

Old Sins Cast Long Shadows

Failed Democratisation in Eritrea

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16th of May 2011

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2011

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Trykk: Reprosentralen, Universitetet i Oslo

IV

Preface

In October 2009, I had my first day as an intern at the Oslocenter for Peace and Human Rights. I had never had a job that was directly linked to my studies and I was extremely nervous on my first day. That first morning at the Oslocenter Alf Åge Hansen, Special Advisor for Human Rights, sat at the coffee table and we started talking. He asked what I was interested in and I told him about my fascination for and my interest in political development in Africa. Alf Åge Hansen had himself worked at the Norwegian Embassy in Ethiopia and now he was responsible for the Oslocenter's new human rights report on Eritrea. He told me that the report was the most important project at that time and that they were in process of trying to meet with UN and EU officials where they would share their findings. I knew nothing about Eritrea. Hansen said that I had to become familiar with the report, as I probably would get some tasks relating to it. I spent the next six hours reading and was introduced to a totalitarian country that was only 16 years old. After reading the report I wanted to know more. I had particularly one question in my mind: Why has Eritrea failed to democratise?

Executive Summary

In 1993, Eritrea achieved *de jure* independence and was perceived by the international community and the Eritrean population as Africa's new hope as the leadership projected a rhetoric of multi-party elections, socio-economic development and human rights. Today, the country is one of the worst human rights violators, there is only one party allowed, and dissenters are thrown into prison and tortured without due process. The thesis attempts to answer the research question: why has Eritrea failed to democratise? It thoroughly goes through the dominant democratisation theories and uses an eclectic theory based on historical sociology, transition theory and post-conflict democratisation theory. It creates an alternative framework with the state, society and external relations as three analytical dimensions. The thesis concludes with stating that all three dimensions have contributed to the failure of democratisation in Eritrea and that it is only possible to understand how they have contributed by looking back in history to see how structures have affected the different agents.

Acknowledgements

Thanks are due to Daniela Ellerbeck and Luis Miranda for all their comments on my first draft. It is always helpful with an outside perspective and I am grateful for the feedback. Also, thanks to the Oslocenter for Peace and Human Rights for introducing to me Eritrea's political situation. They have also let me spend most of my days working on my thesis at their offices. During the last phase of writing they have politely avoided giving me any other tasks, which gave me the opportunity to focus one hundred percent on the thesis. I also appreciate Ida Marie Fottland, Line Grenheim, Yvonne Stabell, Simon Rye, Alf Åge Hansen, Tone Holme, Nikolai Hegertun and Espen Skran's company, advices and support. I would highlight the amount of hours I spent with Espen Skran. It made the long and tiresome days easier. I would also acknowledge Tiril Norvoll's help and support. Having an unconditional support and love all through this process have helped me enormously. Thanks are also due to UiO's Peace and Conflict Studies and my fellow students for all help in developing an idea into a product to be proud of. I would also highlight and acknowledge Arman Aardal's comments and assistance. Last but not least, I am more than grateful for all help and guidance by my supervisor Kjetil Tronvoll. It is clear that his knowledge about the issue has been significant in developing the thesis. His honesty, inputs, suggestions and thoughts helped me a lot and it is only fitting that his help is acknowledged.

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Abbreviations

AFNL – Algerian National Liberation Front

AU – African Union

BMA – British Military Administration

CIA – Central Intelligence Agency

EEBC – Eritrea-Ethiopia Border Commission

ELF – Eritrean Liberation Front

EPLF – Eritrean People’s Liberation Front

EPRDF – Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front

EPRP – Eritrean People’s Revolutionary Party

EU – European Union

GONGO – Government organised nongovernmental organisations

IMF – International Monetary Fund

NGO – Nongovernmental organisations

NUEP – National Union of Eritrean Peasants

OAU – Organisation of African Unity

OLF – Oromo Liberation Front

PFDJ – People’s Front for Democracy and Justice

PLF – People’s Liberation Forces

TPLF – Tigray People’s Liberation Front

TSZ – Temporary Security Zone

UN – United Nations

US – United States

1. Introduction

The EPLF has already underlined its commitment to create a multi-party system in Eritrea. A one-party system will neither enhance national security or stability nor accelerate economic development. In fact a one party system could be a major threat to the very existence of our country. For these reasons we will have to avoid these malaises in tomorrow's Eritrea.

