personnel from the OLF were also absorbed initially into the single post-civil war Ethiopian mili-

³³Article 95, Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia.

tary, though their continued presence is in doubt in view of the OLF's withdrawal of its support of the government in 1992.

Official statements claim that the military is now far more representative than it was in 1991, when it was predominantly Tigrayan with some Amhara participation.³⁴ In line with the striving for greater inclusiveness, new recruits of all ethnic backgrounds go on to officer training if they are assessed as having promise. According to a recent USIS report, in 1995–1996, 25,000 primarily Tigrayan soldiers were demobilized and replaced by recruits from other ethnic groups.³⁵ However, several thousand of the demobilized Tigrayan soldiers have become policemen.³⁶ One can raise questions about how loyal Tigrayan police officers assigned to regions other than Tigray will be to the regional police hierarchy.

What norms exist with respect to the use of violence domestically? Every government in Ethiopian history has used the armed forces to crack down on domestic uprisings.³⁷ Indeed, there is no precedent within the country for government restraint in its actions against citizens. The EPRDF government, since 1991, has been less violent toward its citizens than any other in recent history, but accusations of extrajudicial killings and beatings in the south and torture within the prisons have surfaced.³⁸ More recently, in May 1997, an alleged leader of the Ethiopian United Patriotic Front was killed in Addis Ababa under suspicious circumstances (with government spokesmen claiming he was “resisting arrest”).³⁹

Ethiopian culture, insofar as can be generalized among all its ethnic groups, has a relatively low threshold for violence. Violence is often used as a means of political expression, and there is only limited

³⁴“Effort to Build Multi-National Defense Force Successful,” Ethiopian News Agency (Addis Ababa), July 23, 1996.

³⁵USIS, (1996).

³⁶“Looking Federal,” *Africa Confidential*, September 22, 1995, p. 5.

³⁷See Gebru Tareke, *Ethiopia: Power and Protest*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991; Africa Watch, *Evil Days: Thirty Years of War and Famine in Ethiopia*, New York: Human Rights Watch, 1991.

³⁸Lyons, “Closing the Transition,” 1996.

³⁹Reuters African Highlights (Addis Ababa), May 8, 1997 (Internet version).

experience with ideas of human rights as enshrined by the United Nations.

Are the armed forces suitable for domestic use? The armed forces are largely light infantry, suitable for domestic use, especially in an environment of permissive norms toward violence. Most soldiers have extensive experience fighting in the Ethiopian countryside, gained during the civil war. The military could be employed in a range of activities, from forceful crowd control to counterinsurgency. Training for domestic use is likely to be rudimentary.

In conclusion, the state can readily resort to violence, and the apparatus of violence have considerable capabilities against domestic opponents. Use of force in the domestic context is constitutionally allowable through the imposition of a state of emergency.

STRATEGIC BARGAINING

This analysis of the potential mobilization of the Amhara, and to a lesser degree that of the Oromo and Somali groups, on the one hand, and the capabilities of the Ethiopian state to deal with any such mobilization, on the other, provides a means for considering the possible interactions between them based on the categories and matrices of the framework presented in Chapter Two. As in the two previous cases, the group and state types are categorized on the basis of their capacities, and the matrices provide a way to think about their interaction conceptually.

Measuring the Group's Capacities

The leadership of the Amhara is confident. This confidence stems from the mythology of the group, including perceptions of manifest destiny, the view of the current government as unrightfully in place, and the strong rhetoric supporting these views emanating from the Amhara diaspora in diverse areas of the world. The leadership has not hesitated to take risks. The radical Amhara activists are united in their intent to overthrow the current government, though what type of regime they think should take its place, a predominantly Amhara state or a multiethnic state, is not yet clear. Thus, the assessment of

leadership that a potential mobilized Amhara is likely to have is “strong.”

With respect to resources, support for the Amhara is good, especially in the relative sense of the poor conditions in Ethiopia. The Amhara activists have an extensive support network overseas, and they draw their support within the country from the wealthiest and most educated people. At present the resource base is sufficient to support an urban-based movement against the government. The available support is well-suited to the goal of ousting the current regime from power. But it may not be enough if the objective is to establish a predominantly Amhara rather than multiethnic state. Thus, the assessment of resource support that a potential mobilized Amhara is likely to have is “good.”

