

**Experience of Eritrean National Unity
and modes of transition to democracy in Eritrea?
By Fesseha Nair**

1. Introduction

What is the relationship between the national unity and the liberation of Eritrea? How was the national unity during the process of nationalism and nationhood in Eritrea from the pre-colonial period and later under colonial period and after colonial period during the British administration and the Ethiopian occupation and during the political and armed struggle period? How can national unity of a multi-ethnic and multi religious Eritrea achieved? What forms of unity, consociational or federal?

Based on the Eritrean historical findings, Eritrea's national process was full of conflicts, conspiracies, sabotages and internecine wars. The outcome of the Eritrean political parties after the British administration could not achieve national unity and the Eritrean case was taken by external forces in collaboration of Eritrean nationals under the leadership of the Unionist party of that time and the result was reunion of Eritrea with Ethiopia.

Other Eritrean parties have built blocs claiming the independence of Eritrea and this was the first political sign of unity. The party of Moslem League strongly opposed the union of Eritrea with Ethiopia. The Government of Eritrea under the sovereignty of Ethiopian Empire was abolished in 1963. Eritrean students and other civil rights movements took to the streets of Eritrean cities and demanded the Eritrean rights to govern themselves. Thus troubles began as a conflict between Eritreans and the Ethiopian occupation. Eritreans began to organize themselves in 1958 under a movement called Haraka in Sudan/ Port-Sudan and later spread inside Eritrean cities organized in cells mobilising the people to struggle for their rights. When the Eritrean police and the Ethiopian military responded brutally against the movement, then Eritreans in asylum, students and political leaders of the then Eritrean Assembly declared an armed struggle called Eritrean Liberation Front in 1961 in Cairo/ Egypt.

Ethiopia acted towards the moslem community in Eritrea in extremely heavy handed method by alienating them from their Christian brothers. Brutality such as massacre and burning of their villages was applied to intimidate the resistance. The first armed struggle was made of moslem Eritrean but as the grievances of the Ethiopian occupation increased many Eritreans from the Christian highlanders have joined the struggle.

Throughout the 1961 to 1967 the armed struggle become stronger and stronger and won the people's confidence many students joined the struggle. The armed struggle was not unified under one political objectives but split in many factions. Several attempts for unification were failed or boycotted. The whole period of liberation period was full of suspicion and non confidences where the movements rejected each other of any proposed solution. The Eritrean armed struggle is characterized by its violent and internecine wars based on sum – zero political games.

The Eritrean armed struggle went beyond borders and built alliances with other fronts in Ethiopia in order to win against other nationalist movements/ the EPLF and TPLF. This cross border alliance worsened the Eritrean National unity and the managing of conflicts more difficult.

In 1991, the EPLF and TPLF won the demoralised and weakened army of the DERG in Ethiopia. While the TPLF called for national unity in Ethiopia inviting all movements to join, in contrast, the EPLF rejected and condemned all the liberation movements that have struggled for the Eritrean liberation. EPLF declared itself as the only organization that liberated Eritrea. What followed after independence and what is going today is clear that nation building in Eritrea was based in ethnocentrism and jingoism and exclusive with its war mongering policies. The EPLF/ PFDJ believe in national unity is not voluntary but enforced under their preconditions and interests. There is not a genuine unity based on the interests of others.

What about the call of national unity by the opposition political organizations and the civil societies struggling for democratic Eritrea? How can the opposition achieve national unity in order to defeat the dictatorship in Eritrea and establish a multi-ethnic democracy in Eritrea respecting the human rights and fundamental freedoms of all citizens?

As the waves of transition and democratic change inside the opposition camp escalated repeated bickering from the building of Eritrean National Forces Alliance and later the Eritrean Democratic Alliance seems to be following the same path as the past trend of suspicion and mistrust where each one pursuing the zero –sum game instead the win –win game where all win.

The opposition forces are somewhere in an uncertain and conflict prone middle field of democratic transition. The main task is not only building democracy but rather working within the trappings of today's situation of Eritrea. We should work through the establishment of procedures and institutions so that a positive and dynamic developments with genuine contents reflecting the Eritrean diversity should be created.