(Isaias Afwerki, Secretary-general of the Eritrean People's Liberation Front, October 1990)¹

We will wait for about 3-4 decades [before introducing multi-party elections] until we see genuine natural situations have emerged in Eritrea.

(Eritrea's President Isaias Afwerki in an interview with Riz Khan, AlJazeera, 22 May 2008)²

In 1993, Eritrea achieved independence and was perceived by the international community and the Eritrean population as Africa's new hope as the leadership projected a rhetoric of multi-party elections, socio-economic development and human rights. Today, the country is one of the worst human rights violators, there is only one party allowed, and dissenters are thrown into prison and tortured without due process.³ The current call for democracy in North Africa is the newest occurrence in a long history of democratisation in Africa. The first democratic elections in Africa were in the 1950s and 1960s, but shortly after, many African states moved towards one-party rule or authoritarian takeovers of government. Many were therefore extremely positive in the 1990s when new governments took power in states like Eritrea and Ethiopia. After the Cold War, observers of world politics became convinced that they were witnessing a new era in global politics: a third wave of democratisation⁴. African states in the beginning of 1990s were a part of this third wave and as a result received much

¹ Cited in Kibreab, Gaim (2009a) *Eritrea: A Dream Deferred*, Suffolk: James Currey, p. 146

² Riz Khan – Isaias Afwerki – 22 May 09, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UAXKsZ8OsWo> (08:54), accessed on 27 April 2011

³ Tronvoll, Kjetil (2009) *The Lasting Struggle for Freedom in Eritrea: Human Rights and Political Development, 1991-2009*, Haugesund: HBO AS

⁴ Huntington, Samuel P. (1991) *The Third Wave: Democratisation in the Late Twentieth Century*, Norman: University of Oklahoma Press

support and praise from the international community. The US President Bill Clinton characterised Eritrea, together with Ethiopia, Uganda and Rwanda, as the ‘African renaissance’.⁵ With talk of democracy and economic development, the President of the transitional government in Eritrea, Isaias Afwerki,⁶ created optimism that Eritrea would symbolise a new democratic Africa.

After a 30-year long liberation war against Ethiopia, most of the country was in ruins in 1993. Nevertheless, according to Tronvoll, the Eritrean people strongly believed in a more prosperous future, as the Liberation Front established the first civilian government and appointed its leader, Isaias, as President of independent Eritrea. “The absolute majority of the population looked upon the liberation front with great esteem and admiration, as they had struggled and endured hardships and great sacrifices for the common good of the people.”⁷ The leadership of the Liberation Front was at that time viewed as a new kind of African leaders: they enjoyed popular support, they spoke highly of liberal democracy, human rights and a free market economy, and they had a well-defined development policy based on their own priorities.⁸ Furthermore, Eritrea started with a clean slate in form of no foreign debt, low inflation and zero tolerance for corruption.⁹ They received an unconditional support from the international community and newspaper articles from the beginning of 1990s are full with accounts of USAID/EU delegations, ascension to multilateral agencies, demobilisation and resettlement programs and food security initiatives.¹⁰

Needless to say, as the second quote above highlights, even though Eritrea was part of the third wave of democratisation, democracy is yet to be realised in present Eritrea. The aspirations and hopes for democracy and respect for human rights, as expressed at the time of independence, are today only bleak memories. Eritrea’s democratisation process has not only stagnated, it has reversed. Since coming to power

⁵ Connell, Dan (2009a) ‘Eritrea and the United States: towards a new US policy’ in Richard Reid (ed.) *Eritrea’s External Relations: Understanding its regional role and foreign policy*, London: Chatham House p. 136

⁶ Eritreans (and Ethiopians) go by first names and do not use inherited surnames. Thus when referring to Eritrea’s president Isaias Afwerki, this study will only use Isaias, or President Isaias.

