

THE
ANTINOMIES
OF
DEMOCRATIC VOTING & COLOR-CODED RIOTING
MIXED SIGNALS

Now that the 4th national election is approaching, speculation is rife in anticipation of the challenges and opportunities that are bound to come in its train. This is a normal response anywhere in the world during an election year. Nonetheless, in our case, given the problems of the 3rd National polling, those who tend to focus on the possible hitches could feel apprehension. To a degree, this too is understandable. Particularly as certain forces that may have reason to worry about the outcome of the ballot race are already showing unpleasant signs. Signs as foreboding as those that prefigured the last post-election political deadlock. We all recall with what force the 2005 intractable impasse finally exploded and what measures had to be taken to contain it. It is, therefore, understandable if some among the public feel unease as the commencement hour of 2010 election continues to tick.

However, as will be argued throughout this section, taking a calm stalk of the post-2005 positive developments in Ethiopia is sufficient to allay the fear around the possible difficulties that may arise in the wake of the

2010 elections. The ground that breeds violent unrest similar to the kind that rocked the country in 2005 has been staidly dissolving. Indeed, encouraging indices abound that it could even wither further in the months leading up to the voting day and beyond. One palpable warrant for this guarded optimism is the readiness of almost all opposition parties to compete in the 4th national elections in good faith. Indeed these parties have publicly pledged to embrace the results with neither rancor nor grudge regardless of where the chips might fall.

On the down side, however, as hinted in the opening paragraph, disquieting signals are in the air that others could be plotting to spoil and discredit the 2010 balloting process. Failing in that, their intention, at least by one reading of their current behavior, might be to disown and contest the outcome. This is, of course, if the vote tally spells defeat to the opposition and auger victory to the incumbent. One indicator of the validity of this prognosis quickly comes to mind: Namely Medrek's rejection of the internationally accepted Election Code of Conduct, recently signed by almost every other party in the country. (1) Medrek's uncooperative stance in this matter is all the more alarming. For none of the provisions of the Code leave any room or pretext for prevarications or grandstanding.

Proof that contentious items were hammered out of the Code during the interparty negotiation is the fact that among the first to sign it are Hailu Shawel's AEUP and Ledetu's EDP. Between them, these parties had, and arguably still command, the largest following among opposition parties. The significance of this agreement, therefore, cannot be overstated as, among other things, these were also the two biggest constituent parties that made up the CUD coalition. It is a measure of their weight, then, that these parties were the first to challenge the ruling party for majority

parliamentary seat during the last election. Admittedly, the CUD had all the trappings of a genuine and viable opposition party without which multiparty democracy is out of the question. Nonetheless, the 2005 ballot-counting process was scarcely over before the CUD began to show signs as dangerous as the signals we are receiving from the house of Medrek at present vise-a-vise the next election. As it turned out, these were warnings signs that the CUD had a secret design up its sleeves if it were to lose the 2005 race. A contingency plan, as it were, to subvert the election and bring about a regime change symbolized, as in Eastern Europe, by one color or another. Obviously, since toppling the EPRDF government by any variety of surreptitious unconstitutional stratagems is easier said than done, the CUD's secret plan backfired. The rest, as they say, is history.

However, the history of the CUD's downfall does not seem to hold any lesson to its new self-appointed heir apparent, Medrek. For this cluster of disgruntled personalities and regionally-based parties is already displaying the same perilous behavior that plunged the CUD into the abyss of paralytic atrophy. Consider, if you may, Siye Abraha's statement at a recent Medrek press conference that echoed the exact same pronouncements that the CUD repeatedly made in the lead-up to the 2005 elections. () As it would be recalled, it was part of the CUD's strategy to issue public warnings that the 3rd national election would neither be faire nor free so long as the EPRDF remained in power. This was not a rhetorical devise designed to justify boycotting the election. Rather it was intended to create a win-win situation where, in the event the CUD trailed at the polls, its leadership could turn around and say, 'I told you so!' And, of course, reject the whole outcome as unreflective of the will of the people. Obviously this tactic was invented to place the incumbent in an enviable bind. For in this scenario the only proof of the

fairness of the election could only have been EPRDF's defeat. It follows, then, on this logic any other outcome would have been ipso facto interpreted as a scandalous case of official fraud. Perhaps as a curse, Ethiopia may be the sole exception in the globe where an election is considered fair and free only and only when the opposition says so.

That is why after five years since this double-faced strategy was exposed for what it is, Siye unfortunately is bent on reapplying it. At the said press conference, he announced his victory like a heavyweight professional boxer who boasts of delivering a knockout punch before the first round of the bout begins.

I will run in Tinbyne. By no means or miracle can the TPLF field a candidate that can defeat me. Gebru will run in Mekele. There is no way the TPLF can field a candidate that could beat him. In fact if I run in any part of Tigraye, I can defeat any TPLF candidate. If they say Siye lost the bout, that would be a sure proof that the election had been rigged. The people of Tinbaye had told me that if the elections are anything like the Emperor's days, they will elect me... It is a shame that after 35 years, the democratic quality of elections in Ethiopia have not reached the standards attained during the Emperor's time. ()

There you have it. According to Siye, four months before the first ballot is cast, Medrek's victory is a done deal. At least, in two major districts of Tigraye the TPLF has no chance of retaining its seats. Hence, in Siye's impeccable logic, if he and Gebru were to lose to anyone, much less to TPLF candidates in Tembien and Mekle, it would by itself be conclusive proof that the election had been rigged. In his own estimate, Siye thinks he is the epicenter of politics in Tigray by which the fairness of any election in the region has to be measured. Siye, therefore, is ready to triumphantly return to his native land, bubbling with confidence in his landslide victory in Tembien or any other district of the region he chooses

to announce his candidacy. If only overbearing, Siye's self-confidence is doubtless impressive.

But if he is so sure of his magical appeal, one wonders why he picked Tembien. A district where he himself thinks he can easily win by a phenomenal margin. It certainly would have been a true mark of his irresistible attraction had he ran and upset the incumbent, say, in Adwa. Unlike Tembien, victory at Adwa would at least have additional advantage in that it could cast Siye as a potential candidate for the premiership. To answer our question, though Siye may strike many as a man full of himself, he is not totally blinded by vainglory. He knows that victory at Adwa is a tall order given that the incumbent in this district is none other than Meles Zenawi. A man that Siye himself had, not once, but several times, voted for as the most capable man to lead the TPLF and later as the ablest statesman to serve Ethiopia as the first democratically elected prime minister.