Purpose of the paper

The main purpose of this paper is to address the vitality of national unity to build a democratic and stable state guaranteeing its citizens the fundamental human rights and freedoms, and laying the instruments for democratic transition. The paper will assess the experiences of national unity in different periods during the Eritrean nation making and state building and especially during the political and armed liberation periods. There are indeed very few countries where the national unification of a multi- ethnic territory has occurred without conflict. Eritrea as multi- ethnic and multi –religious nation need still unity. The cries for unity now and in the past have no contents and clear methods. The forms of unity and its contents must be identified and clarified. The purpose of this paper is to make inventory on the past experiences on unity and its failures. It should also be noted that this paper will deal on the process of transitions and democratic changes in Eritrea.

Organization of the paper

Part two presents the unification process of the Eritrean polity and the main arguments. The concept of unity understood by the Eritrean political elites, an imposed unification without no contents and its implications during the Eritrean political and armed struggle. In addition, the ideas and assumptions generally underlying the forms of unity are presented.

Part three, four and five will focus more on the pre –dictatorial or on the methods of struggle against the dictatorship and the instruments needed to win the authoritarian system in Eritrea.

The first aspect will focus on the weak state of the dictator in Eritrea and the second aspect on the role of the opposition forces. Further issues related with democratic change will be discussed based on current situation in Eritrea. The role of military and security forces in relation to democratisation and the transition of justice will be discussed. Lastly, in part five some general findings and our organizations suggestions will be presented.

1. National Unity Experiences

2.1 Pre-colonial period

2.2 Colonial period

2.3 British Military Administration and the Federal Period

2.4 Armed liberation period

2.5 Post- independence period

2.6 Government & Opposition

2.1 Pre-colonial period

This section of part two will only discuss on the general terms on the origins of the Eritrean people how they were organized politically, economically and socially. The purpose is to give short overview of the historical process of national unity. The Eritrean people are composed of multi –ethnic groups inhabiting the different geographical territories in Eritrea. The socio-political organization of the pre-colonial Eritrea differs from one ethnic group to another but have more connection with their economic organization. The lowland communities were pastoral communities with feudal and semi-feudal structures with dispersed communal life. While the people of the highland were settled agriculturalists organized at village level by village chiefs administering their village affairs. Even the people in the highland were scattered and have no common identity. If we compare the traditional community life of the highland and the low land, we see that the organization structure of the highland was more centralized while the lowland land communities was more decentralized and a federal type of organization.

Prior to the advent of the Italians the land was divided into three different regions: the western and north eastern lowland and plateau regions (Barka, Senhit and Sahel) were under Egyptian rule, the highland region comprising the areas of Hamasien, Akele Guzay and Seraye were under the control of the Abyssinian emperors, the Dankalia region were ruled by autonomous local rulers called sultanates. This period was characterized as a period of continuous conflicts and recurrent raids from north and south and various resistances were seen from these regions. These resistances were at the village level and loyal to its local environs and has never created a common identity of Eritrea but were separate resistances. It is difficult to bring historical evidences that the pre-colonial period has important features of common identity under the name Eritrea.

2.2 Colonial Period

We have seen shortly how the people in today's Eritrea were organized at the village level and have no common or integrated territorial, socio-economic and political as such one can prove that the Eritrean people were united before the advent of Italian colonialism. Those of the Ottoman Turks, the Abyssinian Emperors and the Egyptian were not considered as colonialism because they have never formed or ruled the whole Eritrea as a colonial entity built a confined territory called Eritrea but separate regions in today's Eritrea. Therefore, we exclude them from colonial and include them as temporary raids and overruns against the people of that area.