⁷ Tronvoll, Kjetil (2009) p. 18

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Cameron, Greg (2009) ‘The Eritrean State in Comparative Perspective’ in David O’Kane and Tricia Redeker Hepner (eds.) *Biopolitics, militarism, and development: Eritrea in the twenty-first century*, New York: Berghahn Books, p. 141

¹⁰ *ibid.* p. 142

in 1991, the government party, EPLF/PFDJ¹¹ has managed to push Eritrea into armed conflicts with Sudan, Djibouti, and Yemen and waged the biggest and most devastating bilateral war on the continent in recent decades, with Ethiopia. They have sustained a total militarisation of society, suspended all independent and privately owned newspapers and magazines, closed down national and international nongovernmental organisations (NGOs), curtailed academic freedom, detained and tortured many thousands of ordinary Eritreans believed to be a threat to the regime's survival, pushed hundred of thousands of Eritreans to flee their country as refugees and destroyed the state economy.¹² The current regime in Eritrea has been described as one of the world's most totalitarian regimes in regard to democratisation and human rights.¹³ Freedom House, when evaluating political and civil liberties ranked Eritrea in the category 'worst of the worst' when it comes to political and civil liberties, classifying it as 'not free' with the lowest score possible.¹⁴ Reporters Without Borders in their Worldwide Press Freedom Index 2010, ranks Eritrea as the worst country in the world ranking number 175 out of 175.¹⁵

At the time of independence, few could predict today's undemocratic regime in Eritrea. Being a part of the third wave of democratisation and endorsing liberal values were reasons for unconditional support from the international community towards Eritrea and its government. It is thus a puzzle that Eritrea today has no traces of upholding human rights and is not even close to introducing multi-party elections. Hence, this thesis' research question: with such aspirations, potential and external support at the time of independence *why has Eritrea failed to democratise?*

¹¹ EPLF was renamed the People's Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ) in 1994. In this study EPLF will be used when talking about the party pre-1994 and PFDJ post-1994. When an issue concerns the party over a longer period, or in general, the study will use EPLF/PFDJ to refer to the party

¹² Tronvoll, Kjetil (2009) p. 19

¹³ Ibid. p. 17

¹⁴ Freedom House: Freedom in the World 2010,

<http://freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=22&year=2010&country=7819>, accessed on 20 April, 2011

¹⁵ Reporters without Borders, <http://en.rsf.org/press-freedom-index-2010,1034.html>, accessed on 20 April, 2011

1.1 Historical backdrop

Eritrea in its present shape dates from 1890 when the various territories possessed by Italy on the western shore of the Red Sea were united into a single colony, and its present frontiers were defined in a series of treaties concluded between 1900 and 1908. As a result, the Eritrean territory, like most other African colonies, consisted of several ethnic groups. Today there are officially nine different ethnic groups in Eritrea: Tigrinya (50%), Tigre (31%), Saho (5%), Kunama (2%), Rashaida (2.4%), Bilen (2%), Afar (5%), Hedareb (2.5%) and Nara (1.5%).¹⁶

After Italy's defeat in World War II, Eritrea was put temporarily under British trusteeship while the Four Big Powers, the US, Soviet Union, the United Kingdom and France, were to decide the destiny of ex-Italian colonial territories. When they failed to decide, the case was referred to the United Nations (UN) and Eritrea was federated with Ethiopia in 1952, under the sovereign rule of Emperor Haile Selassie, in accordance with UN Resolution 390A passed on 2 December 1950.¹⁷ Repeated Ethiopian violations of the federal agreement, and the subsequent annexation of Eritrea as the country's fourteenth province in 1962 triggered Eritrean armed resistance.¹⁸

From 1961 to 1991, Eritrean ambitions to nationhood were manifested through armed struggle. In 1961 emerged the Eritrean opposition group, the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF). The ELF based its strategies on the methods used in Algeria by the National Liberation Front (AFLN). The ELF divided the Eritrean territory into several zones based on ethnic groups, which worked through patrimonial divisions of ethnic kinship and clan loyalties. Thus the zones divided the Front according to regional, religious, and ethnic differences.¹⁹ The commencement of the armed struggle displayed serious shortcomings of the ELF. It was, according to Bereketeab, characterised by ad hocism and impulsiveness, and the behaviour of the leadership was characterised by arbitrariness, personal rivalry and unfettered power accumulation on

¹⁶ Planning Office, Ministry of Education, Asmara, Eritrea, 1996, cited in Woldemikael, Tekle (2003) 'Language, education, and public policy in Eritrea' in *African Studies Review*, vol. 46: 117-136, p. 120

¹⁷ Kibreab, Gaim (2009a) p. 2

¹⁸ Hepner, Tricia R. and O'Kane, David (2009a) 'Biopolitics, Militarism, and Development in Contemporary Eritrea' in David O'Kane and Tricia Redeker Hepner (eds.) *Biopolitics, militarism, and development: Eritrea in the twenty-first century*, New York: Berghahn Books, p. xix