One also wonders why in the world this country squanders its meager resources on elections or why parties even bother to campaign if the outcome is known in advance with such certainty. At any rate, at the said press conference, Siye did not elaborate on what his party plans to do if by "some remote chance of mishap", he and Gebru were to loose in Tigray. Indeed this is an interesting question given that Siye and Gebru are believed to be Medrek's frontline candidates. And that their defeat might likely spell doom to the party's entire election bid. Apparently Siye did not have to spell out the details of his party's contingency plan in the event the vote tally fell short of Medrek's expectations. As discussed elsewhere, he has already warned us (see below) of the possible consequences if Medrek is not satisfied with either the process or the outcome of the 2010 elections.

Readers would agree that it is precisely this kind of un-democratic mode of election outlook – introduced to Ethiopia courtesy of the CUD --- that breeds conflict similar to what this country endured in the 3rd national voting. However, Siye’s addition to this dangerously skewed conceptualization of the principles of balloting is worth mentioning. For instance, his certitude of victory in the race for Tembien is not based on any claim to the superiority of Medrek’s program. Rather, on the sheer weight of his persona and name-recognition in Tembien where he was born, raised and made a name for himself during the TPLF’s struggle. This logically ties in with Siye’s invidious comparison in which he favors the voting practices under the Monarchy over the election system of the current Federal Democratic Republic. As the older generation of Ethiopians might remember, what passed for voting in Ethiopia during the Monarchy were zero-party elections. In other words, by Imperial edict it was not parties but individuals that run for parliament based on the candidates’ personal stature, individual merit and, more importantly, their social standing. Reminiscent of these candidates, Siye sees a winning combination in his genealogy and personal appeal that no TPLF candidate can match come election-day. He, therefore, reckons that no one would deny him his birth-right to a seat in parliament, if the 2010 voting were to be held as cleanly as in the days of the Emperor.

Of course, at the personal level, it is Siye’s prerogative to harbor nostalgic sentiments towards the imperial order and the standards of voting that obtained at the time. An election standard, according to Siye, Ethiopia has yet to achieve, despite holding numerous subsequent elections. The pity is, in this day in age, he expects that the people of Tigray, for whose right he has undeniably fought for, would follow the same voting pattern as in the days of Ras Seyume’s lordship. Siye’s presumptiveness is truly astounding as it clearly betrays conceit laden

with semi-feudal self-importance of grandiose proportion. How else can we explain his condescension that, as in the reign of Haile Selassi, the electorate in Tigray could be swayed by personalities as opposed to alternative ideas and programs? One can't imagine a more arrogant affront than this to the people of Tigray and their level of understanding of democratic choice. Siye's boastful claim to know in advance that they (the people of Tigray) would vote for him regardless of his political position or regardless of what party he represents can hardly sit well with the people of Tigray.

This is not all. Siye Abraha goes on to proudly pontificate how Medrek is a reincarnated embodiment of the true spirit of the CUD. Whatever was the spirit that possessed the CUD, it could not have been benign. For Siye's admiration aside, the CUD is only remembered as a negative coalition of negative forces with an even more negative political agenda. That is why the CUD is bound to go down in the history books as an amalgamation of irresponsible populist entities that scuttled the 2005 polling which otherwise had all the ingredients of a genuine democratic election. Curious and paradoxical is indeed Siye's belated infatuation with the CUD: Years, to boot after many of its leading architects had renounced it as a deeply flawed coalition. Everyone knows that what once glued and eventually unhinged the CUD was the mutual pact among its leaders to forcefully dismantle the ethnically constituted Federal Democratic order. The very constitutional Federal system that recognizes the Tigrean people's right to self-rule which many, including Siye himself, fought for during TPLF's 17-year long struggle. Therefore, despite contrived swagger tinged with an aristocratic air, Siye's claim to fame does not rest on any known lineage from the Tigrean house of the Selomonic dynasty. Siye owes his political stature to the TPLF and the TPLF alone. Whatever public prestige and respect he may still have is

derived from the valuable service he rendered to the people of Tigray as they struggled of self-determination. Thus, any pretence to act like a kind of latter-day CUD incarnate is a self-deprecatory act for the coalition is only remembered as a national embarrassment.

Sad as it is, judging by their behavior so far, it seems that it is in this same embarrassing vain that Siye and the other Medrek leaders appear to fancy their role in the upcoming election. If proof need be, consider their president--- Merera Gudina's --- recent interview with the VOA where he proposed a power-sharing formula as a substitute for the next mandatory election. () This is the same anti-democratic formula that the CUD flouted during the height of the 2005 post-election crisis. As it will be recalled, another co-signer of the proposal was the now defunct Hebrat led by, among others, none other than Merera himself. In Merera's now-familiar puny analytical insight, a closed-door power-sharing deal between the major political parties is preferable than holding another election. For in his view the next polling is bound to come with a huge risk comparable in magnitude to the troubled elections that ravaged Kenya and Zimbabwe.

Consider too the startling suggestion recently made by a no less important Medrek figure, Prof. Beyene Petros. In his interview with the Amharic weekly, *Negadras*, the professor stressed the need, as it were, to devise 'a final solution' to, as he put it, 'the EPRDF question'. () According to Beyene, if the opposition parties fail to unseat the incumbent in the next election, they must not shrike from considering other means to jettison the ruling party from the summit of power. But, the Medrek leader warned his friends in the opposition that since the EPRDF is a resource-rich party, it would not stop from causing problems even after it is forcefully overthrown. Hence, Beyene opines that opposition parties

must be ready to muster their courage and permanently dissolve the EPRDF regardless of the outcome of the 2010 elections.

Never one to be outdone by his colleagues, much less campus softies such as Beyene and Merera, Medrek's big gun, Siye Abraha, too had to join the chores of self-fulfilling prophecies. In a long *Addis Neger* article written in an eerie tone, Siye warns his readers of the magnitude of the potential conflict that would follow in the wake of the 4th national election. In fact, so concerned about the scale of the impending cataclysm that he clearly envisions, Siye felt that he had an obligation to alert Barak Obama. He, therefore, implores the president to carefully monitor the situation lest the White House is morally bound to intervene and curb the election-crisis before it spreads beyond the country's borders. () Never mind what Siye's stance had been towards the capitalist West, particularly during the 2000 intra-party dispute in the EPRDF leadership. Readers would, nonetheless, agree with one thing here. If, by some chance, any outsiders were to read these Medrek leaders' interviews, they are likely to conclude that this country is about to go to war with a hostile neighbor. Given their bellicose tone and harsh language, how could any outsider guess that what these Medrek leaders are talking about is an election strategy? Unfortunately, contrary to what most foreign observers think, such has been the nature of election discourse among what donors call the main opposition political parties in Ethiopia.