Regarding popular support for the Amhara mobilization, the activist Amhara cohort so far is primarily urban. The more numerous Amhara in the countryside have not been mobilized. Land reform may yet change the situation, but there is little evidence of it at the present. In addition, there are no readily identifiable other groups that seem willing or likely to support the Amhara. The Tigrayans are currently in control of the government and are, therefore, the enemy. The Oromo are extremely unlikely to form any sort of alliance with the Amhara, for many Oromo consider them former “oppressors.” Thus, the assessment of popular support that a potential mobilized Amhara is likely to have is “weak.”

Based on these assessments, the mobilized Amhara is judged to be a type D group. The capacities of such a group are as follows:

Accommodative: low;

Sustainment: high;

Cohesiveness: high.

Measuring the State’s Capacities

Concerning the leadership of the state, the EPRDF government built a guerrilla army and created a development arm and a well-constructed ideology before it won a civil war in 1991. After emerging as the victors in the war, the EPRDF then tried to build a multiethnic

ruling coalition for Ethiopia, with EPRDF at the core. It also wrote a new constitution and embarked on development projects within the country. There is no question that the leaders of EPRDF are secure in their position and beliefs. They have attempted to make the system of governance inclusive to all Ethiopians but have not hesitated to use forceful means in implementing their policies. They have a clear vision of a more developed and prosperous Ethiopia, based on consociational ethnic relations and a market economy. Thus, the assessment of leadership is “strong.”

In terms of its fiscal position, the state has engaged in deficit spending and has become deeply indebted. There is some room for reallocation of funds, within the overall constraints of a low state budget. If the economy continues to expand, there are more optimistic prospects for the future. But the agricultural base of the economy and a dependence on the export of primary products as the source of most foreign exchange puts in place a low ceiling for growth and revenue generation. Thus, the assessment of fiscal position is “weak.”

Regarding the regime type of the state, this capacity is not as clear-cut as the others. The Ethiopian regime exhibits the characteristics of both types. Institutions exist for competitive elections and the replacement of government officials; however, these institutions have not been put to the test sufficiently to conclude without hesitation that the regime is inclusive. A largely free media exists, though some harassment and intimidation of the press is evident. There are limits on executive power, but there are also prevailing norms of intolerance. The tendencies will be easier to ascertain in another few years, especially after the elections in 2000. Yet it is clear that the current regime is much more inclusive than the previous regimes in recent Ethiopian history. Thus, on a close call, the regime is assessed as “inclusive.”

Based on these assessments, the Ethiopian state is judged to be a type C state. The capacities of such a state are as follows:

Accommodative: high;

Sustainment: low;

Coercive: low.

Note that if the regime type is assessed as exclusive, then the coercive capacity is high, and the state type is G.

Outcome of Bargaining and Preferences for Violence

Based on the matrix showing the preferences of the mobilized group, a type D group has the following preferences toward a type C state: (1) negotiate, (2) exploit, and (3) intimidate. Based on the matrix showing the preferences of the state toward a mobilized group, a type C state has the following preferences toward a type D group: (1) repress, (2) exploit, and (3) negotiate. Note that if the state type is G, due to an assessment of the regime as exclusive, the group's preferences change to exploit, negotiate, intimidate. The state's preferences remain the same: repress, exploit, negotiate.

Comparing group and state preferences leads to the conclusion that the potential for violence in the dyadic encounter between a primarily urban-based mobilized Amhara and an EPRDF (Tigrayan) Ethiopian state is high. The violence-prone outcome stems primarily from the state's preference for a strategy of repressing the challenger, with a hedging strategy of exploiting the weakness within the mobilized group. In practical terms, the latter may mean a forceful crack-down and intimidation of the urban Amhara and incentives to the rural Amhara to continue their acquiescence. Quite simply, the EPRDF has few resources with which to head off dissent, but it has a disciplined and cohesive leadership, a blueprint for the future, and control of substantial apparatus of violence, all of which make it determined to stay in power, by force if necessary. The preferred Amhara strategy is to negotiate, with a hedging strategy of exploitation or, failing that, perhaps even outright intimidation of the state. But the pattern of preferences in strategies clearly illustrates the weakness and power difference between the group and the state.

If the state is assessed as an exclusive regime type, then the group's first two preferences are reversed. A more forceful strategy of exploitation is the preferred strategy, for the state makes the situation of the Amhara worse and the group then needs to demonstrate its resolve.

