

What Did We Dream? What Did We Achieve?

And Where Are We Heading?

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Introduction

The Ethiopian Economic Association has given us a daunting assignment: to predict the future course of our country? At a time when we find it extremely difficult to determine even our present state, it is far from easy to embark on such an undertaking. Whoever dares to attempt that does so with trepidation, lest his/her predictions turn to prove wrong in five years or even less, let alone in 20 years.

And this is not without reason. How often have we been surprised by unexpected turn of events in our own lifetime? Who would have expected that the Haile Sellasie regime, which had held sway for half a century, would be swept away in a matter of months and be replaced by a new political order? Who would have foreseen the collapse of the Soviet state and the domination of the world by one superpower? Who would have dreamt that the Derg, which had set up a power structure that could control each and every family and that, especially during Revolution Day parades, appeared to be invincible, would be swept away with such ease? Who would have predicted that the EPRDF and EPLF, who fought hand in glove to destroy the Derg, would fall out in less than half a decade and drag the two peoples into a war of unprecedented ferocity? Who would have asserted with confidence that the TPLF, united in struggle and death for seventeen years, would be split in two and the very existence of their organization put in question?

Hence the mode I have chosen in my presentation is not so much to predict the future as to base myself on history and survey our past course, describe our present state and indicate our future directions. As suggested in the title, I have divided my paper into three major parts. In the first section, I shall attempt to answer the question of what past generations (including our own) had dreamt. In the second, I shall make an effort to see, in the light of our present condition, whether our dream has come true or whether it had turned into a nightmare. In the third and last section, I shall tackle the more difficult subject of what, based on the answers to the two earlier questions, we learn from the past and how we can chart a better future.

It should be clear from the outset that such an analysis cannot be based entirely on the country's past and present condition. Global and continental and even more so sub-regional developments have continued and will continue to have their share of influence. The withdrawal of the support of its long time ally, the United States, contributed to the demise of the Haile Sellassie regime. Likewise, it is incontrovertible that the collapse of the Soviet state had a considerable role in the disintegration of the Derg regime. At present, the new globalization that had cast its shadow over the entire world is controlling our life. American hegemony, which is a reflection of this globalization, is exercising a clear and preponderant role in our present state and our future direction. When we come closer to home, the future fate of Eritrea and Somalia in particular is directly linked to our country's future.

Nevertheless, while the influence of global and regional developments should not be denied, it should be emphasized that national developments play the preponderant role. The imperial regime was swept away by the popular upsurge of February 1974. The Derg disintegrated under the barrage of liberation forces. Likewise, the country's future direction will be determined above all by internal developments.

What Did We Dream?

The first dreamer was Tewodros. As we all know, of all the modern emperors, he strove hardest for the restoration of imperial power and glory and felt most distressed by the country's

backwardness. He took the lifting of the crown from the depth to which it had sunk during the *Zamana Masafent* as a divine mission entrusted to him by God. He strove to reunite the fragmented Abyssinian polities and restore the power and majesty of the medieval empire. Above all, he felt anguished by the country's backwardness and ardently sought the support of the European states, particularly that of England, to introduce modern civilization. He was unambiguous in expressing this backwardness, calling himself and his people "blind", "ignorant", "donkey".

As is common knowledge and as we shall see in greater detail below, he failed in his dream. But he left behind an ideal that inspired his successors. Although the fire of change that he lit consumed him, his successors learnt from his mistakes, moderated their style and achieved better results. Menilek managed to consolidate imperial authority while Haile Sellassie succeeded in introducing, even if in modest measure, modern civilization. However, in the thinking of these emperors, national development took second place to the consolidation of imperial power.

It became the destiny of the educated elite to aspire for national development. The two emperors mentioned above, Menilek and Haile Sellassie, played the principal role in the creation of that elite. We can divide those elite into two generations: the pre-Italian invasion and the post-Italian invasion ones. Whilst the pre-invasion generation looked up to Menilek and *Ras* Tafari as patron and ally, the post-invasion generation was inspired above all by Tewodros. That is why so many books and plays were written about him, and so many poems composed. His horse name (Tateq) was adopted as the name of the journal of the Ethiopian Students' Union in Europe before the Revolution while, afterward, it came to be used by the Derg as the name of a huge military training camp. As is well known, EPRDF also used that very name to christen the campaign that catapulted it to the central provinces.