MEDIA, POLITICAL SPACE & LAW

In this regard, mention should also be made of the private media whose behavior no Western society would have tolerated. We can even go as far as to say that no emerging democracy could have lived with such a media as long as this country has. Indeed its role has always paralleled the

undemocratic practices of the most hawkish of the opposition parties in Ethiopia. The negative campaign that the shrill tabloids had been waging, particularly during the last election, has been well documented. Though in recent years we have seen flickers of hopeful improvement, the private press has still not yet come to terms with one cardinal media responsibility. Most in this business are clueless that the primary task of the press is to enable citizens make informed decisions. And, not to induce them to act on their base instincts as is often the case. Or incite them to rise up in arms against the government. Witness, for instance, the litany of allegations of crackdown, threats and intimidations that the recently self-exiled editorial circle of *Addis Neger* is heaping on the Ethiopian state. The timing of these editors' self-propelled flight and the irresponsible statements being churned out on their behalf by foreign advocacy groups cannot be coincidental. Given that the voting date is around the corner, the intention may well be to pave the ground for leveling accusations of official misconduct when the election process reaches a certain point. And subsequently instigate another riot if the polls veer in an unwanted direction. A good example that illustrates this point is the statement made by the director of the IPA on the matter. Without even taking the small trouble of making a quick inquiry, the IPA director opined, “ *The flight of the journalists at this time reinforces concerns over the government’s desire to silence critical journalism ahead of next year’s parliamentary elections and it is hard not to see a link between these two events.*” () This man’s haste to jump to conclusion is not a bit surprising. In the coming weeks, more facile statements, even reprimands, pertaining to the unevenness of the 2010’s election playing field are bound to come in rapid succession. Nor would it be terribly surprising if the now-muted complaints about the ‘narrowing of political space’ resurface in the build up to the 4th national elections.

A few months back the outrage both abroad and at home was about the sudden collapse of political space in Ethiopia. A crescendo of outcries was orchestrated by a concert of a few donor states, foreign and indigenous NGOs, private weeklies and opposition political parties. A deafening echo of outrage reverberated across the land and the Diaspora decrying the ostensible closure of political space in Ethiopia. The chief legislative enactments routinely cited as responsible for the startling shrinkage of political space are: the Information Act, the Charity Law, and later the Counter-Terrorism Decree. Perhaps with the exception of the latter, none of these bills were rushed through the legislative floor and hastily written into law. As it will be recalled, both the Information Act and the Charity Law, which sparked the loudest outcry, were extensively discussed and debated with the active participation of stakeholders and the public at large. It was, therefore, only after a prolonged series of public consultations, commentaries and several revisions that the advanced drafts of these laws were finally submitted to parliament for final deliberations. The irony is that no critique has so far showed how these laws narrow the political space of the country. Nor anyone, to this day, has been able to cite any clause in these laws that are not found in the legal provisions in one or another Western democratic nation. The same is true of the Anti-Terrorist law. None among the opposition parties that raised objections to its codification could deny that Ethiopia has serious terrorist threat to deal with by legal instruments. Nor could any of these dissenting parties demonstrate how the Ethiopian variant is harsher than the Anti-Terrorist law of, say, Great Britain. Surly, not even a flaming radical can credibly claim that the British counterpart poses threat to the liberties of the legally registered political parties of the kingdom. Or curb the activities of any of the island's numerous anti-establishment groupings. Likewise, no one has been able to make a

compelling case as to how the Ethiopian Anti-Terrorist law limits or infringes upon the freedoms of officially registered opposition parties.

Thus, as in several other policy measures, the objection to these laws in large measure rests on the habit of ‘argument by design’. Unfortunately it has become a virtual culture in certain urban circles to impute evil motive behind any government policy. Such negative valuation is often made before even a scant assessment of the content of the policy in question. Invariably, informal discussions among the politically-vocal urban segment never focus on the substance or implications of any official policy. The preoccupation of the critiques tends to be on second-guessing the intentions of policymakers. It is no small feat, then, that under such a climate where the distorted policy interpretation of the vocal elements holds sway, the government could still manage to implement any of its urban renewal programs.

To illustrate our point about the facile manner of how political opinion is formed in this capital, let us cite one simple example. An example that, had it not been a sad commentary on the culture cited above, one would have dismissed as a laughing matter. We are referring here to the preventive healthcare measure taken against the threat of bird-flu by a local health bureau in Oromiya. No doubt the measure involved incineration of several chickens at a poultry site. Rumor, however, quickly spread in Addis Ababa -- the reservoir of infinitely replenishing political hearsay, spinning the incident as a spiteful government action. Intended, as the rumor went, to economically ruin the owner, Birhanu Nega. It mattered little that the story was bogus since the said investor/politician never owned any chicken farm.

One would think that the segment of this city’s public that bought this utterly dubious story and similar such hearsay would thereafter exercise

caution before echoing any sham tells that circulate in this city. Or at least, one would have thought that by now this city's elite would refrain from reading evil intention into every single official policy initiative. But sadly, this is not the case. So far at least, suspicious as it is, the urban elites have been reticent to accept any openly communicated official policy rational. Rather, it had always preferred to rely on the grapevine as the only source of information on which to base its often unexamined negative political opinion. That is why it is only recently that the urban population is beginning to understand the grand vision behind the major development initiatives of the government. The curious thing is that, unlike anywhere else, rumor in Ethiopia does not travel by word-of-mouth alone. Sadly, the chief conduits had always been the licensed private weeklies and the foreign-based electronic media. Much, of course, has been said about the yellowness of this country's tabloids, including through a recent well-received ETV program. () Thus, as we shall also have a few things to say below on this topic, there is no need to extensively dwell on the subject here.

THE BEATEN PATH

To return to our story, it was only after the televised inter-party debates on the subject that the clamor about the disappearance of political space somewhat subsided. () However, what finally put the issue to bed was the signing of the Election Code of Conduct that generated a high rate of public approval and donor appreciation. What, on the other hand, has not subsided, but seems to escalate, thanks to EPRDF's detractors, is the scramble to blight the 4th national election. As we shall see below, the short and interim objective of this effort seems to be focused on bringing about a myriad of adverse impacts and dent the 2010 balloting process. Whereas the final aim could well be to first, de-legitimize of the balloting

