Beyond the Oromo and Amhara Protests: The challenge of democratic transitions in Ethiopia
The Oromo Protest
Triggers, Underlying Factors, Actors and Implications for Ethiopia’s Long Term Political Stability
TRIGGERS
ADDIS ABABA and the SURROUNDING OROMIA SPECIAL ZONE
INTEGRATED DEVELOPMENT PLAN FOR
ETHIOPIAN RENAISSANCE

ADDIS ABABA AND THE SURROUNDING OROMIA SPECIAL ZONE
INTEGRATED DEVELOPMENT PLAN
(2014–2038)
Draft Executive summary

JUNE 2013
(1) The Addis-Ababa – Oromia integrated Master Plan
Perceived as an annexation of Oromo territories and a threat to Oromo identity
“The Master Plan will divide Oromia into two separate entities”
(2) The May 2005 election – “Our vote is stolen”

- The intense political mobilisation and campaign by the OFC (Oromo Federal Congress)
- vs OPDO’s 100% electoral win in Oromia and at the national level
- OFC’s core constituencies such as West Shewa Zone as the epicentre of the Oromo protest
UNDERLYING FACTORS

OROMO GRIEVANCES
POLITICAL

• Perception of political marginalization
  – Political marginalization within the EPRDF coalition – OPDO’s false start, legitimacy deficit and capacity gaps
  – A numerical majority dominated by an ethnic minority (“we are dominated by the TPLF/Tigreans”)
  – The perception that key sectors are still dominated by the Tigreans
  – The federal project has failed – meaningless regional autonomy (Oromia is ruled by the Tigrean “king makers”)
  – The narrowing down of the political space and EPRDF’s 100% electoral win
POLITICAL (2)

- A Post-Meles Moment
  - The relative weakness of TPLF and lack of a coherent political leadership by the EPRDF has sent a signal that the establishment is no longer invincible
  - Various factions of the OPDO (from compliers, ‘rent-seekers, to Oromo nationalists)
IDENTITY ISSUES

• The Master Plan instances the actualization of the process of annexing Oromo territories into the increasingly non-Oromo metropolitan

• Oromo identity claim over Addis Ababa/Finfine
  – Constitutionally the Oromos are given a special status over Addis, but this is not yet specified by law
  – Oromos having insignificant presence in Addis Ababa's cultural landscape
  – However, they are paying dearly for the ‘development’ of Addis (waste disposal; exploitation of natural resources)

• Oromos as an ethnic majority: Oromiffa deserves to be the second federal language
ECONOMIC FACTORS

- **The land issue** – eviction of farmers ("land for the investors")
  - Large scale expropriation of land of Oromo farmers in the context of increasing landlessness
  - Little/no/inappropriate compensation (financial compensation vs. livelihood compensation)
  - "Most of the so-called investors are Tigreans"
  - Tigrean domination of the national economy
    - "it is all about EFFORT and TPLF-affiliated business groups" – differential access to capital/market information
    - Even OPDO-affiliated business groups are insignificant
ACTORS
1. **Oromo students**
   - Politics of concern (most are children of farmers)
   - Rising unemployment among the educated youth
   - Networking through social media (new technologies of nationalist imaginations and connectivity – Universities have better IT facilities)

2. **Oromo farmers**
   - “*They robbed us*” = deeply resent their dispossession and accumulation of land-based wealth by government officials and so-called investors connected to them
3. **Opposition parties**

- The OFC and its active political mobilization of the Oromo youth in the May 2015 election (*western Shewa Zone is the epicenter of the protest, an area where the OFC has been the most active*)

- The popularization of civil disobedience by OFC’s charismatic leader/Bekele Gerba (*translated into Oromiffa*)

- The ODF and its peaceful struggle gesture rebuffed by EPRDF

- OLF’s intensified efforts to get international support (*Eritrea + Egypt*)
4. **Oromo business groups** – the economics of ethnicity
   - Economic competition with Tigrean business groups affiliated with TPLF (e.g., Wegagen Bank Vs Oromia Cooperative Bank)