The choices in the original matchup are interesting because they are the inverse of each other. The state starts from a position of strength

and has incentives to keep its superior position. On the other hand, the Amhara start from a position of weakness and are wary of an escalation to violence because that will put the group at risk. The group has incentives to continue to negotiate (forcefully, through the exploit option, if need be) but not to resort to all-out force.

If the Amhara leadership were able to mobilize the rural Amhara, turning the group type to A, its choices against a still predominantly inclusive regime type (state type C) would stay the same. Moreover, the group would stand a real chance of having a larger access to power, because the state's preference would shift to negotiation as the preferred strategy. But if an Amhara shift to type A is accompanied by a state move toward a more exclusive regime type (state type G), then violence becomes the preferred strategy for both sides. Intelligence analysis needs to be on the alert for such an evolution in Ethiopia.

What is telling about the choice of strategies is that the state has little tolerance for any challenges from the Amhara, and the state's resource base supports a strategy that includes a quick recourse to force. The Amhara are weaker and, from a resource base perspective, their demands and tactics are likely to be moderate.

The Oromo. With respect to the secondary scenarios of mobilization, the current situation of the Oromo is characterized by weak leadership, weak resource support (predominantly poor and rural), and broad popular support (largest single ethnic group, with appeal potential beyond the Oromo), which make it group type E. The group's preferences against state type C (inclusive regime) are exploit, negotiate, intimidate. The state's preferences against the group are exploit, negotiate, repress. If the state type is assessed as G, then the group's preferences are negotiate, exploit, surrender, and the state's preferences become exploit, negotiate, repress. In neither of the four sets of preferences is violent outcome either a first or second preferred strategy. According to the framework, there is little potential for Oromo-centered violence.

If the Oromo move toward a strong leadership (group type C), then the group's preferences against state type C (inclusive regime) are negotiate, exploit, intimidate. The state's preferences are negotiate, exploit, repress. In other words, even if the Oromo mobilize with a

strong leadership, there is still little potential for violence if the state stays inclusive or moves further toward inclusion of other groups. However, the Oromo with a strong leadership (group type C) facing a state type G (exclusive regime) have very different preferences: intimidate, exploit, negotiate. The state's preferences then become repress, exploit, negotiate. In other words, the primary strategic preferences for both the state and the group are for the use of violence.

The Somali. The current situation of the Somali is characterized by strong leadership, weak resource support, and weak popular support (small overall numbers, limited appeal to other groups), which make it group type G. The group's preferences against state type C (inclusive regime) are negotiate, exploit, intimidate. The state's preferences against the group are repress, exploit, negotiate. If the state is assessed as G, then the group's preferences are exploit, intimidate, negotiate. The state's preferences remain repress, exploit, negotiate. In short, the state has a preferred strategy of violence toward the group. The group's preference for violence increases as the state turns toward greater exclusiveness. According to the framework, there is good potential for violence to accompany any Somali mobilization.

If the Somali move toward greater resource support (group type D), perhaps as a result of assistance from a reconstituted Somalia, then the group's preferences against state type C (inclusive regime) are negotiate, exploit, intimidate. The state's preferences are repress, exploit, negotiate. Against a state defined as an exclusive regime (state type G), the group's preferences are exploit, negotiate, intimidate. The state's preferences remain repress, exploit, negotiate. In other words, the state has a preferred strategy to turn to violence to counter a Somali mobilization in conditions of both limited or strong resource support from Somalia. Given the shape of the state's responses to Somali activism so far, the assessment is on the mark.

Revisiting the Evaluation

There is much to be said for the portrayal of the type of ethnic tensions between the Amhara and the Tigrayan-dominated state as expressed in the terms above. The Amhara have followed the identified strategic preference for negotiation. The preference does not

mean that some activists within the group are not preparing for more forceful action, and factions of the Amhara, both in Ethiopia and abroad, advocate strong measures.⁴⁰ But so far, the Amhara have “negotiated” through implied threats and a more pronounced mobilization effort. The Amhara have launched neither an insurgency nor even a terrorist campaign; they have stayed largely within the bounds of peaceful, if sometimes attention-getting, methods.

The state has shown little tolerance for any challenger. It has acted to repress vocal dissenters, and its potential for violent measures seems to be understood by all the major actors in Ethiopia. Whether the state moves toward being more or less inclusive during the next few years is crucial. If it moves toward greater inclusivity, then the strategic preferences of any challenging groups will also change, usually toward more peaceful methods of taking on the state.