process, and subsequently incite public uproar against the outcome. With the proviso, of course, the result entitles the EPRDF to retain power for five more years. On the doctrinal side of the equation, the endgame of the current anti-election machination is equally troublesome. It is to keep EPRDF's exercise of power floating as a controversial issue. Since to the vocal urban minority and Diaspora extremists the question, sad to say, is still an unresolved contentious matter. In this way, any disagreement or dissention over any government policy, state directive or parliamentary decree is instantly morphs into an endless debate over the legitimacy of the EPRDF's authority to frame national policy. Casting the EPRDF's right to lead the country as a perennially indeterminable question naturally allows the opposition to reserve the right to use extra-legal measures against the ruling party as a justifiable optional course of action. This is precisely why the Ethiopian opposition seems to be conflicted and display ambivalence during national elections. On the one hand, the opposition often exhibit enthusiastic excitement whenever the country gears up to go to the polls. For it knows that the only chance it has to either delegitimize or topple the EPRDF is by converting a national election into something similar to a color-coded revolution. To this extent, opposition leaders see national voting as a fantastic opportunity to apply their unstated agenda. On the other hand, they tend to be nervous lest, despite their concerted efforts, the election process runs smoothly. And, in consequence, (this is the big fear) an unwanted result is upheld by voters as a democratic outcome and in turn forces the international community to follow suit. Naturally under such a situation it is virtually impossible to either question EPRDF's legitimate hold on state power. Or, as it is frequently don, to obfuscate public understanding of government policies by red-herring that often involves raising impertinent issues about the legitimacy of the framers of the policies. It

is, therefore, not surprising if in May 2010 attempt is made to prevent such a scenario by either I) boycotting the race in the hope of dampening public enthusiasm and lessening voters' turnout below acceptable threshold margin. Or II) forcing the ruling party to accede to a backdoor power apportioning formula, or compelling it to consent to a set of election terms of engagement that tilt the playing field overwhelmingly in favor of the opposition. Or III), fielding as many candidates as possible only to cry foul and incite a color-coded mob riots in the event the result turnouts to be below expectation.

Perhaps not a lot can be done to prevent a newly registered party from boycotting the 2010 elections. Except perhaps denying it any excuse or hiking the political cost of boycotting to a prohibitively high level. Nevertheless, as things stand at present, almost all opposition parties in Ethiopia are gearing up to field candidates in the May 2010 election. If any party, say, Medrek, for instance, decides to pull out of the race under one excuse or another, its tactic is bound to ricochet. As it would be the sole exception, it would have a hard time justifying its absence on the balloting day. But if Medrek insists on applying this self-defeating tactic, it would only live to regret it as the Ethiopian public is tired of parties that quit democratic process in mid course or refuse to take seats in parliament. Thus, from any vantage point, boycotting is not a viable electoral tactic. Nor is, for that matter, employing obstructive ploys to derail and tarnish the integrity of the electioneering process. Not least because the recently signed Election Code of Conduct which parliament just passed into a binding law has provisions that addresses such negative election tactics. In other words, the Code contains several clauses that provide mechanisms for dealing with virtually all foreseeable scenarios of obstructive maneuvers. Any party so inclined can, therefore, be easily caught and censured. Similarly, the last in the above listed

tactics has even less chance of success. We are referring here to the East-European election phenomena. Where, as in Ukraine and Georgia, a party parasitically fastens itself on a democratic electoral process and whip public excitement into a frenzied uproar of regime change. Whether or not meticulous planning went into its preparation, attempt was doubtless made to apply this same tactic in Ethiopia during the last election. Fortunately, much to the relief of the mainstream public, this cunning scheme was foiled by a prompt and resolute state response, albeit at no small cost.

Nonetheless, one thing can be said with a reasonable degree of certainty. Any attempt to duplicate the same stratagem under the banner of any variety of color-symbols is bound to be nipped in the bud. Likewise, Beyene Petros notwithstanding, activating any unconstitutional secret process aimed at removing the EPRDF is sure to backfire. Witness, for instance, how easily the national security foiled the recent Ginbot-7-financed plot spearheaded by a circle of disgruntled army officers. On the conspirators' own confessions, the objective of the plot was to sabotage the 2010 elections by, among other cruelties, blowing up public buildings and assassinating state officials. () Unsupported as it was by citizens, this conspiracy, on whose success Birhanu Nega and Andargachew Tsege had banked on, was doomed to fail. As are, we hasten to add, similar future plots intended to delegitimize the 2010 elections. Ample reasons can be cited to back this confident appraisal. For one thing, few Ethiopians can be expected to countenance foreign or Diaspora-hatched intrigue of bloodletting during the next election. Nor is the public likely to tolerate any local-based conspiracy to instigate violent convulsion in the course of the 2010 election. Besides, it must not be forgotten that the Code of Conduct proscribes incitement, hate speech, or any such inflammatory rhetoric that incite mob violence. The deterrent effect of the Code cannot

be understated. As we all know, without inflammatory propaganda, street-based turbulence akin to the 2005 explosion is not possible.

On a different level, what could serve as a check on another riotous outburst is the change in the mindset and consciousness level among youth on whose vulnerability our election-year revolutionists rely on. Those goaded into the last urban turmoil may have been gullible, but they are not retards. They too are capable of drawing an important lesson from the 2005 tragic experience. Most, in fact, appear to have realized that they are the ones who suffer most whenever stern law-enforcement measures are taken against street rioting. More so when such actions become necessary to quell politically-motivated violent upheavals that could potentially skid out of control. Many also seem to have developed a healthy sense of suspicion toward parties that rely on youth to do their biddings. For such parties are often led by spineless careerists that lack the courage of their conviction to face the consequences of their decisions.

HOPE & PROSPECTS

At the objective level, change has similarly occurred that has direct bearing on attitudes towards election-related conflict among marginalized urban youth. Unlike foreign reporters, careful observers will recall that the reason why the jobless youth was susceptible to the 2005 opposition rhetoric of incitement had little to do with politics. The enraged youth had no clear political preference to any of the principle rival parties in the 2005 post- election showdown. To a great extent, the angry street rioting was conditioned by frustration and generalized lack of hope within the ranks of the unemployed youth. Nevertheless, since 2005, significant and visible economic growth-cum-development has occurred that could militate against any design to drag the vulnerable youth into another round of turmoil. What reinforces this contention is the fact that the

benefits that accrue from economic growth are reaching the lowest strata of the urban population. For instance, the boom in the construction sector is not only impressive but is also making a dent in the rate of joblessness among the urban youth. Through the expanding small-scale enterprise linked with the Housing Program, a significant number of formerly unemployed youth is being absorbed into the workforce and earning decent income. As a recent unpublished Socio-Economic survey shows, the overall growth of the economy has spawned a strong sense of hope across all sectors of the society. () Indeed in recent years, the majority of the population is certainly showing greater interest in development issues with increasing appreciation of its necessity and desirability. More importantly, low-income citizens are at present inclined to believe that development is possible and that their lives would change as a result. This is also true of the marginalized young jobless of the country's urban populations. In marked contrast to the situation five years ago, today it is not uncommon to see youth applying itself with renewed hope in a better future. Meles' confident remark says it all. *'We have succeeded in proving that Ethiopia can grow at Asian growth rate...This has rekindled hope in the possibility that Ethiopia will not for long be the poster child of poverty in the world.'* () If our observation is correct, we can dare say that a sizable segment of the disadvantaged inner-city youth at present sees light at the end of the tunnel. It is fair, then, to conclude that most would be less susceptible to be sucked into another self-destructive vortex of street riot on the promptings of our election-year insurrectionists.