The creation of Eritrea as all African countries dates from the beginning of 1890 when Europeans began to scramble Africa as the same time when the Suez Canal opened in 1869, Italians purchased the port of Assab from the rulers of Danakalia. Italians established contacts with the local population and prepared to occupy the land. Since the western lowlands people were bitter with the memories of raids and plunder by the Tigrean and Abyssinian leaders they welcomed the Italians. (Negash, 1987) But to enter to the highland was costly for the Italians because of the resistance of the Tigrean Emperor Yohannes but when he was defeated by the Mahdists the situation was in favour of the Italians. Italians began to expand their occupation of territories in Eritrea by making treaties with the Abyssinian Emperors especially with Menelik. The treaties and conventions signed by the Italian and Abyssinian leaders created today's Eritrea. Eritrea's existence is the result of the colonial agreements of French, British and Abyssinian Emperors.

The Italian colonial rule laid the basic infrastructural foundations, in terms of political and administrative structures. They introduced a modern administrative divisions or provinces

based on legal and political science. They have applied both modern and traditional laws in administering the people. The Italian colonial rule developed economic infrastructure by building the modern towns, ports, airports, schools, hospitals, banks, industries, agricultural projects and communications infrastructures such as postal system, telephone, roads and railway lines. These economic developments have impact in social structure such the emergence of working class in the industries of the colonizer, urbanization and soldiers and the rise of the intelligentsia (mostly interpreters and teachers)

The great contribution of the Italian colony was law and order which was previously absent characterised by peace and tranquillity¹. Italian colonial rule gave the territorial integrity but not established an integrated national political

¹ Tekeste Negash, Eritrea and Ethiopia, the Federal experience, Uppsala 1997

entity that can replace them, they kept the Eritreans out of politics and only gave them the economic wellbeing. Still the majority of the population were untouched and live in their separate areas. We cannot talk about national unity at this time.

2.3 British Military Administration and the Federal Period

In 1940, the fifty year old Italian rule was over and the British assumed the responsibility of Eritrea on behalf of the Allies. Reconstructing of Eritrea was discussed in the corridors of the Allies. It was in 1943 that the fate of Eritrean people was seriously discussed. The military administrator Stephen Longrigg was the first who was interested to reshape Eritrea by partitioning Eritrea in two parts. Longrigg's proposal can be based on the interest of the British and his local understanding of the Eritrean population. His proposal was that the Moselm Lowland be included to Sudan and the central Christian highland including Massawa and the Samhar, and the Saho tribes form a united Tigrai state under the sovereignty of the Ethiopian Emperor.(Longrigg, 1945) Ethiopia was at this time arousing the Eritrean Christian highlanders to reunite Eritrea with Ethiopia but the British administrators will neutralise this irredentist movement by all means.

In 1946 and 1947 the British tried to put in practice the advice of Frank Stafford who was financial advisor of the Ethiopian Emperor. He argued that the Eritrean people must be given the opportunity to know about all the alternatives, namely the incorporation of the colony to Ethiopia or the trusteeship but the idea of independence of the Colony was never been in the minds of the British.

The political parties at that time have no common understanding on the future of Eritrea. The Unionist Party campaigned for the unconditional union with Ethiopia. The Liberal Progressive party campaigned for the creation of Tigray – Tigrinia. The pro –Italian party campaigned for the return of Italia. In 1947 at the Arrival of the Four Power Commission, there were four parties to make their views on Eritrea. The Four Power Commission(Britain, USA, Soviet and China) studied the situation of the parties and the people and come with different views. The case of Eritrea was entirely on the hands of the external factors and the parties were divided without no common understanding on the future of Eritrea, then the case of Eritrea was submitted to the newly formed United Nations at that time.

When the Paris Treaty between Italy and the Four Power Commission was signed, Italy has denounced its rights on its colonies and the Council of Foreign Ministers of the Four Powers has taken the responsibility of the colonies and to

decide the fate of the colonies based on the wishes and the welfare of the inhabitants. Eritrea as one of the colonies where its inhabitants will be explored and this was done by Brigadier General Benoy toured Eritrea with the purpose of informing the Eritrean people that they should prepare themselves to make known their opinion to the commission.