Of the pre-invasion intellectuals, Gabra-Heywat Baykadañ, who could be described as their leader, was particularly fascinated by Tewodros. We find the following words of admiration and remorse in his booklet entitled "Atse Menilek and Ethiopia":

That king from Qwara (Tewodros's birthplace) forcibly united with his sharp sword the fragmented components of the Abyssinian state. In order to liberate the people from the yoke of priests and officials, he declared himself lord over all the land; and he struggled to introduce education. Dear Reader! What, do you think, did he get for his trouble? The

priests and officials instigated the people against him and drove him mad. Finally, they put him at the mercy of invading forces, and he committed suicide. An ignorant people is like a child: They do not like their benefactors. However, Tewodros's dream may not have been realized; but it did not die. Abba Tataq may have been distressed, but he died leaving behind an enduring idea.

The dream for change first kindled in Tewodros's mind and later developed by the intellectuals of the twentieth century had three major facets. These were: instituting ordered governance, changing the life of rural Ethiopia by making the peasant owner of his produce, and ensuring justice and equality.

The word *ser'at* (equivalent to ordered governance) was prominent in the first chapter of the struggle for change. In a letter-cum-testament that Tewodros wrote to the commander of the invading British force, General Napier, as the former was facing death on his solitary stronghold, Maqdala, he explained with bitterness the cause of his defeat thus: "My countrymen rose against me because I told them to submit to *serat*. You defeated me because you had marshaled a force that respected *ser'at*". Gabre Heywat Baykadañ also underscored the importance of ordered governance in the following words:

An ignorant people does not have *ser'at*. And a people without *ser'at* has no stable power. The source of power is *ser'at*, not the multitude of an army. A small town governed by law is much better than a big state without *ser'at*.

When one talks of ordered governance (*ser'at*), one has in mind above all rules and regulations that govern and are respected by both the ruler and the ruled. This means essentially laws and constitutions. The drafting of a constitution that governs the mighty and the weak is a phenomenon that has been seen more than once in our country in the twentieth century. If we include the constitution of the Endalkachaw period that was aborted in its embryonic state, we have seen five constitutions - two of them during the imperial regime, the third during the first months of the Revolution, the fourth under the Derg, and the fifth one under EPRDF.

The second principal dream was to see the backbone of the country, the peasant, become the main beneficiary of the product of his toil and at the same time to eradicate poverty from Ethiopia. In this respect, the pre-invasion intellectuals felt the peasant's suffering as their own and described his misery and pain in trenchant language. They opposed ardently the exploitation and suffering of the *gabbar* (as the tribute-paying peasant was known) and demanded the introduction of an equitable system of taxation. The contemporary weekly, *Berhanena Salam*, is full of such writings. One of those intellectuals, after describing the miserable lot of the *gabbar* in passionate terms, concludes his essay with the following existential question: "These poor people who go by the name of *gabbar*, which country is it that they come from?"

The post-invasion intellectuals echoed this sentiment and gave the whole matter a revolutionary direction by raising the slogan of "Land to the Tiller". When this slogan, which has played such a key role in the country's history of revolutionary change, was thrown out in 1965, the *gabbar* system that the pre-war intellectuals had fought so ardently was disappearing. In its place, particularly in the southern parts of the country, many peasants had been forced into tenancy and were paying from a quarter to half of their produce to the landlord. The thrust of the slogan was to give the producer not only the produce but also the means of production, land.

The third dream was to ensure justice and equality. This aimed particularly at eliminating religious and national oppression. The principal objective of the pre-invasion intellectuals was to ensure the equality of all religions and the separation of church and state. Conversely, it is doubtful if any of them were even aware of the existence of national oppression, let alone fight for the equality of nationalities. On the other hand, the main objective of the post-invasion intellectuals, particularly the student movement, was to eliminate national oppression and, as has now become almost cliché, "build an Ethiopia based on equality and consent".

What Did We Achieve?

While the dream of succeeding generations was more or less as described above, the question that we ought to tackle next is: "How far has the dream been realized? If not, where did we go wrong? What opportunities did we miss? Where did we go off-track? Where did the train miss the track?"

