The Ethiopian Transition in Regional Perspective

I Introduction

The quest for democratic change unfolded in Africa following the end of the Cold War and intensification of popular struggles, which ushered in developments that rendered previous authoritarian dispensations obsolete. Hence the initiated processes in this regard led to the unfolding of concomitant practices presumed to promote democratic values in a wide variety of ways. However, maintaining the momentum of transformation through perseverance in upholding these values became increasingly difficult in many African countries owing to the persistence of previously entrenched authoritarian legacies. This notwithstanding, however, political and socio-economic reforms that became the order of the day neutralized the unbridled prerogatives of the African power elite, which in the past reduced citizens to "extended households of incumbents" (Gros 1998:3). Consequently, all regimes in Africa "have embraced at least one phase of democratization" at varying times (*ibid:* 4).

Ethiopia experienced two successive regime changes since the mid-1970s. The *ancien regime*, alias imperial rule, was toppled by the revolution of 1974 that brought about the reigning of a military dictatorship that ruled until 1991. This was followed by the ousting of military rule in May 1991by a coalition of ethno-nationalist insurgent groups spearheaded by the incumbent Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF)[1]. In the post-1991 years, therefore, the longstanding disposition of successive Ethiopian regimes was rebuffed when the EPRDF ventured into a project of recasting, reorienting and reorganizing the Ethiopian political landscape and state-society relations by adopting the principle of a federal system of governance based on ethno-linguistic considerations. Immediately after seizing state power, EPRDF declared a transitional arrangement that lasted for four years during which it took a number of reform measures such as introducing a charter (TGE 1991) as an interim constitution that guaranteed freedom of speech, assembly, association, etc. Other major political developments that transpired during the period in question included the adoption of the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights, establishment of a "broad-based" transitional government, institution of national/regional self-governments along ethno-linguistic lines (TGE 1992), and conducting three national, regional and local elections.

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[1] The EPRDF was established in 1989 by the Tigray Liberation Front (TPLF) in its quest to lend a multinational image emphasizing the former's national role. Initially, the EPDRF was composed of the TPLF and the Ethiopian Peoples' Democratic Movement (EPDM). The latter was later renamed the "Amhara National Democratic Movement" (ANDM). The Oromo People's Democratic Organization (OPDO) and the Southern Ethiopian Peoples' Democratic Front (SEPDF) joined the EPRDF at a later stage. According to John Young (1997), prisoners of war captured by the TPLF during its armed confrontation with the military regime were instrumental in forming some of the member organizations of the EPRDF.

This paper highlights the salient features of the Ethiopian transition by analyzing the ramifications of the policy drives and attendant practices in terms of realizing stated transformational objectives and goals. Finally, the implications of the Ethiopian transitional experience for developments in the region in general and the Horn of Africa sub-region in particular are discussed.

Salient Features of the Post-1991 Ethiopian Transition

In the immediate aftermath of the ousting of military rule, an interim legislative assembly known as the Council of Representatives (COR) was established at the July 1991 Conference, which approved the formation of a Transitional Government of Ethiopia (TGE) affirming the coming on the scene of federalism, liberal political economy, and the right of the country's ethnic groups to self-determination as the major drives. Popular sovereignty and representation exercised through democratic participation in the country's socio-economic and political process directly and/or through elected representatives became the cornerstone of the principles outlined in the 1995 Constitution (FDRE 1995) that heralded the establishment of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE). Legislative, executive and judicial bodies were formed both at federal and sub-national levels. In addition to these, political parties and civil society organizations proliferated taking advantage of the introduced liberal reforms. Both during the transition period and after, assumption of public office in the leading bodies of the Ethiopian political system at all levels (national, regional, and local) was legally determined to be based in the outcomes of periodic competitive elections. In addition to local elections that took place prior to the promulgation of the incumbent Constitution, the May 1995, the May 2000 and the May 2005 National, Regional and Local Elections were held following the promulgation of the incumbent constitution. At the time of writing, preparations for the fourth round of national and regional elections are underway scheduled to be conducted in May 2010.