When the Four Powers Commission of enquiry arrived in Eritrea in 1947, the two main parties were the Unionist Party and the Moslem League, the Liberal Progressive party and the Pro-Italy party were not significant. The Four Powers Commission collected the information how the parties were organized and their political programmes. The Unionist Party was well organized while the Moslem League was fragmented with its varied views on the destination of Eritrea, some for independence and some for union with Sudan. The Unionist Party has the dominance in its propaganda and intimidation. It used to intimidate the LPP and weaken it but they couldn't the ML because the ML was all moslems. Many changes have taken place at this time. A coalition of several parties was formed in 1949 called " Independence Bloc "demanding full independence for Eritrea. The major parties that built this coalition were the ML and LPP. The ML was divided in groups and different interests, they could not create a common and collective political unity but divided in local groups. The LPP was also split in groups some joined the unionists and some remained for Eritrea's independence. The first experience of coalition or alliance of Eritreans trends still survive in our times.

The Last United Nations Commission including Burma, Pakistan, Guatemala, South Africa have seen that the situation was changed, then the first proposal of dividing Eritrea into two parts(Bevin-Sforza) was suspended. When the United Nations Commission of Enquiry arrived in 1950, they found that the Unionist party wanted union with Ethiopia while the Independence Bloc independence. Independence Bloc was weakened by splits and other disagreements, while the UP become powerful because of Ethiopian support and other religious pressures.

After ten years of political turbulence between the Eritrean parties and the United Nations spear headed by the four powers(Great Britain, USA, France and USSR) Eritrean case was resolved by the UN resolution 390(V)A giving Eritrea an autonomy under the Ethiopian sovereignty. As the findings of the Four Powers Commission reports showed that the solution of Eritrea was federation with Ethiopia, because Eritreans were not united in their self-determination. According the findings of the FPC the majority of the Eritrean Christians were for the unification with Ethiopia while all the moslems opposed the unification with Ethiopia. There are many studies how the federation come but the main factor was the lack of unity.

How was the unity of the parties under the federal period- 1952-1962?

The draft constitution was debated and discussed by the Eritrean Constituent Assembly and the parties of ML and UP and others. The constitution was approved by the Constituent Assembly and the deliberations were reported in the Eritrean Weekly News. The federal act was approved by the Emperor. The Eritrean Government where power was shared by the ML and UP. The post of the Chief Executive went to the UP. The Eritrean government had three branches of government- the Executive , Legislative and Judicial responsibilities. The first year of the federation was in dispute with the Constituent Assembly because it has undermined the democratic process by extending its term of office and this was not a good start. The main dispute was the division of power between the Eritrean government and the representatives of the Emperor. A big gap has been created between Chief Executive and the Eritrean Assembly. The arrogant attitude of the Executive and his party the unionist party in collaboration with the representatives of the Emperor rejected all calls and memoranda from the Assembly members of the ML and other Eritrean democratic forces like that LPP.

Attempts of suppression and murder to those who criticised the work of the Executive were committed.

Opposition movements began to emerge led by the ML and started to arouse their people that the Chief Executive together with his unionist party decided to abolish the government of Eritrea. The Executive Officer was alienated from his cabinet and couldn't face the Assembly and has given all hope to sustain the federation. One of his failures was that he did not give respect for the concern of the ML members of Assembly. The Moslem League struggled to preserve a separate and autonomous Eritrea based on the UN Resolution of 1950. and the constitution of Eritrea which emanated from this resolution. The struggle between the UP and ML in the Eritrean Government continued until the federation was dissolved by the UP in cooperation with the Ethiopian Empire. The ML tried many time to negotiate with the UP but Asfaha Woldemicael Chief Executive– himself said that the word federation did not exist in our language and our union with Ethiopia is our recognition of being Ethiopians. The attitude of arrogance and supremacy of the UP rejected all initiatives for negotiation and unity offered by the ML and at last Eritrea lost its freedoms and national symbols(Constitution, flag, official languages and government)

Because of mistrust and lack of common understanding Eritreans lost the rights and freedoms they practised during the ten years of Eritrean Government under Ethiopian sovereignty.