If we start from the first dreamer, Tewodros, we can appreciate that, while his dream was beautiful, the method he chose to realize it was wrong. As Gabra-Heywat has written (if inadvertently in this context), what Tewodros attempted was to bring the people together by force. He chose the sword rather than the power of persuasion. Many were those who lost their limbs, were shut up in a house and burnt alive, or thrown from the edge of a precipice. The term was not known at the time; but what Tewodros unleashed on all those who dared to oppose him was little short of "Red Terror". Given this fact, it is not surprising that the people rose against him and drove him mad.

Tewodros's other problem was that the external ally that he sought to introduce modern civilization in Ethiopia was not forthcoming. The British in particular turned a deaf ear to his pleas and entreaties. In a manner so uncharacteristic of British tradition, they even denied him the courtesy of acknowledging his letter. This was another situation that drove him mad. Furious at the British, who were far away, he took hostage the foreigners nearby. And with that move, he hastened his downfall. What is surprising is that a few years after the death of Tewodros, the situation was dramatically changed. Both the British, who had been loathe to hold his outstretched hand, and the other Europeans sought with remarkable persistence to win over his successors. Nay, the Italians in particular went even beyond that and sought to control the country more than once.

When we turn our attention to the aspirations of the intellectuals of the twentieth century, we encounter both achievements and failures. With regard to ordered (more specifically, constitutional) governance, we have been the beneficiaries of five constitutions. However, leaving aside the 1974 constitution, which was inspired by the popular upsurge and aborted within a few months, the other constitutions have two features in common. The first is that all of them were decreed from above rather than emanating from below; they were charters of the victor rather than a covenant between the people and the government. The second feature that they share is that, especially with regard to civic rights, there has been a discordance between intent and reality. In other words, one observes rights guaranteed by the constitution being violated.

In this respect, the post-1991 situation has been encouraging in a number of ways. The FDRE constitution has ensured the exercise of hitherto suppressed rights. More than any other time in the past, the public (**particularly** that of Addis Ababa) has been able to express its views freely. The mushrooming of the private press has broken in some measure the government's monopoly

of the media. The expansion of NGOs and CSOs has created an opportunity to work for country and compatriots outside the government framework. However, the frequent reports of civic right violation has dimmed this bright hope. Over and above the frequent harassment of the private press, recent measures suggest a trend towards tightening control not only over that press but also other non-governmental activities.

Before we wrap up this section dealing with "ordered governance", there is something that we should note. And this is that below the constitution, there are laws. In this respect, the highest achievement was recorded during the Haile Selassie regime. The codes that we are still using - criminal, civil and commercial - were all legislated at that time. Indeed, these codes have shown greater durability than the constitutions. The only changes that have been introduced are the series of special criminal codes promulgated by the Derg to legalize its repressive acts.

What about the results achieved in the sphere of making the farmer owner of the land he is tilling? The agitation of the pre-war intellectuals for the abolition of the *gabbar* system was achieved before the Revolution. And the slogan of "Land to the Tiller" **appeared** to have been realized with the radical land reform proclamation of 1975. I use the word "appeared" advisedly, because the proclamation that nationalized rural land did not liberate the peasant fully. Rather, it imposed on him a new and no less demanding lord in the shape of the peasant association. Far from becoming the rightful owner of his land, he could not even sell his products in the market of his choice and for a price that he deemed was rational. While this situation precipitated the fall of the Derg, the peasant has been denied legal ownership of his land even after that. In this sense, one can say that the "land to the tiller" agenda has become a train that has missed its track.

One good way of gauging how our aspiration in this regard has miscarried is through the incidence of famine in the country. One can even say that famine has become the distinctive badge of Ethiopia. The extent and severity of the famines have also increased from epoch to epoch, and from regime to regime. Surprisingly enough, the extent and severity has tended to be directly proportional to the sophistication of our development strategies and the redoubling of our efforts to combat famine. Just as the 1984/85 famine made mockery of the 1973 one, what we seem to be facing now seems to dwarf the 1984/85 one (even if concerted national and international reactions seem to be preventing the worst). And the rural population, far from being able to support the nation, has been increasingly unable to feed itself.