The Oromo and Somali relationship with the state also falls within the bounds of the conceptual framework of the model. The main Oromo groups disagree on the extent of participation in the government, with the differences primarily based on greater sense of separation or inclusion of the Oromo in Ethiopia. Negotiation strategies predominate, as borne out in reality. Similarly, the Somali relationship is captured in the preference of the state for repression no matter which of the two main paths the Somali mobilization takes. The heavy-handed state control over the Somali (emphasizing the role of the police), indicates the accuracy of the framework.

For the purposes of tracking the evolution of interethnic relations in Ethiopia, any appearance of the following trends needs special monitoring by intelligence analysts:

- A clear move by the EPRDF away from the attempt at inclusion of other ethnic groups in the governance of the country and toward a more narrow emphasis on the Tigray. Specific indicators might include a dwindling influence of non-Tigrayan parties (the Amhara National Democratic Movement [ANDM] and the Oromo People’s Democratic Organization [OPDO]) within the EPRDF, greater prominence of Tigray mythology in EPRDF’s

⁴⁰Taye Wolde Semiat and the Ethiopian Patriotic Front, now also the Ethiopian United Front.

statements, or even the creation of a Tigray-centric vision of Ethiopia as a guiding plan for the future evolution of the country. In terms of the model, this would represent a move toward state type G, one of the most violence-prone state types.

- A significantly higher level of openness to and acceptance of urban Amhara appeals by the rural Amhara. Specific indicators might include the loss of support for the ANDM in the rural Amhara areas, a changed pattern of activity of the Amhara militant groups, and changes in philosophy and pronouncements of the urban Amhara activists to include concerns central to the rural Amhara. In terms of the model, this would represent a move toward group type A, one of the least violence-prone group types.
- The evolution of ties among the Oromo organizations toward greater cooperation or even unity. The mobilizing message among the united and mobilized Oromo would be important: Is it secessionist, or does it emphasize inclusion in the current Ethiopian structures? In terms of the model, the crucial variable is the type of state such an Oromo group would face. If it were an exclusive regime type, then the matchup would be highly violence-prone.
- Concerning the role of Somalia in the Ogaden, the state's heavy-handed attitude toward the Somali is unlikely to change, but in case of a revitalized Somalia emerging in the future, the intra-Ethiopian Somali-centered tension may attain again the inter-state conflict dimension that it has had several times in the past.
- The use of Islamic rhetoric and Islamic appeals, especially by the Oromo and the Somalis. If, in response, the EPRDF turns toward greater exclusion of these major non-Tigray groups, then, in terms of the model, the likelihood of violence will be enhanced.
- The ongoing process of regionalization and, specifically, the treatment of minority groups within each ethnic state. For example, perceived mistreatment of the Amhara minority in the Oromo state (in terms of land allocation or equal administration of justice) would escalate the grievances of and potential for the mobilization of the Amhara.

Thinking about the dynamics of ethnic relations and potential for strife in Ethiopia, the framework presented above makes apparent the following intelligence needs and information gaps:

- Tracking the rise of militant activists among the urban Amhara and any evidence that points to their increased preparations for armed actions against the government.
- Tracking the appeal of the urban Amhara mobilizational appeals among the rural Amhara, including the interest by urban Amhara activists in the rural Amhara, visits, common organizations, and organizational channels to further the mobilization process.
- Following closely the appeal of EPRDF to non-Tigrayan groups, including signs of willingness by the Amhara, Oromo, and Somali to participate in the governance of the country and the popularity of major non-Tigrayan EPRDF political figures among their ethnic cohorts.
- Following closely the appeal of anti-EPRDF, ethnically based political groupings in the Amhara, Oromo, and Somali regions.
- Analytical scrutiny of the 1994 census data, including taking into account the probable errors of under- and overcounting, the identification of minority groups within regions (for example, Amhara living in Oromo areas), their projected rates of growth, and potential for increased ethnic competition at substate (regional) levels.
- Additional information on the police, including the principles used (in theory and in practice) for selection and promotion within the police force, the ethnic composition of the regional police forces, and the relationship between the police and the armed forces at the local level.
- Additional information on the armed forces, including the changing ethnic composition of the officer corps and the actual criteria for promotion, the principles behind stationing and assignment of troops in the regions, as well as indications of the overall prestige of the armed forces among the various ethnic groups.