EPRDF's move to use elections as important instruments of representative politics by itself could be considered as a positive development in a country whose history was bedeviled by the absence of competitive electoral exercises. Despite the holding of several elections, however, the legitimacy of the electoral process in Ethiopia still remains to be a highly contested issue. This is mainly due to the failure of the system in providing a leveled field for all legitimate players and the lack of credibility of the management of the electoral process as expressed in the mode and manner of instituting the electoral authority, which is widely believed to be the client of the EPRDF regime. The assertion that this body is not impartial and autonomous is substantiated by invoking its track record of consistently endorsing the position of the EPRDF whenever controversies pertaining to election outcomes surface. In this connection, Gudina (2000:188) states "…*neither*

*the rules of the game of the electoral process were applied in a transparent way nor were there parliamentary democracy and popular governance as ...had been hoped fo*r". The Ethiopian Human Rights Council (EHRCO), in an extensive analysis of the legal and institutional framework of the electoral process in Ethiopia, has also disputed the claim that this body is independent. It argued that the independence of the electoral authority is curtailed right from its establishment by stating that the modality of appointment of executive and managing officers of the election board opened the door for its control by the dominant party in parliament, EPRDF (EHRCO 2001: 40). In this regard, developments marked by a host of irregularities and unwarranted state interventions in electoral processes in the face of docility of the board as experienced during the May 2005 Elections are illuminating. A study by the UN/Economic Commission for Africa (ECA 2009: 33) included Ethiopia in the list of the countries where the electoral system is viewed as marginally acceptable.

In all the electoral exercises that took place since the 1991 regime change, the EPRDF emerged as the single dominant party in parliament whereby its leader served as the chief executive of both the Transitional Government and the FDRE, a position he holds to date. In view of the currently prevailing circumstances, it is justifiably expected that the forthcoming May 2010 elections will be merely a repetition of the past with respect to the composition of the major branches of government at all levels. There was no single MP representing the organized opposition in the first National/Regional Elections held in May 1995. The second multiparty National and Regional Elections, which resulted in EPRDF's winning of the overwhelming majority of seats in parliament, were conducted in May 2000 in the midst of the devastating border war with Eritrea. The possibility for the opposition to pose serious challenges against the dominance of the EPRDF in parliament was marginal as the latter continued to control the political and economic resources of the Ethiopian state, which it unsparingly utilized to ensure its dominance. Moreover, the opposition's fragmentation and failure to develop a common minimum program that could be presented as alternative policy choice contributed to the entrenchment of the EPRDF without facing the peril of being seriously challenged. The third round of national and regional elections held in May 2005 are markedly distinct from the preceding ones in the sense that public debates and electoral campaigns on the part of the contestants and the rallying of supporters and mobilization of constituencies of support was highly visible. The opposition has, as admitted by the ruling party, won more than a hundred seats in the federal legislature which was a dramatic improvement when compared to previous state of affairs. Improved access to public media for all participants was considerably witnessed and things went smoothly until election day. Notwithstanding this, however, the opposition's claim of winning more seats than the ones officially acknowledged became an issue of serious controversy. The ruling front denied this and the subservient electoral board complied prompting widespread protests and riots, which entailed state repression and bloodletting. As in the past, the EPRDF ostensibly

continued to control almost all of the constituent regions of the Ethiopian federation through its member, affiliate, and client organizations. This is buttressed by the ruling party's uncontested grip on the security apparatus, the army, the electoral authority, the civilian bureaucracy, and the commanding heights of the economy[2].