2.4 Armed liberation period

The persistent struggle of the ML since the federal period and then the later the movement of liberation called , “ Haraka” organized by Eritreans in exile and later spread in under ground the towns of Eritrea were all to revive the violation of the federation, when these movements were eliminated the Eritreans were enforced to change their resistance by declaring armed struggle called ELF in September 1961. The mistrust that was built during the pre-federal and federal period between the UP and ML in the beginning of the struggle in the ELF but when more and more Tigrinya speaking Christians joined the struggle this mistrust was weakened. The armed struggle have passed through many phases of divisions and conflicts. ELF being in the first period dominantly moslems were divided in groups and internecine wars were fought between them. The formation of EPLF came later in 70th by the help of splinter groups led of Osman Salih Sabe. Inside the ELF there was a power struggle between the leaders divided by region not religion. The current president Essayas Afewrki has exploited the conflicts between the moslems in the ELF and appealed to his ethnic that ELF is enemy number one to be dissolved and ELF cannot be changed. Essayas and his group mobilised their ethnic group by spreading hate politics against the ELF as anti Christians and highlanders. Essayas has at last formed formidable political organization dominated by the Christian highlanders. The same attitude as UP, EPLF when it has seen that the wave of power was in its side it has shown no interest for negotiation with the ELF while eLF expressed its willingness but all attempts were except tactical but not strategical unity agreements that never lived long.

Throughout the whole years of liberation struggle EPLFs strategy was first eliminate ELF by any means even by collaborating and making allies with others beyond the border joined the TPLF and fought against the Elf where at last ELF has defeated militarily and EPLF reminaed as the only political organization at the battle field. Tracing from 1950 and 1960, the UP rejected all calls for negotiation with ML and dissolved the Eritrean Identity and chose to be Ethiopians but when they suffered under the Ethiopian rule they joined the ELF and later mobilised against the organization that gave them support and encouraged them and declared that ELF is an enemy organization against the Christian highlanders. Because of this hate politics the battlefield has witnessed bitter internecine wars. The EPLF first objective was to destroy ELF simply because they were moslems predominantly. It was the EPLF that has inherited the attitude of UP of separation conspired and rejected the call of national unity

and with the active support of the TPLF defeated ELF and assumed hegemony in Eritrea.

The ML tried to negotiate but lost, the ELF tried to negotiate with the EPLF but its repeated calls for national unity were rejected by the EPLF and at last the loser was the ELF.

The ML opposed the partition of Eritrea while the UP party supported it. Who was for the national unity and who was against national unity is clearly evidenced by the historical facts, denying and not learning from the past history has been for the Eritreans a sickness that never be cured. The trends of mistrust that was between the UP and ML was inherited by the leaders of the Eritrean liberation organizations and still is alive as we see it now inside the EDA(Eritrean democratic alliance)

2.5 Post- independence period

2.5.1 Government

We have seen that after a long political struggle among the Eritrean parties during the destination of Eritrea under the BMA Eritreans become more conscious thanks to the British liberal politics and the freedoms of press and freedom of organizations , Eritreans formed parties that express their wishes on their country. From 1942- 1952. Eritreans have shown their various interests and wishes. The major parties were ML and UP. The parties who claimed independence built bloc and coalitions. Building coalitions and blocs was a sign that shows how much they were matures in politics. At last when federation with Ethiopia came as solution they met and reconciled their differences to form the so called , Eritrean Government” at that time.