While these periodic famines accentuate the perilous state of rural life, their enduring basis is the endemic nature of rural poverty. What is more, this endemic rural poverty has now come to be accompanied by an increasing level of urban poverty. It has now become public knowledge that Ethiopia is one of the poorest nations in the world. The country that its early twentieth century intellectuals hoped would grow to be the Japan of Africa has in actual fact become an epitome of poverty and famine. This situation makes mandatory a reassessment of the rural development strategies successive regimes have pursued.

As far as the question of religious and national equality is concerned, the result is a mixed affair. Islam, one of the oldest religions in the country, has come to enjoy since 1975 the kind of recognition and respect it deserves. Nonetheless, one could notice a feeling of "It is getting too far" on the part of the Christians and "It is only the beginning" on the part of Muslims. Wise and prudent leadership is required on both sides to make sure that these two old religions would not abandon their tradition of mutual tolerance (except for one epoch, i.e. during the wars of Ahmba Grañ) and pursue the path of bloody conflict. Another source of concern is the growing confrontation between the followers of Orthodox Christianity and the adherents of a militant form of Protestantism known in common parlance as "Penté". Many observers are worried lest Ethiopia, successively subjected to the stresses and strains of class struggle and ethnic conflict, become an arena of religious warfare.

At this juncture, however, the most controversial issue is the modality chosen to ensure the equality of the different nationalities. The slogan of "self-determination up to and including secession" hurled so readily in the late 1960s has now been enshrined in the country's constitution. But, one could notice three contending positions around this issue. The government, which was instrumental in the drafting of the constitution, is convinced that this constitutes the perfect formula for resolving the national question. Some national liberation organizations argue, however, that national oppression has continued in a new guise. A third party is worried that the experiment could only lead to the disintegration of Ethiopia.

When we examine the matter more closely, the picture is much more complex. True, nationalities have achieved relatively greater freedom to enrich their language and develop their culture. However, except for Tegray and perhaps the Amhara region, the administrative autonomy of the regions has become questionable. As long as one political party or front holds undisputed sway, it

would be naïve to think that regions would be free from central government control. Political power (alas!) has its own logic; it is not necessarily bound by promises and constitutional guarantees.

As it stands, therefore, the ethnic politics that has prevailed since 1991 has been attended with a host of historical ironies. As all of us who participated in the pre-Revolution student movement know, the recognition of the right of nations and nationalities to self-determination up to and including secession followed the Leninist tactic and was meant to support the Eritrean struggle for rights and help to resolve it within a framework short of independence. But the tactic misfired when the Eritrean fronts, this unstinting support from the Ethiopian left notwithstanding, claimed that the Eritrean question was a colonial question, and not a national question, and that their struggle was for independence. Further, the fronts, particularly EPLF, completely revised the history of the region and denied the historical links between the two peoples and the struggle of Eritreans themselves for union with Ethiopia. They invented a new history to show that the two countries had no historical links whatsoever, that all Eritreans had struggled for independence since 1941. Moreover, they believed in this history and managed to sell it to the world.

Forgotten both during the struggle for independence and after victory were such crucial questions as: What would be the economic basis of an independent Eritrea? What would be the nature of its link with Ethiopia? What would be the fate of the many Eritreans who were living in Ethiopia in relative comfort? What would be the political boundary between the two countries? The result is the very complicated situation in which we find ourselves now.

The second irony is the fact that both Eritrea's independence and the right of nations and nationalities to self-determination up to and including secession have been proclaimed through the good offices of an organization that purports to represent the people of Tegray. This is for two reasons. Firstly, more than any other nation or nationality, it is the people of Tegray who have historical links with Eritrea (particularly the highland part) and can appreciate its Ethiopian-ness. Secondly, the question arises as to how it is possible at one and the same time for a nationality that is numerically small to maintain its hold on central power and at the same time proclaim the unrestricted right of regions for self-administration.

The third irony lies in the birth of a movement that, copying *in toto* the Eritreans' style (including the invention of history), has been arguing that the right of the Oromo people could be ensured only through secession from Ethiopia. This irony has two facets. On the one hand, it is incongruous to follow an agenda of secession when it is known that the Oromo constitute the single largest nationality in Ethiopia. On the other, more than any other nationality, the Oromo have had the most intimate historical, cultural and social links with other nationalities. In this respect, the emergence of a trend that aspires to struggle for the recognition of the rights of the Oromo people within the Ethiopian framework is encouraging.