The Workings of the Post-1991 Transitional Arrangement

Like other parliamentary systems, the leader of the party or a coalition of parties occupying the majority of seats in parliament forms the Ethiopian federal government (FDRE Constitution, Art. 73/2). The Ethiopian Prime Minister who is vested with considerable executive powers in the federal government is elected from among members of the lower house with no term limit on his tenure as the chief executive in the person of the prime minister. The prime minister appoints ministers of the federal government (cabinet) subject to the approval of the lower house. Cabinet members are appointed from among members of the two houses including outsiders presumed to possess the required qualifications and expertise (*ibid.* Art. 74/2). The President, who serves as a titular head of state, is also nominated by the HPR and elected by a two-third majority in joint session of both chambers of parliament. The tenure of the President is for six years during each term, which is limited to a maximum of two terms. Any person elected from either of the houses is required to vacate his/her parliamentary seat (Art. 70).

In present-day Ethiopia, the parallel structures of the ruling party and the government are overarching and closely intertwined. Hence incentives for competitive politics and legitimate electoral process under a multi-party framework and policy choices are minimal. This is owing to the fact that boundaries between the state apparatus and the structures of the ruling party are too hazy to enable one in making any distinction between the two. In all of the regional states, EPRDF's coalition partners/affiliates and clients spearhead state functions on the basis of claims of winning the majority of the votes cast in the elections conducted to date. In the following sections, a brief overview of the major institutions of the political system is provided by highlighting their mode of operation and their formal and informal interface and linkages.

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[2] EPRDF's member organizations run a host of business organizations that are engaged in different profit-making activities. Moreover, land (both urban and rural) is under the custody of the government, in effect the EPRDF. Given that land is one of the prime factors of economic activity in Ethiopia lends added leverage to the EPRDF in its bid to control the commanding heights of the economy and "capture" the peasantry. It is widely alleged, albeit with some justification, that these party-affiliated business firms enjoy preferential treatment in terms of accessing land, credit and other services, industrial and agricultural inputs, and tax privileges. The Ethiopian political leadership denies these allegations while admitting that the political parties that are in power in the different regions provided the business enterprises with initial working capital as endowment fund. For details see the Prime Minister's interview on the subject with correspondents of the *Financial Times*, Michael Holman and Mishla Rong, 2 March 1998.

The Federal Executive

The federal executive is organized by instituting various line ministries, authorities, and agencies and commissions whose roles and responsibilities are specified in Proclamation No. 41/1993 that defines the powers and duties of the central executive organs. The common powers and duties of each ministry include (TGE, 1993). The Prime Minister appoints high ranking federal officials mainly on the basis of political allegiance and loyalty as the major criteria. The federal executive poses as a dominant branch of the government, which could be understood by looking at its relations with the legislative and judicial branches. Parliament, which is constitutionally empowered to play the role of supervising and overseeing the performance of the executive and charged with the task of undertaking oversight functions, is noted for its subservience to the whims and wills of the latter. This is owing to the fact that the overwhelming majority of the law makers in the federal, regional and local legislatures belong to the ruling party. In terms of making laws, parliament has steadfastly continued to be subservient to the executive as evidenced by its role that was largely limited to rubberstamping proposed bills submitted by the latter. To date, there is no single instance when bills proposed by the executive have failed to be endorsed in parliament. The judiciary is noted for its marginal role in adjudicating on issues of constitutional violations on the part of the executive owing to its lack of the power of judicial review, which is the prerogative of the upper house of parliament mainly composed of members and sympathizers of the ruling party.

The Federal Legislature

Ethiopia has a bi-cameral legislature consisting of the House of People's Representatives (HPR) and the House of Federation (HF) posing as the lower and upper houses, respectively. The HPR has 547 seats and its members are directly elected for a five-year term from constituencies[3] (regular and special) throughout the country. The HF that is designated as a 'Council of Nationalities' is allegedly composed of representatives of all ethnic groups of the country. The Constitution provides that at least one delegate represents each ethnic group in the HF. Moreover, an additional one representative will be included for each one million people of a given ethnic group in the HF (Art. 61/2). Members of the HF are elected either by regional councils (legislatures) or through direct votes of the peoples of the regions. The HF is constitutionally vested with powers to decide on matters of federal and regional revenue sources, litigations relating to constitutional