What happened when Eritrea become independent and recognized as sovereign state? EPLF who has one of the major armed liberation fronts during the independence period excluded all the former political organizations who have struggled their whole life. The self-appointed president Essayas declared that he will never allow any political organization in the future of Eritrea and the only political organization that decide the future of the Eritrean people is EPLF/PFDJ. He began to rule by decrees and his first strategy was to reshape Eritrea. He dismantled the former provinces and their boundaries and proclaimed the land as of state without people’s consent. Referendum that was held was not free but enforced by the EPLF. The constitution was drafted under a dictatorial system of EPLF with no freedom of speech, expression and organization commissioned by the EPLF, its process was exclusive and not

participatory/ (people with dissent views were not allowed) where people assemble to listen not to debate and pass decisions. Naturally, a constitution should have been reconciliatory and conflict managing process but the EPLF's constitution was non –reconciliatory and conflict creating process. The process of EPLF and later PFDJ and its hegemonic attitude derailed the state building of Eritrea and is today a failed state and deeply divided. The sustainability of Eritrea as a nation is in a shaky situation.

It is the hegemonic attitude the source of all internal and external conflicts that is inflicting the Eritrean people. For the dictator dialogue and negotiation is a sign of weakness, therefore, the Eritrean opposition must instead work hard to unite their forces to bring back the lost Eritrean culture of dialogue.

2.5.2 The Political Opposition parties, fronts and movements

The internal conflict between the Eritrean political elites and their organizations is not new but began since the birth of Eritrean nationalism in late 40th during the British Military administration and passed down through generations from the disposal of Eritrea after the end of Italian colonialism and still is alive with the contemporary politics of Eritrea.

We have 60 years' form of history of failed political initiatives since the birth of Eritrean nationalism. Federation with Ethiopia was a compromise solution when the unionist bloc and independent bloc claiming independence were equal. Federation has not lived long because Eritreans were not united to govern themselves as autonomous Eritrea. Federation was dissolved not because Ethiopian intervention but because of disunity between Eritreans and its political elites.

Whereas, the short lived agreements characterized by internecine wars where more than 4000 people died is our part of failed conflict resolution. The peace initiatives from the Conference of Bet Giorgis during the political struggle and the later peace initiative during the Armed struggle at Weki Zager bringing together the two main streams political organizations/ ELF and EPLF was our people's wish and will but this failed because of incompetent leaders of that time.

The formation of the Eritrean National Forces in 1999 by the opposition political organizations was also a peace and unity initiative. The coalition of the EDA consisting 11 political organization with various claims of political, religious, ethnic rights is a direct reflection of our multi- ethnic and multi –religious Eritrea and they are the results of a long struggle for unity in diversity never seen before in the Eritrean political history. The Eritreans cry for unity but still

the method of unity is not clear. We, in the Eritrean Federal democratic Movement have the understanding of that since the Eritrean people is diverse and this time is the time of building state therefore our unity should be achieved by organizing a state that power is shared that a nations wealth distributed by policies that prevent conflicts.

3. The Methods of struggle against the Dictatorship in Eritrea

3.1 Modes of transition

There are three modes of transition to democracy:

- 1. Transformation: when the ruling elite at the top comes to conclusion that the time has come for them to relinquish power and they initiate the process of change.**
- 2. Replacement: The people at the bottom or the ruled revolt against the ruling elite and replace them with a new government.**
- 3. Transplacement: Moderates within the authoritarian regime and liberals who are likely to favour compromise from the opposition movements cooperate and initiate the process of change.**

In the world experience of transition to democracy, it is rare that dictators initiate the process of change. What do you think that is possible in Eritrea from these three modes?

The modes of transition in Eritrea need academic debate based on the experiences of the other transitions over the world countries which were ruled by dictators.

The arguments we have and the concept of transition to democracy is generally expressed by the some studies based on the western scholars. This model mainly built on the experience of the wave of democratization in the in the 1970s and 1980s in Latin American countries were peaceful because the dictators have liberalized their politics and allowed the opposition for dialogue but this model has been discredited² in Africa. Transition from dictatorship to democracy is not a cost-free endeavour but all forms of struggle have its problems and costs.

What we need is to consider a comprehensive strategy including all methods of struggle that increase the power of the struggling democratic forces and weakening the power of the dictatorship with less casualties. The methods

² John W. Harbeson, " Rethinking democratic transition: lessons from Eastern and Southern Africa", in Richard Joseph(ed), State, conflict , and democracy in Africa, (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1990) p. 42

should be concrete and joint in all fields of activities, thus politically, diplomatically, economically, militarily and socially targeting the resources of the enemy.