There is an additional factor that obviates another youth-based turbulence. Or prevent it from spinning out of control when and if it reoccurs at all. This has to do with the preparedness of the state and the ruling party for such an eventuality. Doubtless, the reason why the 2005 post-election crises reached the height it did was partly because of

inadequate preparedness on the part of the government. This is understandable as the 2005 crisis was the first of its kind that exploded in the context of a multiparty election bout. The institutions of the state and the ruling party, therefore, cannot be faulted for lacking the requisite experience to effectively handle such politically-directed mob unrest, involving city-wide shutdown and disruption of public transportation amid widespread furtive and random rampage. Such an outburst conducted under a smokescreen of indignant anti-vote fraud protest was a new phenomenon unfamiliar to state officials. Nor in the lead-up to this crisis could state agencies control the flood of riot-provoking messages transmitted through Radio/TV political advertisement, foreign-based airwaves and the private weeklies. Let alone the numerous subversive mob-incitements channeled via the internet, SMS, classroom lectures as well as faith-based congregational sermons. All in all, the country was not prepared for the kind of challenge --- politically instigated mob riot -- that overwhelmed and paralyzed the capital for several days. Be that as it may, it would be naive to presume that the government has learned nothing from this experience. It would certainly be unpardonable if it were to underestimate the level of havoc that a subversive opposition party could wreak unless preventative mechanisms are put firmly in place. It is, therefore, reasonable to assume that the government may already have laid down the necessary political, legal, and security precautionary plan to prevent another election-related turbulence. This much has been communicated by Meles for those who care to listen. The prime-minster has warned, in a Heraclitean-sounding, but stern statement that 'the EPRDF does not make the same mistake twice.' The statement might be cryptically worded. Nonetheless it is an unmistakable warning of what the state has in store for those who might be foolish enough to ignore it. It, therefore, behooves the opposition to heed Meles'

advice and refrain from tinkering with the idea of reigniting turbulence in the hope of turning the coming elections into an opportunity of regime change.

National Reconciliation or National Election?

Alas, knowing the opposition, Meles' cautionary reminder will neither be totally ignored nor fully heeded. In other words, partly because of the PM's word of warning and partly due to the changed tenor of the urban public mood, our election-year insurrectionists too are less likely to commit the same error twice. Put differently, these forces may probably not try to openly and directly reapply the 2005 strategy. Nevertheless, what they might not refrain from is planning, albeit via indirect and roundabout ways, to derive undue advantage at the expense of the 2010 elections. They would, for instance, try to do this through either some underhanded scheme camouflaged as legitimate election bid: Or by rallying the public around a reasonable-sounding political formula and catapult their party into power by short-circuiting the clearly laid out legal channels. It is in this light, then, that Merera Gudina's power-sharing proposal must be seen. So must Beyene Petros' call for the surgical removal of the EPRDF from power.

Another sign that such tactic might be in the works is the resurfacing of the now forgotten 'National Reconciliation' slogan - a slogan that the public only sees as Merera's pet project. In the December 20 issue of the Amharic weekly *Aweramba Times*, the general editor printed a long four-page article under the title 'National Reconciliation or National Election?'. It will not be a bit surprising if more is written on this subject as the election date approaches. The idea it seems is to create a climate of opinion where this patently out-of-synch slogan finds purchase. And,

where the constitutional imperative of holding a national election in 2010 drops to a level of a side issue of secondary importance. It is not farfetched either to assume that the above cited article might have been solicited by opposition figures, possibly Merera Gudina. As it is a variant of his power-sharing formula, the Medrek president, for instance, is known for echoing this slogan ever since the days of Transitional Government. This is because, aside from self-serving reasons, Merera has a woefully skewed cognition of the concept of National Reconciliation. In his own weird way, he thinks that National Reconciliation is some kind of a durably nested political order or system of governance, say, for example, Consociationalism.

There is hardly a semblance of any basic understanding of the subject in any of his writings and pronouncements. For instance, Merera does not seem to be aware that National Reconciliation is not an all-purpose political device applicable under all times and under all circumstances. Nor is there any indication in his lightweight discourse on the subject that it is a response to a specific situation under a specific time and place. Where, at the objective level, a national polity is overwhelmed by an intractable and often violent horizontal cleavage to the point of rendering governance virtually impossible: Or when such a scenario is deemed to be imminent. Neither is there any clue that Merera has the faintest idea that National Reconciliation is believed to be possible when certain specific subjective conditions obtain. When, that is, due to domestic or external pressure, or out of sheer exhaustion, the principle warring political forces abandon their intransigent stance. And show positive signs of readiness to embrace reconciliatory proposals aimed at salvaging the country from further descent into the bottomless pit of statelessness. Though perhaps an extreme case, a living example is the numerous efforts made to regenerate a national state-building political process

through inter-clan interface in Somalia. The post-conflict power-sharing deal in Kenya and Zimbabwe also fall under the same category. Granted, we have not yet heard of any initiative to reconcile the polarized grassroots constituencies across the two countries' internal political divide. This lacuna nevertheless cannot detract much from our contention or refute our argument.

Whereas when we turn our gaze to the Ethiopian scene, perhaps the only time during the last eighteen years that National Reconciliation could possibly have had any appeal was between 1991 and 1993. As it will be recalled, this was the period of the Transitional Government that administrated the country from 1991 until 1995. The twofold paramount national agenda then were A) establishing peace and stability within the framework of the Transitional Charter: And, B) laying the foundation for the present Federal Democratic Republic. In an important sense, the founding conference of the Transitional government could be read as a National Reconciliation moment. As its main objective was to provide all insurgent organizations solid political incentive to end all hostilities that had almost brought the country to the brink of total collapse. Though it may not mean much given the bloodthirstiness of the decrees of the Red Terror regime, the Transitional Charter was, nevertheless, a major step forward. Few could deny that by any standards, the Charter was a vast improvement on the country's legacy of governance as its provisions foreshadowed many of the democratic rights contained in the 1995 constitution. However, no one had any illusion that the Charter was a binding legal expression of the sovereignty of the people ratified through popular plebiscite. At best, it was a tenuous pact, reflecting nothing more than a provisional working arrangement between political organizations with largely ethnic followings whose backing was decisive to defeat and replace the Derge. Doubtless these organizations were of uneven reach