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[3] Two types of electoral constituencies are used for electing members of the House of Peoples' Representatives. In regular constituencies, which largely follow geographic jurisdiction of district (w*oreda)* administrations, one constituency is organized per one hundred thousand inhabitants. Special Constituencies (numbering about 22) are established for minority nationalities within regions designated for majority ethnic groups.

matters (judicial review), the rights of ethnic groups to self-determination, and preservation of the constitutional order. The overwhelming presence of EPRDF members in both houses of parliament lends primacy to party lines and preferences to the detriment of their public responsibility as law makers and oversight bodies. In this connection, Berhanu (2005) argues that the blending of party and state functions rendered the legislature's capacity to check and offset executive malpractices ineffective.

The Federal Judiciary

The 1991 regime change entailed several changes in the formal set up of the Ethiopian judicial system. During the initial years of the transition period, there was no effective court system throughout the country. In some of the regions, which were controlled by the EPRDF prior to its total control of state power, people's tribunals that did not operate according to established legal procedures and mechanisms were at work. Moreover, some policies of the EPRDF contributed to the paralysis of the judiciary resulting in mass dismissal of functionaries thereby exacerbating the shortage of trained and experienced judges. At present, the judiciary in Ethiopia has a three-tier hierarchy of courts: first instance, high, and supreme courts both at the federal and regional levels. The FDRE Constitution provides for the independence of the judiciary allowing it to operate free of executive interventions and influences. To this end, formal and legal safeguards concerning the appointment and removal of judges were put in place. Federal judges are appointed by the HPR upon the recommendation of the Prime Minister (see art. 81/1). The Prime Minister's recommendation for appointing judges is made on the basis of screening and selection of nominees by the Federal Judicial Administration Commission (art. 81/2), whose chairperson for many years is a member of the politburo/executive committee of the EPRDF[4]. The same procedure is followed at the regional level where regional judicial administration commissions perform screening and selection of judges whose appointment is made by the regional councils upon the recommendation of the heads of the regional governments. Notwithstanding the existence of legal-constitutional mechanisms and procedures for putting in place an effective and independent judiciary, the record of this branch in dispensing justice and ensuring the rule of law is disappointingly low. More importantly, adjournment of court hearings is excessively used in high profile and politically sensitive cases like the one made against a former Defense Minister who fell out with the Prime Minister's faction on differences regarding the handling of the Ethio-Eritrean conflict. In sum, the credibility, effectiveness and independence of the judiciary seems to have been undermined by the dominance of the executive, which commands leverage in terms of influencing the recruitment and promotion of judges.

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[4] This refers to the ex-Minister of Information who is a leading member of the ruling party with no training and experience on legal-constitutional matters.

The Media

In Ethiopia, the role of the media assumed increased importance following the 1991 regime change when the proliferation of the private media (mainly print media) and abolition of censorship were experienced thereby leading to relative subsiding of the hitherto absolute state monopoly of the media. As a result, the country moved to a new era of press freedom and a new press law was enacted in 1992 allowing for the coming into being of the private press (Nega 2000: 21). Notwithstanding this, however, frequent reports on harassment, arrest, and fining of journalists running the private press abound partly resulting from violations that could be attributed to lack of professional training and experience (Kohen 1994: 26). Following the unrest that accompanied controversies surrounding the outcomes of the May 2005 Elections, state repression against the private media resulted in their diminished size and recourse to self-censorship.