The last and final irony is the condition of the peoples of southern Ethiopia who, more than any other nationality, have been subjected to centuries of oppression and injustice. In the last centuries, they have been subjected to acts of injustice ranging from alienation of land to mass enslavement. And yet, the kind of self-rule right granted them under the new political dispensation has been dubious and controversial. Not only has a regional administration been set up that does not represent the history or language of any of the constituent nationalities, but this region has also had the distinction of being the scene of ethnic strife and the target of armed assault by government forces. And yet (and this is another dimension of the irony), the people of this same southern region have demonstrated a sense of Ethiopian-ness that is not inferior (and sometimes in fact superior) to that exhibited in any other region.

As a matter of fact, the artificiality of the regional administrative structure is not limited to the southern region. If we look at Amhara and Oromia regions as well, although they demonstrate overall linguistic unity, they are bereft of both historical basis and administrative rationality. Except for a short while during the medieval period, when a region called Amhara was evident around present day southern Wollo and northern Shawa, there has never been a region designated by that name. As we all know, the historically authentic regions of the Amhara-speaking peoples have been: Gondar, Gojjam, Wollo, Shawa, etc. Likewise, there has never been in history a region as far-flung as present-day Oromia. What we have had were: Arsi, Bale, Leqa, Jimma, etc. From the point of view of administrative convenience, too, it does not make sense to include within one unit the Amhara stretching from Ankober (in northeastern Shawa) to Armacheho (in northwestern Gondar) or the Oromo from Ginir (southeastern Bale) to Gidami (southwestern Wallaga).

The culmination of all these ironical developments has been that, in place of the promised mutual trust and understanding between peoples, we have come to witness unprecedented suspicion and

rancor. Entire members of a nationality are condemned because a few among them have improved their lot through the acquisition of political power. In spite of the fact that it was once a land that saw people who felt more Ethiopian than the Ethiopians themselves, Eritrea has not only become independent but also entered a new chapter of warfare with Ethiopia. Tegray, in many ways the cradle of Ethiopia, has come to be regarded by many Ethiopians as the source of a movement bent on dismembering the nation. The Oromo, who are no less Ethiopian than any other nationality, are being harangued by a movement that tells them they have no historical links with Ethiopia.

These internal contradictions of ethnic politics have become even more manifest after the split within the TPLF. Because of that split, the organization that has been chief architect and beneficiary of that politics has not only been weakened but is virtually withering away. This is the genesis of the current move to transform EPRDF into a multi-ethnic party. What the ultimate outcome of this move would be is the big question of the day. Would it give a chance to other multi-ethnic organizations that have so far been kept at bay? Or would it result in the kind of one-man rule that attended the transition under the Derg from *Imaledeh* (the Union of Ethiopian-Marxist Leninist Organizations) to the Workers' Party of Ethiopia? Would it open a new administration where the rights of nationalities will be chastened by Ethiopian-ness or will it reimpose centralism in a new guise? Only developments in the coming few years will tell.

Before we close this section, it would be useful to point out some missed opportunities or wrong turns not so much for the sake of remorse as for a better understanding of our present state and future direction. If we start from the Haile Sellassie regime, there is no doubt that that epoch was characterized by unprecedented achievements in the introduction of modern administration and civilization. In particular, notable progress was seen in the realms of education and the expansion of infrastructure (such as Ethiopian Airlines, Telecommunications, Highway, etc.). Ethiopians, who have had to endure so much suffering in the revolutionary years, have been forced to look back to that epoch with nostalgia.

But that regime had two cardinal failings. These were its failure to liberalize administration and to exert even the minimum effort to initiate land reform. It was unable to guarantee democratic rights or tolerate a genuinely legislative parliament and a prime minister who could form and lead his cabinet. In short, it was unable to introduce constitutional monarchy of the British or

Scandinavian model. With respect to land tenure, it passed away unable even to regulate tenancy, let alone entertain fundamental land reform.