and of disproportionate size of social- base that ranged from solid to nominal. The tenuousness of the arrangement was revealed during the 1992 regional-election dispute that led the OLF, the second largest front after the EPRDF, to withdraw of from the Transitional Government. Coming as it did in the wake of repeated sporadic skirmishes even instances of mass killing, the ill-conceived OLF decision compounded the apprehension around the viability of the bold experiment in ethnic politics. Nevertheless, thanks to an able leadership, none of the then projected fearful scenarios came to pass. Or no serious setback occurred to frustrate any of the two major objectives of the Transitional Government. At any rate, it would be unfair to fault Merara Gudina for promoting the politics of National Reconciliation during those troubled early months of uncertainty. Since, at the time, no one could have been absolutely certain that the arrangement would succeed much less anticipate the extent it did. After having said that, however, it is ridiculously to incessantly recite this slogan like a mantra as Merara does, long after a stable constitutional order had emerged. A stable democratic order has indeed ushered in that for the first time in Ethiopia's recent history secured not only peace and stability. But that has also spawned unprecedented social and economic development.

It is against this background, then, that the *Aweramba Times* article cited above proves nothing. Except that the author has an unstated agenda that has little to do with political reconciliation per se. The author, of course, goes to great length to establish that: I) National Reconciliation is an objective and urgent necessity that must be accorded priority over the next national election. To support his contention, the editor cites incidences of inter-communal clashes in Gambela and at other sites of overlapping interregional boundaries. He then switches to the Red Terror genocidal killings and instantly fast-forwards to the tragic loss of

lives during the 2005 post-election conflict. Obviously, all this meandering is to relativize the Red Terror and include the architects and perpetrators in his National Reconciliation proposal and absolve them of all their hideous crimes. In a nutshell, then, the author would have his readers believe that Ethiopia is at present precariously sitting on a time bomb. A ticking one, to be sure, that could go off at any time unless the danger is diffused by National Reconciliation. Lest his readers miss the point, the editor invokes the experiences of South Africa and Rwanda along with supporting quotations from several local and foreign public figures that he takes as world-class authorities on the subject.

One could be at a loss as to how and where to begin exposing the unmitigated fallacy of this article intended, as it is, to downgrade the importance of the upcoming election. But begin as we must, let us first take the author's boldest assertion. Here, he tries to scare his readers by hyping the immediate danger that the ethnic-based clashes in regions like Gambela pose to the Federal order. Apparently he had not read Siye Abraha's recent article where Medrek's heavyweight contender warned the White House to intervene in the 2010 election. Had the author done so, he probably would have called on the UN to dispatch a peace-keeping mission to Ethiopia and help its peoples reconcile with themselves. Had the author also flipped through the 2009 ICG's Report, he would certainly have discovered a lot that he could have cited to back his otherwise futile effort of making a mountain out of a mole. For like *Aweramba Times*, it is on these incidences that the ICG Report based its forecastle of ethnic wars during Ethiopia's 2010 election.

There is no denying that from time to time incidences of localized and low-intensity inter-ethnic clashes occur in Ethiopia. This is particularly true in distant interregional cross-border areas of relative thin state-

presence. Nevertheless, at no point have these occasional conflicts ever threatened to exceed beyond manageable proportions. Thanks to the efficiency of law-enforcement agencies as well as the experience gained by local administrative officials, the likelihood for such conflicts to spin out of control is minimal, if not, nil. The short-term modality of Federal interventions often employed to address these incidental skirmishes is organizing 'Peace and Reconciliation' forums with the active participation of the principle actors on both sides of the fault line. Whereas, when the bone of contention pertains to competing jurisdictional claims, the standard procedure is holding referendum. Though the authors of the *Aweramba Times* article and ICG Report are oblivious, these inter-ethnic spars, which they warn us about with undue alarm, actually predate the Federal arrangement. Their root cause is, by and large, scarcity of resources compounded by competing modes of production in overlapping geographic space. It has to be stressed that these clashes trace back several decades before the current ethno-linguistic political reconfiguration was institutionalized. From the point of view of policymakers, therefore, the long-term solution is quickening the pace of the present rate of development. Already, even at the current pace, the rate at which these spurts of isolated inter-communal skirmishes occur has not only decreasing, but are also becoming easier to contain. As a matter of fact, the prevailing condition in these once conflict-prone areas is characterized by peace and tranquility. So much so that today Gambela, Benishangul-Gomuze, and the south-eastern part of Oromia have become favored destinations of foreign investment, notably in the area of large-scale mechanized farming and agro-processing. There is no question that one factor that attracts foreign investors to these areas is the prevalence of dependable peace and the existence of solid security provisions.

One thing has to be kept in mind here. The security concerns that arise from time to time in these areas have always been conditioned by local issues whose interlocutors are driven by local objectives. Notwithstanding the ICG Report, therefore, these isolated clashes can scarcely have any bearing on the coming election. In fact, as in the past, the contentions in the 2010 elections are bound to be over issues that tend to be national in scope. Thus, intermittent precinct-level inter-communal infightings can never be ground to set a National Reconciliation agenda. Besides, it is not uncommon for faith-based, identity-driven or culture-centered clashes to occur in many multiethnic societies both under unitary or federal systems of government. This is true of, say, India and Nigeria, to mention two countries whose political arrangements bare similarity with Ethiopia. But no one in these states calls for National Reconciliation whenever sporadic incidences of communal scuffles occur. Nor does any credible person foist such a slogan in this country too, if we exclude the few with ulterior motives. Indeed nothing could be sillier than to suggest that the Ethiopian government and all relevant political actors should drop everything, including the 2010 elections, and engage in a National Reconciliation project just because a few spats of inter-communal collisions occurred here and there.

It is equally childish to lecture Ethiopian government officials on the need to draw lessons from other countries about the importance of National Reconciliation. As is the author's effort to have us think that National Reconciliation was preceded by National Election in the case of South Africa and Rwanda. It is true that in both countries nationwide reconciliatory initiative have been launched under different names of varying scope and duration. In South Africa, for instance, a Truth Commission was established to promote an ethos of 'forgiveness' to soften the sense of vindictiveness that might simmer among the victims of

Apartheid. The chief means employed was providing opportunity for racist security officials to openly confess their crime. And express sincere remorse to help bring about emotional closure among the victims' surviving families. The incentive for such candor was obviously waiver of criminal prosecution of the perpetrators. The Truth Commission was by no means intended to reconcile the exponents of the ideology of Apartheid and the champions of democratic racial equality. In fact, no National Reconciliation scheme could have been possible before an election was held based on the principle of 'One-man One-vote' in South Africa. Hence, at least in South Africa, the sequence was: voting first and reconciliation second. It must be quickly added here that even after Apartheid was dismantled and the ANC assumed office, inter-communal conflicts did not altogether stop. Occasionally such outbursts occur. But no scheduled national polling was ever suspended, pending the outcome of a National Reconciliation initiative.