The Civil Service

In Ethiopia, the civil service is famed for lack of efficiency owing to the prevalence of bureaucratic red tape and paucity of effective mechanisms of accountability and transparency (Gebreegziabher *et al.* 2004). The formal devolution of power from the centre to sub-national levels since the 1992 reorganization of regional administration has entailed its expansion on a progressively increasing scale. The current Ethiopian civil service law is based on standard principles and procedures regarding mode of operation, integrity, and accountability and transparency. The code of conduct for civil servants, for example, requires civil servants not to use their positions to promote political goals and advance personal and sectarian interests. It also requires that civil servants should report to their superiors when there is conflict of interest with their regular duties and desist from accepting gifts and enticements in return for services rendered (FDRE 2002). Public service delivery in Ethiopia largely remained inadequate and corruption-ridden in instances of seeking licenses and permits, accessing public land and utilities, speeding up administrative and bureaucratic processes, avoiding payment of taxes, fees or fines (World Bank, 1998). Notwithstanding the relative improvements witnessed in the performance of the civil service following the recently introduced Civil Service Reform Program, the sector's poor performance still continue to be experienced. However, the EPRDF government has enacted anti-corruption laws and instituted ethics and anti-corruption commissions at the federal level and in some of the regions with the hope of enhancing the level of performance of the sector. Awareness creation activities have taken place and some punitive measures against alleged corrupt top officials have been taken on a selective basis[5]. In this connection, a study on corruption in Ethiopia (IER 2001: 252) rightly stated that

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[5] This refers to the prosecution and punishment of an ex-deputy prime minister and a few top federal officials on corruption charges for allegedly falling out with stalwarts in the ruling party. On the other hand, it is widely believed that other offenders that are close to the locus of power are tolerated from being called to account for their malpractices.

if a political system lacks the political will in resolutely checking corruption as a result of omission or commission, it looses the moral high ground to condemn and even-handedly deal with the malpractice.

.Political Parties

In Ethiopia, multiparty politics is a recent phenomenon. Following the overthrow of imperial rule in the mid-1970s, semi-clandestine and clandestine political organizations temporarily came on the scene. The process culminated in the advent of a vanguard party under the tutelage of the military regime following the violent suppression of opposition groups that were thriving. The 1991 Transitional Charter recognized the right of citizens to establish political parties in Ethiopia for the first time thereby resulting in the formation of political groups with varying orientations and programs. While the large majority of the existing parties in Ethiopia are ethnic-based, some that pose as multiethnic/pan-Ethiopian organizations also are at work. The Ethiopian political landscape with regard to the formation and operation of political parties in the ranks of the opposition is constantly characterized by mergers, splits, and complete disappearances. It should also be noted that the EPRDF formed client ethnic-based parties in its quest to undermine independently organized regional organizations in almost all cases. In this connection, it is worthy to note that the formation of EPRDF in the late 1980s was spearheaded by the TPLF and comprised the Ethiopian Peoples Democratic Movement (EPDM)[6] and subsequently the Oromo People's Democratic Organization (OPDO)[7]. A few years after EPRDF's seizure of state power, the Southern Ethiopian Peoples' Democratic Movement (SEDM) was formed and enlisted as one of the member organizations of the ruling Front thereby ensuring the latter's firm entrenchment in the four major regions of the country.

Moreover, EPRDF actively encouraged and supported political entrepreneurs based in the remaining regions of the Ethiopian federation to form their respective political organizations, which became regional ruling parties in their respective areas qualifying as pro-EPRDF groups thus facilitating the ruling party's dominance in the entire country. Hence EPRDF's leverage to reward clients through distribution of power and resources that are deployed unsparingly and with impunity played a crucial role in expediting its drive for absolute control. In this connection, Abbink (2006: 177) stated that many people in positions of power from the federal to the grassroots levels enjoyed privileged positions as a result of political loyalty and belonging to the ruling front. According to Hagmann (2005), among the key features of post-1991 Ethiopian politics are signified by

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[6] The EPDM, which comprised a group that have defected from the Ethiopian People Revolutionary party (EPRP), joined the TPLF and operated in the Amhara and Agaw areas in Northern Ethiopia Following the EPRDF's seizure of power, EPDM was renamed the Amhara National Democratic Movement (ANDM) thereby transforming itself from a multi-ethnic to ethnic-based movement..

[7] The OPDO is basically formed by Oromo individuals many of whom were prisoners of war captured by the TPLF and EPLF while serving as soldiers of the military regime. It claims to represent the Oromo, which is the numerically largest ethnic group of the country.

the co-existence of patrimonial and legal-rational domination, institutional instability at administrative level, and complex and often contradictory patron-client relations. In spite of rights and freedoms sanctioned by the Constitution with regard to political and associational life, the EPRDF has exhibited exclusionary tendencies by way of barring unwanted political organizations[8] from participating in the political process (Berhanu 2003).