It does not mean that with the end of dictatorship disappear all problems rather it opens the way for hard work and long efforts to build more just social, economic, and political relationships and eradication of all forms of oppression and injustices practised by the dictator in the country. The Eritrean opposition forces have two kinds of struggle in this transition: the first one is to fight the dictatorship and the second is to build a democratic state built on justice, equality, democracy and development.

The Eritrean opposition must remember that their objective is not only to bring down dictatorship but to install a democratic system and make the rise of a new dictatorship impossible. To achieve these objectives the Eritrean opposition need a chosen means that is related with the dictatorship in Eritrea. The strategy that must be used must be effective and contribute to weaken or disintegrate the power of the dictatorship. The EDA forces must recognize the reality in the opposition camp. They should recognize and acknowledge the ethnic and religious organizations struggling with them against the dictatorship. A transitional period is likely to exacerbate ethnic and religious conflicts if it can't accommodate the interests of different groups inside it. If the opposition political organizations reject these organizations the transition can fail and the situation of the state will be shaky or disintegrated.

The dynamics of transition depends on the cohesion of the opposition. If the opposition are all united by coalition or alliances, then the transition has a chance to avoid conflicts and in addition the political leaders are moderates rather than extremists both during the struggle against the dictatorship and building democracy can contribute to peaceful transition.

Eritrea today lacks moderates that can accommodate all the diverse interests of its people.

The transition method to democracy should provide opportunities for controlling and managing conflicts through institutional mechanisms. Managing power that recognizes ethnic groups as a central power that recognizes ethnic group politics rather than trying eliminating them is the precondition that transitions shall progress towards democracy,

In the conflict resolution literature, power sharing has increasingly been seen as a way of shaping the democratic political game in multi-ethnic societies like that

of Eritrea. Timothy Sisk³ argues that power sharing, defined as practices and institutions that result in broad –based governing coalitions generally inclusive of all ethnics can reconcile principles of democracy in multi-ethnic states. The most frequently cited form of power sharing is that of consociationalism . According to Lijphart consociationalism can involve a range of institutional arrangements. The attitude of Eritrean we are majority therefore we are the only who can decide on the destiny of others has failed and only lead to dictatorship as we see it now. The regime in Eritrea has been destabilising the region and has been a threat to international peace and security. Its behaviour has been beyond humanitarian law and cannot be remedied but completely uprooted. If this regime continues long then the whole region will in wars and Eritrea will be the hub of international terrorism. In Eritrea today , the military is under authoritarian rule , the opposition must deal with such army in a way that they join the forces for democratic change and use all methods to defend themselves and their people from the authoritarian rule that kills its people.

4. Transitional Democratic changes

Democracy is by definitions a method of resolving societal conflicts in a non-violent manner, the route to it is or democratizations is both revolutionary and conflict generating because it involves dramatic changes. These changes include political power sharing, new methods of exercising power. Democratic changes must be reflecting the deeper political culture of the Eritrean people and fulfil their wishes and interests. The existing culture of one heart and one people or the hegemony of one ethnic group over the others must be eradicated. A process of democratizations should begin now creating a broad national cohesion around the rules of the political game. How can the country be run? How should power be exercised? How should decisions about issues be made? How should the transitional justice versus reconciliation be dealt with? How can we defuse the tensions between the regime, military and the opposition?

It will take time to establish a political structure that changes the old system full of suspicion and fears to culture of tolerance and mutual respect. We need national conferences, broad based reconciliation forums, constitution making conferences and “ Great Walas”. These are the appropriate vehicles and must be exercised from today.

The politics of patronage must be abolished. A crucial factor in democratizations is to manage the problem of security sector and its role in the process and emerging political order. The military and security forces must review their role

³ Timothy sisk , Power sharing and international mediation in Ethnic conflicts, (WahingtonDC, united states institute of peace, 1997, 2nd edition)

and realise that they are loyal guardians of democracy and protectors of the people. The EDA member political organizations with military wings must integrate their forces towards national forces protecting the people and weakening the dictator's army and security forces.