The Rwandan case is not much different. Though less known, a similar initiative was undertaken in this country in the hope of healing the trauma of the 1994 genocide. The effort in this severely conflict-torn nation involved organizing village-level forums for low-level genocidaires to voluntarily confess their crimes. Nevertheless, as in South Africa, there was no National Reconciliation between the Kagame-led RFP and the fugitive leaders of the Hutu-based genocidal Interhamway. Understandably, due to the magnitude of the problems inherited from the genocidal regime, the transitional period took nine years before presidential elections were held. Nonetheless, from whatever angle one examines this prolonged delay, it cannot be cited as a compelling reason to hold National Reconciliation in Ethiopia as a substitute for National Elections.

Neither are the men that the *Aweramba Times* cite as authorities on National Reconciliation a convincing lot. For instance, he quotes Desmond Tutu, Rike and John Calvin. As men of the robe with theological learning, these men are apt to extol the virtues of reconciliation in the generic sense of the term. None of them, however, are scholars or experts in the area that one consults for theoretical insight. The *Aweramba Times* editor might not be aware, but the third in the group, Calvin, is associated with the introduction of theocracy in the heart of post-Reformation Europe. () The intolerant behavior of his theocratic regime could justifiably be held as a precursor of the strictest of our contemporary Islamic Republics. () Speaking about intolerance, the author could not have made a worse choice than the second group of Ethiopians he invokes to bolster his contention. Indeed, the last persons that one would quote to build a case for National Reconciliation are Merera Gudina, Yakob Woldemariam and Mesfine Woldemariam. These men may wax eloquent extolling the virtues of tolerance and reconciliation to all eternity. But when crunch time came to stand up and be counted, they were found wanting. If truth be told, every one of these men was behind the 2005 post-election conflict that resulted in death and destruction. Yakob and Mesfine Woldemariam, in fact, were tried and sentenced in court of law for their involvement in the 2005 violent upheaval. As it will be recalled, today the two namesakes would have been serving life in a penitentiary, had they not been pardoned on voluntary expression of remorse and solemn pledge to obey the constitution. Merera's fate would also have been the same had he not, as they say in America, pulled a stunt at the last minute.

Unbecoming as their behavior was, these men could, nevertheless, redeem themselves. If, indeed in their remaining public life, they lift themselves up from the political and moral deficit they have been trapped in, they could doubtless play a constructive role commensurate with their age and educational background. There is one possible area where they could prove themselves worthy of their claim. Using whatever acceptance and influence they might still have among opposition parties and their followers, at least the two Woldemariams could help bring about National Consensus in this country. A quick word of caution is necessary here to avoid confusion between National Reconciliation and National Consensus. In our preceding discussion, we have tried to show the condition under which National Reconciliation becomes necessary: And, how such a situation does not exist in this country. In contrast, we argue here that the latter is both necessary and desirable in Ethiopia. What we mean by National Consensus is not a situation where, after a seemingly interminable mutual destruction, the major belligerent political parties of a country agree to end their hostilities and embrace each other. And where in a gesture of goodwill make solemn pledges to forgive each other's past transgressions and agree to let bygones be bygones.

National Consensus

By National Consensus, however, we mean a condition that arises from solid society-wide understanding on clearly delineated areas uniformly accepted as vital national interests that transcend partisan political agenda. This, of course, has to involve first and foremost the country's contending political parties. National Consensus, then, implies shielding these vital national interests from being, in any shape or form, jeopardized as the country's competing parties struggle for public support and political hegemony. Since it goes without saying, one normally would

not associate refusal to aid external aggressors or abate terrorist bands sponsored by an alien state with National Consensus. Unfortunately, however, it is not uncommon in Ethiopia for party leaders to sneak into Eritrea no sooner than they lose an election and lend themselves to its government's terror-sponsoring activities. Recall, for instance, the case of the OLF and, recently, of course, Ginbot 7 leaders' willingness to serve as lackeys in Issayas' terrorist conspiracy aimed at, among other things, sabotaging the 2010 election. What is tragic is that so far, all that could be achieved by such treacherous collaborationist scheme is planting explosive devices in public minibuses and incinerating innocent passengers. Thus, this is one disturbing area against which all Ethiopian political parties must forge a strong consensus. As it is a moral imperative, political parties must indeed sign a memorandum of understanding to publicly condemn any Ethiopian party that acts as an accomplice in such foreign-sponsored terrorist activities. Sadly, however, opposition MPs in this country often tend to be reluctant to speak out against such runaway organizations that commit treason in the name of promoting one or another domestic agenda

Arguably a more pressing vital national interest that cries out for a robust all-party consensus is on the urgency of securing food security. If this country is to survive as we know it historically, it has to be able to feed itself. Ergo, regardless of differences over political agenda or ideological orientation, it's vital that competing parties see eye-to-eye on one basic concrete truth that : A) Ethiopia today is closer than at any time ever to end its dependency on external aid. And, B) that parties, therefore, must reach a national consensus that this historically unprecedented opportunity be in any way jeopardized in the welter of inter-party struggle for political office. Let us put the contention here in stark normative terms. The world would harshly judge the present

generation of political elites if, on account of the imperfections of democracy in Ethiopia, they were to embroil themselves and the country in an insoluble political strife. And, as result squander the chance of achieving self-sufficiency in basic a matter as the means of sustenance. No matter the gulf that divides them, there should, therefore, be inviolable consensuses on the need to limit the intensity and scope of the rivalry between contending parties. Lest, that is, the reverberations of their struggle exceeds a critical threshold beyond which the bigger agenda of securing self-sufficiency is thwarted.