Regional/Local Self-Government

The Transitional Charter provided a framework for decentralized self-rule in a manner that could be viewed as a major departure form hitherto existing state of affairs, at least at the level of official policy. Self-governing units that fulfilled the laid down criteria in terms of ethno-linguistic considerations qualified to form regional state governments by virtue of which they were entitled to also participate in the central government. Concurrently, they were empowered to run administrative and other developmental undertakings in areas under their respective jurisdictions. A federal arrangement stipulating the need for sharing of powers and functions as an expression of regional and local self-rule was deemed essential owing to its presumed ramifications in terms of enhancing socio-economic development, entrenching peace and stability, and forging national unity and cohesion. The policy was justified as the only way out to avert possibilities of disintegration that seemed imminent at the height of the civil war in general and the eve of the 1991 regime change in particular. In order to lend legal force to this drive, the Transitional Government enacted a proclamation providing for the establishment of national/regional self-governments (TGE 1992). As opposed to former policy settings and practices, this Proclamation clearly stipulated that all leading bodies at the various levels of regional and local administration would assume a purely representative nature where the incumbency of officials of state governments could be realized only on the basis of elections outcomes.

Measures of decentralization-cum-devolution introduced in the immediate aftermath of the May 1991 regime change brought about a situation whereby two-levels of government, namely federal and regional became operational (Gebreegziabher and Berhanu 2004: 1). For nearly a decade (1992-2001/2002), the decentralization-cum-devolution initiative was limited to the self-governing regions in the sense of exercising devolved powers and functions as stipulated in the pertinent provisions of the federal constitution and other laws. This was expressed by the establishment of elected bodies of governance like regional unicameral legislatures (councils), executive organs (cabinets), and judicial units in a manner that resembles structuring and organization of government at the federal level. Further decentralization of local government was introduced in 2001/2002. Regional state governments are

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[8] Among others, this refers to the exclusion of older multiethnic organizations like the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party (EPRP) and the All Ethiopian Socialist Movement (*Meisone)* from participating in the post-1991 political process.

also legally empowered to promulgate their own constitutions without violating the provisions of the federal constitution. Similar branches of government were also instituted at the district and grassroots levels with specified powers and functions. As mentioned earlier, the EPRDF has ensured the total control of regional administration through the agency of its member organizations and the so-called "friendly" parties all of which have remained in power in their respective regions and local constituencies right from the start. In view of this, Aalen (2000) argued:

> *The centralized party structure of the EPRDF is clearly contradictory to the provisions of the federal and regional constitutions...It promotes upward accountability to the party organs above rather than downward accountability to the people of the region, woreda* [districts] *and kebele* [grassroots administrations]. *The constitutional rights for the regions to formulate and implement plans and policies are severely diminished by the fact that regional governments, which are under EPRDF's hegemony, follow the centrally designed policies and five-year plans. ... in the Ethiopian case, the party structures are centralized, and when the party and the state are the same this leads inevitably to a centralized division of state power.*

Regional Dimensions of the Ethiopian Transition

Given that Ethiopia is one of the major countries of the Horn of Africa, developments associated with the Ethiopian transition can impact on state of affairs in other places of the sub-region in one way or another. It is to be recalled that most of the boundaries of the Horn, like elsewhere in the rest of the continent, were imposed by colonial powers. These boundaries more often traverse ethno-cultural and geographic divides as a result of which some ethnic communities in the region were split between and among neighboring countries. For instance, the Somali are found in Somalia, Ethiopia, Kenya and Djibouti whereas the Afars inhabit territories within Ethiopia, Eritrea and Djibouti. The Anuak and the Nuer ethnic groups live in Ethiopia and the Sudan while the same is true of the Borana Oromos who are found in Ethiopia and Kenya. In several cases that are similar to the aforementioned, many ethnic groups that straddle the border areas of the different countries of the sub-region could be identified. In addition to the negative ramifications of the fragmentation of pre-colonial formations that took shape in this manner, the issue of citizenship and loyalty of ethnic groups to the national entities to which they formally belong could be affected by political developments and arrangements unfolding in one or more of the countries.