The occasion for initiating change along the lines suggested above presented itself more than once. After the failed coup of 1960, rather than be complacent at its failure, the regime should have learnt a lesson from its very occurrence and introduced some meaningful reform. Then, on the occasion of the emperor's 80th birthday (two years before the 1974 Revolution), as was almost universally expected, the emperor could have made some transitional arrangements. But what Ethiopians got out of the whole exercise were festivities and street lamps decorated in the national colours. As a result, the change that could not come in measured fashion was conceived through popular upsurge and proclaimed by force of arms. And the outcome on the whole became blood and tears.

It has now become fashionable not only to criticize but also to condemn the harbinger of that revolution, the student movement. Although, the movement undeniably had many weaknesses and committed many mistakes, appreciating the fact that it was by and large a product of the system would save one from blind condemnation. For instance, among its weaknesses and mistakes, the one that stands out is the culture of extremism that is still far from defunct. But this extremism was born out of a situation marked by the absence of any meaningful reform. Revolution occurs when there is no credible reform. Revolution erupts when there is no safety valve.

The eruption of the revolution and the sway exercised by the culture of extremism swept away the Endalkachaw cabinet (February-July, 1974) and paved the way to military rule. Moreover, the two major multi-ethnic leftist organizations (EPRP and *Ma'ison*), because they were subject to this culture of extremism, were unable to resolve their minor differences and were hence in turn eliminated by the Derg. It is a moot point whether Ethiopia would have been better off with these leftist organizations rather than the Derg. What is indisputable is that their liquidation cleared the stage for the ascendancy of national liberation fronts, who ultimately wiped out the Derg and ushered in the era where we find ourselves.

Finally, it has become increasingly evident that the manner in which the Eritrean problem was resolved is at the root of the war and suffering we have endured in the past few years. During the liberation struggle, EPLF itself had tentatively suggested three possible options in case of a referendum: union, federation, or independence. But, in 1993, Eritreans were confronted with a stark choice of "freedom or slavery". The Transitional Ethiopian Government for its part, bent on facilitating the referendum à la EPLF, was unable or unwilling to take any steps to protect the rights of Eritreans who considered themselves Ethiopian or to provide for Ethiopia's long-standing interests.

Where Are We Heading?

I am perfectly aware that the historical analysis presented above is far from encouraging. But the aim of the analysis is not to discourage; rather it is to give a realistic basis to our vision. In my opinion, the objective of this series of lectures is not to make people despair and despondent, but to project a ray of hope out of the predicament in which our country currently finds itself. If we cannot foresee anything but absolute darkness, then it means we are finished as a country and as a people. And no essay is needed, nor discussion called for, to predict gloom. If there is one truth that we learn from Ethiopian history, it is the country's capacity to bounce back after imminent disintegration. This is what was seen at the end of the Aksumite empire, in the 16th century, during the *Zamana Masafent* (eighteenth and nineteenth centuries), during the Revolution, and after the fall of the Derg. I feel that this ability to bounce back is a result of the human and cultural values it had accumulated over the centuries.

As I have indicated in the introduction, it is difficult to predict with certainty what Ethiopia would be like twenty years from now. Thus, all visions are bound to have an element of wishful thinking. For the vision to be realistic, it has to be accompanied by an indication of the conditions that have to be fulfilled. I have followed this method. And it is the sort of method suggested to us by the organizers of the series.

My vision is basically similar to that of earlier generations. Where it probably differs is in learning from past mistakes and omissions and in suggesting ways of facilitating its realization. In

actual fact, my vision is most probably no different from the wishes and aspirations of many Ethiopians. In this respect, the institution of genuine constitutional governance remains the main agenda of the future. It is the desire of many that the constitution emanates from below rather than being imposed from above, that it is honoured in practice rather than the breach. And the aim of the constitution should be to establish a democracy free of any epithets (popular, revolutionary, etc.). For, at the end of the day, democracy is one and only one. It is an order where the common man, and not the wise and bright who officiate in his name, is the final arbiter.

Second, and closely related to this, everyone is still eager to see an Ethiopia where justice and equality prevail. When we talk about justice, we mean above all the setting up of a judiciary free from the executive organ, not merely the promulgation of sophisticated laws. And equality means on the one hand the equality of all citizens before the law and, on the other, ensuring that all nationalities live in equality and mutual respect.