5. **Artists**
   the artistic expression of Oromo protest
   - (e.g., Haacalu’s “Laal Galoo Too”; Hawi’ “Ka’I Qeero” (stand up the Oromo youth), and Caalaa’s “Master Pilaani” (the Master Plan))
6. EPRDF/Government

a. Section of the OPDO
   • The power struggle among members of the EPRDF in post-Meles period (OPDO and ANDM resenting TPLF’s continued dominance and their view of SEPDM as an upstart promoted by TPLF)
   • Section of the OPDO has a vested economic interest in keeping the status quo of the Oromia Special Zone (outfoxing rent-seekers at the federal level)
   • A section of the OPDO penetrated by Oromo nationalists including ex-OLF members (part of the post-2005 massification of EPRDF)
   • The protest as a new window of opportunity for the OPDO to connect with the Oromo people and make up for its legitimacy deficit

b. EPRDF/TPLF’s definition of the conflict situation – alliance among narrow nationalists, rent-seekers and religious extremists

c. The security establishment – the use of excessive force (As we crushed the CUD…)
7. Diaspora

- New generation
  - Diaspora seclusion

- Jawar Mohammed
  - Oromo Media Network (Oromo and Amharic)
  - Building networks

- Social media
  - Facebook; the hub - the coordinating structure?
  - Commando structure
  - Result oriented
7. Diaspora (2)

- Oromo intellectuals
  - Oromo Studies Association
  - Never-ending discussions
  - Ideology and practice?

- Changing narrative
  - From an isolated focus on ethnic suppression, past discrimination
  - To recognition of economical factors
  - The combination of the ethnic and economic story
7. Diaspora (3)

- Positioning and representation
  - Self-representation: From urban to rural protests
  - Diaspora representing the rural

- Dilemma of long-distance nationalism
  - Increased communication
  - Access to credible information
  - Connecting the locals
  - Disparate narratives and objectives
The Amhara Protest
Tigray Republic
The Republic of Greater Tigray

The Manifesto of Tigrayan People’s Liberation Front (TPLF)

Prior 1991

After 1991

The Republic of Greater Tigray

“A) A Tigrayan is defined as anybody that speaks the language of Tigrigna including those who live outside Tigray, the Kunamas, the Sahos, the Afar and the Taltal, the Agew, and the Welkait.

B) The geographic boundaries of Tigray extend to the borders of the Sudan including the lands of Humera and Welkait from the region of Begemidir in Ethiopia, the land defined by Alewuha which extends down to the regions of Wollo and including Alamata, Ashengie, and Kobo, and Eritrean Kunama, the Saho and Afar lands including Assab.

C) The final goal of the TPLF is to secede from Ethiopia as an independent “Republic of Greater Tigray” by liberating the lands and peoples of Tigray

D) Redefinition of Ethiopian boundaries through relocating nationalities, acquiring Humera, Begemidir, Wollo’s Raya, Zalambesa......”

The TPLF Manifesto, February 1976

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Welkait Incorporation

Administrative Weredas of Tigray Region

Fig. 3

Shaded area annexed by Tigray in 1991

Gonder Weredas annexed by Tigray in 1991

Wollo Weredas annexed by Tigray in 1991
Welkait Incorporation (2)
Tigray Region After 1991

NOTE: Colored Areas are New Additions to Tigray from Gonder & Wollo

Wollo Prior 1991

Wollo After 1991

Wollo Weredas annexed by Tigray in 1991
Crosscutting themes in the Various Protest Movements

‘Shared grievances and Emerging shared vision’

• The TPLF/Tigran domination of the political and economic life of the country

• Political recentralization propounded by the developmental state ideology and its federal cost

• Rising inequality as a critic to the ideology of developmentalism (“I can’t eat GDP”)

• So far *the protests are more of shared grievances than shared vision*; spontaneous than organized – could ultimately lead to a more inclusive democratic politics and political reform
Impact

- Developmental gains are threatened
- Surging anti-Tigrean sentiment
- Occasionally translated into indiscriminate violence not only against Tigrean supporters of the regime but also ordinary Tigreans
- The emerging tactical alliance between the Oromo and Amhara and TPLF’s mobilisation of the peripheral areas (“defend the Ethiopian federation from Chauvinists and Narrow nationalists”)
- Proliferation of protest movements and Ethiopia’s new political fragility (a perfect storm?)
What next?

- EPRDF will survive the current crisis, yet severely wounded politically;
- The government has lost the moral authority to govern; the party will muddle through until the next election:
- A lot can happen in between now and 2010. The strategy is some kind of ‘managed democratization’ that does not threaten Tigrean monopoly of power.
- The Amhara resistance will remain the biggest political challenge to the regime.
- The reshuffling of the cabinet does not address the Amhara and Oromo grievances! State of emergency or not, the resistance will continue in different forms.
- Just as Ethiopia is coming apart, the region is also coming apart. This will also have an impact on Ethiopia’s internal political dynamics.