The principle of ethnic self-determination including and up to secession adopted in Ethiopia by the EPRDF regime as the central aspect of the Ethiopian transition was a major departure from the established disposition of post-independence African states thereby posing as a threatening factor to the cherished values and norms of maintaining territorial integrity and undivided sovereignty. By and large, the new trend that took shape in

Ethiopia in this manner is feared to serve as a source of inspiration to centrifugal forces in the neighboring countries of the Horn. It was also felt that there could be spillover effects of new developments in Ethiopia to neighboring countries by forces that harbor different claims and demands on their respective political establishments. It is to be recalled that the conflicts that unfolded in several of Ethiopia's ethnic regions prompted by a range of issues including sharing of political power and resources (Gashaw 2006, Vaughan 2006, Feyissa 2006) entailed spillover effects to neighboring countries like Sudan where identical ethno-linguistic groups and socio-cultural formations inhabit the border areas of both countries. Anxieties prompted by similar occurrences in the other neighboring countries that share similar attributes along their common borders with Ethiopia such as Djibouti and Kenya appears to exist owing to the politicization of ethnicity in post-1991 Ethiopia. Hence this constitutes an aspect of the regional dimension of the Ethiopian transition.

The end of the civil war in Ethiopia culminating in the seizure of state power by the coalition of rebel forces under the umbrella of the EPRDF was followed by the de'jure independence of Eritrea. This gave mixed signals characterized by the initial impression that the logic and attendant practice of mutual intervention could give way to cooperation and concerted institutionalized management of conflicts on the one hand. On the other hand, it was perceived that the power holders in the two countries (EPRDF and the Eritrean People's Liberation Front-EPLF) that forged partnership in the ousting of the Ethiopian military dictatorship would try to join hands in forcing the others to do their bidding by influencing the sub-regional configuration of forces as evidenced by the Ethio-Eritrean united hostile disposition towards the Islamist regime in the Sudan in the mid-1990s. The issue of resurgent Islam also had a polarizing effect influencing the stance of the Ethiopian and Eritrean regimes, among others, against regional actors like in the Sudan espousing political Islam. This is owing to the fear of the incumbent regimes in Ethiopia and Eritrea that 'division along religious lines would present a mortal threat not only to regime survival but also to the survival of the state itself' in the face of sizeable Ethiopian and Muslim populations' (Clapham 2007: 72). This does not seem to be the case with regard to Djibouti and the Sudan where the resurgence of political Islam does not seem to be viewed as such.

Moreover, the Ethiopian transition that endorsed the secession of Eritrea made the country totally landlocked as a result of the latter's acquisition of the ports of Massawa and Assab. It is to be recalled that close cooperation between Ethiopia and Eritrea did not last long as experienced by the events surrounding the 1998-2000 border war prompted by their divergent political and economic drives. Notably, EPLF's misgivings with regard to EPRDF's economic directions and its according of primacy to ethnic self-determination are perceived as detrimental to the former's nation building endeavors eventually leading to the 1998-2000 Ethio-Eritrean conflict. Following the defeat of Eritrea in May 2000, proxy warfare or mutual intervention through the agency of intrastate protagonists in the fashion of old behaviors and practices of state actors in the sub-region continued

to be one of the major instruments of foreign policy in the current Ethio-Eritrean relations. This is demonstrated by providing reciprocal support on the part of both to internal insurgent groups seeking to overthrow the adversary in power in each country. The situation is further exacerbated by the involvement of the two in the Somali conflict where each resorted to supporting different Somali warring factions. Hence Ethiopian and Eritrean engagement in Somalia has adversely impacted on the possibility of bringing peace to the war-torn country (Menkhaus and Prendergast 1999: 216). Deterioration in Ethio-Eritrean relations also led Ethiopia to be heavily dependent on Djibouti as a vital source of port facilities for its import-export trade thereby lending increased significance to their interstate relations. This move deprived Eritrea from getting economic amenities accruing from Ethiopia's use of the two Eritrean ports prior to the unfolding of the conflict. Hence Djibouti became the most important neighbor for Ethiopia partly contributing to its on-going rift with Eritrea.