The same has to be said with regard to the nationality-based Federal arrangement that defines present-day Ethiopia. An all-encompassing bedrock understanding on the salient reality of this country --- from which the Federals system sprang --- is vital. For without which the democratization and electoral processes are bound to be plagued by recurring conflict. This incontestable reality is that Ethiopia is I) a nation state composed of a multiplicity of nationalities. That, II) relations between these nationalities were unequal. That III) this inequality was the country's chief source of instability, and, IV) that a dependable way of safeguarding the country's peace and unity is empowering nationalities through a system of Federalism of shared- and self-rule. Unfortunately, too often, opposition parties tend to target this very foundation on which rests the hard-won political system that accommodates plurality of interests. It is not difficult to imagine what could happen in any country if the very foundation of its political structure were to be constantly challenged and questioned by no less political parties that enjoy constitutional protection to operate freely. Easier still is to foresee the consequences of such an anomalous state of affair during times of national elections, particularly in an emerging democratic country like Ethiopia. Indeed, in large measure it is the utter failure to distinguish

between the state and the ruling party that plunged the main rival political parties into a head-on clash during of the 2005 post-conflict faceoff. The showdown could in the last analysis be traced to doctrinal irreconcilability between the contending political forces regarding the country's very political foundation i.e. the nationality-based Federalism. Hence, if there is to be a peaceful and credible multiparty democratic election in Ethiopia, it is necessary to draw the following conclusion from the forgoing observation. And, this is: whatever political agenda, ideology, or economic doctrine divides the country, there should be a moratorium on political mobilizations that target the nationality-based Federal system. Whereas if this constitutionally sanctioned scaffolding that holds the polity together and which, for the first time in Ethiopia, made democracy possible is open to intense, hostile de-legitimization campaign, one thing is bound to reoccur. Every election would be continuously seen not as an opportunity to change incumbents within the system, but as an occasion for launching a revolution against the political order as a whole.

Fortunately, however, fear of ethnic politics as a disuniting organizing principle is markedly receding at all societal levels. One can even dare say that today there is a growing national consciousness that Ethiopia is not only a mosaic of nationalities. But more importantly, that these nationalities have the right to govern themselves, the right to equal access to all opportunities, and, the right to nurture and promote their particular cultural heritage. Similarly, unlike the early 90s, there is an increasing widely-shared appreciation of the importance of the Federal arrangement in securing durable peace. The bulk of the population certainly feels that this Federal system, predicated, as it is, on the principle of unity in diversity, is a dependable unifying factor of peace and stability. In fact, the soaring appreciation for the Federal arrangement at the grassroots level has become too popular for

oppositional elites to ignore. That is why, for instance, opposition political parties are today less inclined to denounce the Federal system in the same shrill tone as they did, say, five years ago. A good indicator in this connection is the signing of the Election Code of Conduct discussed earlier. The Code certainly contains built-in clauses designed to protect the institutional edifices of the Federal Republic against offensive electioneering campaigns and activities. That these changes would positively impact the effort underway to ensure that the 2010 election is peaceful, fair, and democratic is not hard to imagine.

There is another, an even more salient factor why one could make sanguine predictions about the coming election. Or at least why one could confidently say that it would not be blighted by conflict as were the 2005 elections. This has a lot to do with the growth-effect we discussed earlier. We have pointed out that, unlike five years ago, the visible effects of the country's successive double-digit growth has generated widespread hopeful expectations among a broad sector of the population. Presently, even at the lowest social stratum of the urban population, a palpable rising expectation of better days to come can be felt. Indeed, the country's development surge appears to have captured the imagination of its citizens in ways that could not have been possible five years back. In this regard, it has to be said that no government policy has been successfully communicated to the public as has the EPRDF's development program. Lately, a day scarcely passes without a seemingly endless stream of media advertisement, announcing fundraising activities for the development of every near and far small towns of this country. From one extreme end to the another, every backwoods town on the map seems to be engaged in raising fund for building its own public roads, schools, clinics, water and sanitation facilities etc. This is a notable departure from both the distant and recent past. Indeed, historically speaking, the

issue of development was rarely raised among residents of remotely-located towns. If ever, it was invariably raised in the guise of supplications or pleas for government funding for the construction of an elementary school, a telephone line or a post office etc.

In marked contrast, what these same town residents are presently pushing for is partnership with the government. A partnership, that is, where they themselves would shoulder a fair share of the responsibility for the development of their home towns. It is no wonder, then, that along with fundraising activities the media is flooded with unending series of public announcements of tradeshows and commercial bazaars emanating from one remote rural town after another. The whole country, it seems, is in competition with itself, determined to achieve greater development through self-initiated partnership with the government. Undergirding, this voluntarism is a major paradigm shifts, as it were, in popular perception of government and its role in society. When considered from the perspective of the both the traditions of Ethiopian as well as modern liberal conceptions of the state that the West seeks to promote globally, this shift has profound implications. In the Ethiopian tradition, popular perception of the state is conditioned by two closely related elements. The state is at once considered as guarantor of public order and defender of the nation against alien aggression. It is concurrently perceived as an institution that has to be obeyed and feared as those who wielded its coercive apparatus had historically enjoyed unlimited powers to impose their will on all subjects of the realm. In complete revolutionary break from this legacy, government in the modern Western liberal tradition is understood as an embodiment of the will of citizens expressed through periodic elections. Its role is limited by constitutional design not to exceed beyond ensuring rule of law, protecting national security and the governing institutional foundations of the country and the rights of

citizens. The new perception of government cited above in Ethiopia, incorporates core precepts from this modern Western notion. However, in a significant departure both from the local and modern traditions, the public has begun to see government not only as a necessary administrative machine, but as a vital agent of change and economic development. It is important here to point out that this profound shift in perception resonates with the EPRDF's own characterization of its role as a governing party. In a sharp break from the past, the EPRDF has redefined the governing institutions of Ethiopia as a democratic development state with vital roles to play in the economy that complements (note substitute) the private sector. This sea change in popular and official view of the role of government and the policies that followed from this understanding has certainly spawned tangible development that few can deny. No less importantly, it may well have permanently altered the traditional ground for legitimacy. Henceforth, any future government would have to be mindful of its development performance lest its tenure in office is shortened.

On a different register, parallel change is also noticable in the practices of the urban business middle-class. As the start-up capital of investment is steadily rising as are returns, the business community is adopting with the situation by forming share-holding companies. Witness the number of share companies --- Axions as they are called in this country --- that are being formed in Ethiopia, particularly in the last two and three years. This is another indicator of the expansion of the economy, on the one hand, and the growing confidence among the urban middling-sort that it is possible to augment once earnings and end dependency on a single source of income. More and more people, it seems, are buying shares in these companies and investing in several other business enterprises that are mushrooming all over the country. If this trend continues, the

number of stakeholders in the national economy is bound to increase. In sum, the upshot of all these post-2005 changes point to one thing. They point to the possibility that for a greater number of citizens, the stakes in peace and tranquility may well be higher today than at any time ever. Thus, if our analytical observation is even half sound, the overwhelming majority of the Ethiopian people would have none of the disturbances of the 2005 repeated in the 2010 voting. Finally, when Ethiopia conducts its 4th national elections free of the shortcomings that stained its previous polling, the government's call for a Renaissance will not only be an aspiration, but a practical possibility.

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