It is also equally necessary that the EDA work hand in hand with the civil society in order to function as a watchdog on the process of democratization as a vehicle for channelling popular demands towards the political organizations. Threats of a new dictatorship must be exposed during this time otherwise they can steal the people's struggle and become new masters worse than the incumbent. The people with varying outlooks should be given the opportunities to work constructively in policy making and problem solving. In the interests of preserving the democratic system and impeding dictatorial trends and dimensions, the constitution should be preferably that establishes a federal system with significant prerogatives reserved for the regions, state and local governments.

Measures to be established during the transition period:

- i. transitional security and stability
- ii. transitional justice
- iii. transitional commissions for refugees return
- iv. transitional reparation
- v. disarming the security and releasing free all conscience and political prisoners
- vi. Human rights commissioner

5. Concluding Comments

One of the conclusions that we can draw was that if the post liberation period had started with national conferences on reconciliation and dialogue for democratic development, we would not have this crisis today in Eritrea. Tracing the Eritrean internal conflict one can ascertain that issues of conflict were based on identity. In the first time, during the political parties, the identity element religion was the main line that the parties were organized. But later it was more ethnic. (Ethnic a broad concept covering a multiplicity of elements: race, culture, religion, heritage, history, language, and so on) The major parties formed during the BMA were organized by religious line but gradually they took ethnic characteristics. The ML and UP were all interested in protecting their identity in threat not the whole Eritrean people. When Eritrea was federated with Ethiopia , they couldn't run their autonomy or the so called government of Eritrea but after two years, the Executive and the Assembly

couldn't unite to govern themselves then it(the government) was dissolved by Eritreans.

When federation was dissolved and the struggle for independence started led by ELF, this armed struggle was not supported in the beginning because of mistrust and religious identity(ELF was supposed a moslem organization or arab organization or jihad as today's president Essayas called it at that time) When the armed liberation fronts were grown and many young Eritreans joined them , still there was no trust and the will to unite was not genuine and strategic but tactical. No doubt all Eritreans regardless of their differences in identity fought for liberating the country but this is not enough to safeguard the formation and survival of a nation. The civil war between ELF and EPLF was in itself based on mistrust and ethnic, regional and religious identity it was not national identity. All the pretexts used by the EPLF as progressive and many other blackmails were just to liquidate the national force and dominate the battlefield. What happened after the liberation of Eritrea under the EPLF? Many scholars supporting the regime told us that national unity is not a prerequisite to liberate or nation building, one dominant ethnic group can rule all the others by force. Historically, most African nations after post colonialism built their states dominated by one ethnic group. Even Western Countries like Yugoslavia had suppressed and held back for almost 50 years during the years of Eastern Bloc internal conflicts/ ethnic conflicts are always present and unresolved. Authoritarian systems can present an illusion of short –term stability, but are unlikely to be sustainable over the long term. Eritreans in the ruling party or the opposition should learn that suppressing the other ethnic Eritreans will never give them peace and stability.

Today , we see all African nations internal conflicts and wars, the best example is the Hutu / Tutsi war of cleansing in Rwanda. The result of depriving the fundamental rights of citizens based on identity are practiced today by the ruling party in Eritrea. A national unity is not that people live together but how their rights are respected and how they influence the politics of their country. National unity is not something or mixing personalities from the Moslem and Christian or the Highland or Lowland, it is but managing or addressing the issues of the conflict.

The national congress for democratic change convened in Wasa- Ethiopia last summer was one step forward but has a long way to go providing the foundations for building an effective and lasting settlement to internal conflicts making appropriate choices about democratic institutions in the near future.

Conflict management: how to bring the opposing sides together in a cooperative process , how to design a practical, achievable, cooperative system for the constructive management of differences Addressing the real causes of the conflict is the road to building a democratic organizational structure challenging the dictatorship.

6.References

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