Close attention to these issues may enable an early identification and warning of impending ethnic strife in Ethiopia.

FINAL OBSERVATIONS

The framework presented here examines the situation in Ethiopia through a series of dyads, pitting a specific mobilized ethnic group against the Tigrayan-dominated Ethiopian state. As such, the model does not capture the various intergroup relations that may be influential in the equation. For example, Amhara mobilization may spur greater Oromo support for the Tigrayan-led government, or, depending on the course the mobilization takes, it could spur the Oromo to undertake their own mobilization against the Tigray. In other words, a weakened Tigray-led Ethiopian state may come under challenges from both the Amhara and the Oromo, with the Amhara-Oromo relations ranging anywhere from tacit alliance to mutual hostility (surpassing even their hostility toward the Tigray-led government). On the other hand, the ethnic mobilization of the Amhara against the Ethiopian state is interesting in the sense that it stipulates the mobilization of an ethnic group to restore the privileges the group once had. The two secondary scenarios, focusing on the Oromo and the Somali, add further depth to the analysis.

Critics may believe that the lack of a multiactor perspective to the model is a serious flaw that detracts from its usefulness. The lack may be a necessary shortcoming to make the model user-friendly, but it need not be a fatal flaw. The framework provides a tool for thinking abstractly about the mobilization patterns and challenges to the ruling state authorities. It is meant to provide insight into the strategic preferences available to the main actors under certain “what-if” conditions. As such, the model aims to be parsimonious, and its narrowing of the crucial questions to the main dyad illuminates the logically derived preferences of both actors without unwieldy mathematical equations. The way to capture the influence of other parties on the crucial dyad is to include their impact when calculating the state’s and the group’s capabilities. For example, in accounting for the Oromo factor in the Tigray-led state against Amhara dyad, the limited appeal to the Oromo of the Amhara mobilization can be captured in the assessment of the sustainment and cohesiveness capacity of the Amhara. Similarly, a potential Oromo

disinclination to defend the Tigrayan-led state against a challenging Amhara can be captured in the assessment of all three state capacities.

Since the model was applied to a prospective case, its accuracy in anticipating the likely strategies that the challenging groups and the state are likely to follow is, as yet, unverifiable empirically. But the purpose of applying the model to a prospective case was to provide a series of hypothetical but likely situations and determine the evolutionary paths for both the state and the group that would result in the most violence-prone confrontations. As such, the model proved useful in illustrating the “dangerous dyads.”

Finally, the model was designed to structure intelligence analysis, trace the logical connections in the evolution of tensions along interethnic lines, and provide a framework for thinking of potential outcomes to hypothetical situations. Outlining specific trends for analysts to track—on the basis of their potential for violence—is the goal of the exercise. The model is a tool toward that end, as it provides the all-important linkage between goals, level of resources, and the resulting strategies and choices open to the state and the group.

AFTERWORD

In May 1998, war broke out between Eritrea and Ethiopia. The war was ostensibly over a small patch of land on the border of Eritrea and the Ethiopian state of Tigray. However, the armed conflict was precipitated by economic friction between the two countries that began when Eritrea (officially independent of Ethiopia from 1993) launched its own currency, the *nakfa*, and demanded that all trade and exchange between the two countries be conducted in hard currency. This was a particularly burdensome request for Ethiopia, since it uses the Eritrean port of Assab to export many of its tradable goods. Fighting between the two countries continued for a few weeks before both the UN and the Organization for African Unity began to try to mediate some sort of peace agreement. These negotiations broke down, and conflict erupted again in February 1999.

These events have reduced significantly the potential for ethnic conflict within Ethiopia. The ethnic divisions that were so pronounced before the fighting broke out have receded with the appearance of a new and external enemy. Ethnic divisions within Ethiopia, and ethnic divisions between Ethiopian groups outside of the country, have become muted as nationalist sentiment is generated by the war. It is unclear whether or not the war will have a long-term positive effect on the possibility of ethnic conflict in Ethiopia. The length of the war, its outcome, and subsequent government policies will all play a role in determining the eventual result. The length in particular will be important. As the war drags on, the elections of 2000 may be far less contentious than previous elections. But when the war ends, the country could be back to ethnic politics as usual and the scenarios documented herein will be as relevant as ever.