The Ethiopian transition particularly with regard to the countries alliance with the west in the fight against terrorism has also impacted on the raging conflict in Somalia, which has domestic, regional and international implications. At the domestic level, the conflict is inextricably connected with the thriving insurgency against the EPRDF regime in the Ethiopian Somali region, the Ogaden. Regionally, Ethiopia's intervention in 2006 aimed at averting the downfall of the Somali Transitional Federal Government (TFG) from the onslaught of the Union of Islamic Courts (UIC) indirectly pitted Ethiopia against some powers in the region who suspect the latter of harboring an anti-Islam stance and acting to promote the interests of the US and other western powers in the Horn of Africa. The cordial relations between Ethiopia and separatist Somaliland that is short of formal recognition reinforced the suspicion of several actors in the sub-region that Ethiopia has an ulterior motive that is advanced to the detriment of a united Somalia. Ethiopia's relations with Sudan improved following the crumbling of the Ethio-Eritrean united front against the Islamist regime in Khartoum. Since then, Sudan and Ethiopia began to gradually improve their relations as they started cooperating on a wide variety of issues (communication, transport and energy, cross-border trade…). Sudan is also a major supplier of oil to Ethiopia at present in spite of the implicit skepticism of the Sudanese regime that the potential for separation of Southern Sudan is partly inspired by developments associated with the Ethiopian transition that underlined the need for ethnic self-determination.

Concluding Remarks

This article provided a bird's eye view of the events and occurrences and the processes involved with regard to the Ethiopian transition that commenced following the May 1991 regime change. Aspects of change and continuity with regard to the workings of the Ethiopian political system are highlighted in view of attempts made to effect political and socio-economic transformation. Formal changes in policy directions, structures and

legal-constitutional arrangements pertaining to the mode of governance and intrastate and state-society relations constitute one aspect of the Ethiopian transition. On the other hand, the transition culminated in the persistence of past behaviors and practices cloaked in democratic pretensions despite the gradual entrenchment of electoral authoritarianism. As the saying goes, forms alone do not beget substance and hence the Ethiopian transition needs a long way to go in bringing about a fundamental departure from the line of thought and ways of doing things that gained currency during the bygone days. Viewed from a regional perspective, the ramifications of the Ethiopian transition could be seen from two angles: first and by and large, it perpetuated past practices and dispositions with regard to mutual interventions and reconfiguration of forces driven by exigencies of changing patterns of regional and international alignment and realignment; second, the lending of primacy to the principle of ethnic self-determination that is emphasized by the Ethiopian transition became a cause for concern in a region where indivisibility and inviolability of territorial integrity and state sovereignty is held as a sacrosanct value for long.

Ethiopia is a major country in the sub-region in terms of a number of indicators such as population size, land area, potential resource endowment, and a long history of statehood marked by its prominent role in the liberation of African colonized entities, which is further reinforced by the enduring foreign relations the country has established with state-actors in the Horn and the rest of the continent. Most notably, the existence of several ethnic groups whose compatriots inhabit territories of neighboring countries characterize the make up of the Ethiopian polity. In the light of the aforementioned, one can argue that the assets at the country's disposal could have enabled the transition to positively impact on the quest for democratic transformation in the region. However, the power holders in Ethiopia must mend their disposition of making a mockery of democracy in order to qualify for such a task by creating favorable conditions for the entrenchment of the major attributes of good governance internally in the first instance. By the same token, the country needs to embark on constructive disengagement with its adversaries while deepening the amicable rapport with its allies and friends in the sub-region.

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