Since, in my historical analysis, I have dwelt at considerable length on this latter issue, I would like to add a few points on the best way of approaching this issue. I doubt if there is anyone who would deny the existence of national oppression in the past. If there is, it must be someone who is not conversant with the history of the country. In particular, the southern peoples were subjected to extensive and odious oppression. Subjected to the administrative fiat of the north, their language and culture were denigrated. Many lost their lands and quite a few were sold into slavery. The Ethiopian student movement played a commendable role in exposing this state of affair and fighting for its termination.

However, the solution prescribed for this problem has proved highly controversial. Ethnic federalism has saddled us with a host of problems. I believe strongly that Ethiopia should have a federal form of government. Indeed, centralized government, which gained ascendancy only in the 20th century (i.e. during the Haile Sellassie and the Derg regimes) has been the exception rather than the rule in Ethiopian history. But the federal arrangement has to reflect historical reality, conform to economic rationality and facilitate efficient administration. For this, the American-style territorial federation is to be preferred to the Soviet style of federation of nationalities.

Rather than proclaiming to all nationalities that they can form their own administration and, if they so desire, even secede, it is better to devise a system whereby Ethiopians residing in any region could develop their language and culture. This is because the system of regional administration that has been in place so far has only succeeded in improving the lot of a few officials and their relatives and not that of the mass of the people in each region. It is my sincere hope that this territorial federal arrangement would be the first step towards the establishment of a sub-regional confederation uniting the countries of the Horn of Africa (Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia and Somalia/Somaliland) and reflecting the inherent unity of their peoples and the geographical and historical links of the countries.

Thirdly, in the economic sphere, like many other Ethiopians, it is my wish to see an Ethiopia free not only from famine but also from poverty, an Ethiopia where the rural as well as the urban population would lead a comfortable life. Even if, as the early twentieth century intellectuals had dreamt, Ethiopia could not become the Japan of Africa, I would like to see her acquire the commanding place in the continent that her historical assets and human and natural resources warrant. Just as the *gabbar* system which those intellectuals fought with such prescience disappeared and the parasitic class that had been imposed on the peasant was eliminated, I would like to see the peasant able not only to feed himself but also to produce a surplus for the rest of the country and for export abroad.

In order for these visions to come true, however, the objective conditions have to be conducive. We can divide these conditions into three: international/global, continental/sub-regional, and national. The global situation is pregnant with both opportunities and dangers. To the former category belongs the expansion of information technology and the opening of a new avenue for growth and civilization. This technology has opened for us, on the one hand, a new opportunity to partake of the global knowledge and information. On the other hand, it makes it incumbent on us to strengthen our own capacity lest we succumb to a new form of alien domination and control.

The second danger pertains to the emergence of a hegemonic power after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The recent war on Iraq has shown what damage could be perpetrated when an administration short on wisdom but inflated with the arrogance of power sits in the White House. The danger for poor and weak countries like Ethiopia is that such a government would force them to sing its tune and dance to its song, thereby insulting their national dignity and, worse, dragging them into interminable war and confrontation. For Ethiopia to alienate Arabs and Muslims for the

sake of the United States is tantamount to being caught between two fires (internal and external). Therefore, the circumscription of American hegemony is something that all weak states should aim at. In this respect, the strengthening of the European Union and China is an important condition to tip the power balance and restrain the United States.

What has been styled as the New World Order (read American hegemony) has cast its shadow not only in the political but also in the economic sphere. In particular, the situation has become conducive more than at any other time in the past for the two financial institutions - IMF and the World Bank - to place poor countries at their beck and call. To achieve development and prosperity amidst such political and economic traps is like navigating safely to the shore across a stormy sea. On the shoulders of our economic experts rests the onerous task of drafting the requisite navigational chart.

Another source of concern in the international arena is environmental pollution and degradation. Even if there is consensus that drought is not the sole cause of famine, it has been seen repeatedly that drought does precipitate famine. Environmental pollution, and in particular the thinning of the ozone layer, has been one of the major contributing factors to global drought. In this respect, as well, the refusal of the Bush administration to sign the Kyoto agreement designed to control this danger is yet another manifestation of its hegemonic status. (Pointing out the global dimension of environmental distress is not meant, however, to belittle our own responsibility for environmental management. The negligence that we have exhibited so far in protecting our forests is particularly distressing.)

Secondly, Ethiopia's future is intimately linked with that of Africa in general and the Horn in particular. As we all know, our continent is beset with the three evils of poverty, conflict and disease. All efforts undertaken to achieve continental or regional integration since the dawn of independence have been vitiated by these scourges. If our continent is not to be thrown off the fast train of development, let alone get her rightful place in the international arena, these scourges have to be conquered.

Above all, the situation in the Horn bodes ill for the future of our country. As if the turmoil created by the disintegration of Somalia were not enough, Ethiopia and Eritrea plunged into a war

of unprecedented scale and intensity. If such tension continues and given the chronic problems of poverty and disease in the sub-region, endless suffering is to be feared. As indicated above, the lasting solution to the sub-region's problem is a confederation entered into freely. When we look at the ethnic links of the peoples of the sub-region (the Afar being found in Djibouti, Eritrea and Ethiopia; the Saho in Eritrea and Ethiopia; the Somali in Djibouti, Ethiopia and Somalia/Somaliland; and the Tigreña-speaking people in Eritrea and Ethiopia), it becomes compelling that the colonial boundary that separated these peoples should be opened in some measure. By virtue of its geographical location and its material and human resources, Ethiopia has a special role to play in realizing this vision of a sub-regional confederation.

To overcome the global, continental and sub-regional problems that confront our country, however, we have first of all to put our own house in order. In my opinion, much more than the external problems, the internal ones are under our control; and provided we make the necessary effort, we have a better chance of overcoming them. While our tasks in this regard are manifold, I shall point out only what I think are the main ones.

First of all, we have to replace the culture of extremism and zero-sum game that we have inherited from the revolutionary period (including the leftist movement preceding it) with a culture of tolerance and mutual respect. The suffering that our country has endured in the last thirty years (including the Red Terror) is the result of this culture of extremism. Thus, we have to be ready to listen rather than feel omniscient and to share rather than try to appropriate everything. Above all, we have to know that the masses in whose name we have been killing each other know perfectly what is good for them and we should be ready to learn from their earth-bound wisdom.

Secondly, we have to show special respect and care for our human resources. We can say that we have been gambling with our educated manpower in the last thirty years. As if those who have perished in the Red Terror were not enough, those who survived have been forced either to flee the country or to live in misery. As the figures recently released by the International Office of Migration shows, Ethiopia has attained the dubious distinction of being first in Africa in the extent of its brain drain.

If the treatment meted out to our higher educational institutions, particularly the Addis Ababa University, continues the way it has been so far, this situation is bound to get worse. The charter that has been promised it for the past 12 years has been like a mirage. Instead, the University has become a laboratory for half-baked pedagogical interventions that put the premium on quantity rather than quality. In having five president in 12 years, it is also poised to enter the Guinness Book of Records. In such a situation, it is inconceivable to run the day-to-day affairs of the institution, let alone formulate long-term plans for development.

Another element that requires ample opportunity even more than care is the private sector of the economy. The pressures exerted by government on that sector has progressively increased in the country's recent history. Not entirely free even in the imperial days, it was forced virtually to disappear under the Derg. And yet, the experience of the years immediately before the Revolution as well as that of the early 1990s (after the change of regime) has shown how, given the chance, it could play a constructive role in the economic growth of the country. However, the commandist tradition of the state has still prevented it from exhibiting its full potential. Moreover, honest and legitimate commercial transactions are being constantly undermined by the culture of illicit handling and a get-rich-quick mentality. Side by side with this has been the menace of corruption, which has assumed brazen proportions.

The fulfillment of the conditions outlined above are crucial for the attainment of the progress that we aspire for. The foundation of that progress is the judicious use of our trained manpower and the granting of ample opportunity to the private sector. It has become increasingly evident that such progress can come about only if we can devise a strategy for rapid industrialization, rather than remain wedded to the small-scale agriculture on which we have been toiling for centuries. What we have been able to get so far from that kind of agricultural economy has been only chronic poverty and frequent famines.