¹⁹ Iyob, Ruth (1995) *The Eritrean Struggle for independence: Domination, resistance and nationalism, 1941-1993*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

individuals.²⁰ Iyob notes however, that the ELF's horizontal structure encouraged factionalism. "Such a [...] system based on patronage affiliations with the leadership was bound not only to create conflicting loyalties [...], but also to accentuate the ethno-religious divisions that demarcated the zones from one another."²¹ In 1970, due to internal differences, a small faction of the ELF broke away and established its own competing liberation movement, the Popular Liberation Forces (PLF), which by 1975 had taken the name of the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF). The conservative leadership of the ELF was challenged by the youthful and radical EPLF. The ELF viewed the EPLF as a threat and when the EPLF did not comply with the ELF's ultimatum of rejoining or face the consequences, a full-blown civil war was waged between 1972 and 1974.²²

The first civil war between the Eritrean liberation fronts ended in a ceasefire in 1974 as the two fronts agreed to coordinate their activities against the Ethiopian army. This ceasefire was not a permanent one and differences between the groups remained.²³ The fronts again turned their energies towards each other, unleashing the second civil war (1980-1981). Internal disagreements and fighting between the ELF and the EPLF ended in 1982, when the ELF was driven off Eritrean soil and the EPLF could thus direct all its efforts against the Ethiopian Derg regime²⁴. Additionally, this meant that the EPLF was the sole actor defining Eritrean resistance and could thus enforce its hegemony in Eritrea. With growing tensions within Ethiopia as a consequence of the military activities of the Ethiopian liberation movements, namely the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) and Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), the EPLF managed to throw out the last outposts on the country, liberating the capital Asmara on the 24th of May 1991.²⁵ After the fall of the Mengistu regime in May 1991, the TPLF-led coalition resistance movement, Ethiopian People's Revolutionary

²⁰ Bereketab, Redie (2007) 'When Success Becomes a Liability: Challenges of State Building in Eritrea (1991-2005)' in *African and Asian Studies*, vol. 6: 395-430, p. 402

²¹ Iyob, Ruth (1995) p. 112

²² Bereketab (2007) pp. 403-404 and Iyob, Ruth (1995) p. 116

²³ Iyob, Ruth (1995) pp. 118-121

²⁴ The Derg regime was a communist military junta that came to power in Ethiopia following the ousting of Haile Selassie I in 1974. Mengistu Haile Mariam was the leader and in this thesis the Derg and Mengistu regime are used interchangeably

²⁵ Tronvoll, Kjetil (1999) 'Borders of violence – boundaries of identity: demarcating the Eritrean nation-state' in *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, vol. 22:6, p. 1043

Democratic Front (EPRDF), took power in Ethiopia. Simultaneously the EPLF proclaimed a two-year transitional period, which would end in a referendum on independence. In April 1993 the Eritreans went to the polls and voted overwhelmingly in favour of independence. On the 24th of May 1993 the EPLF declared Eritrea as an independent sovereign state.²⁶

Outwardly friendly relations between Eritrea and Ethiopia for much of the 1990s, however masked deeper tensions between the respective governments. Economic agreements and suggestions of ever-closer political and strategic collaboration hid escalating tensions over boundaries, commercial rivalries, ideological differences and the quest for being the regional hegemon.²⁷ In May 1998 an exchange of fire in the contested area of Badme swiftly led to a full-scale war. The war ceased in June 2000, and was formally ended by the Algiers Treaty of 12 December 2000.²⁸ In 2001, a group of top-level military and leaders (G-15) from the People's Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ), EPLF's new name as of 1994, questioned Eritrea's president. In an open letter, G-15 questioned what they perceived as an authoritarian development in Eritrea and accused President Isaias of acting without restraint, even illegally.²⁹ In the letter they wrote that "the problem is that the president is conducting himself in an illegal and unconstitutional manner, is refusing to consult, and the legislative and executive bodies have not performed their oversight functions properly."³⁰ In response to a growing dissent in Eritrea, President Isaias mobilised a large-scale crackdown in September 2001, arresting dissenters, including the G-15, shutting down all private media and the nascent civil society was closed down. Since then, the PFDJ has assumed *total* control, mobilising all Eritreans between 18 and 40 in the national service programme, prohibiting all forms of alternative opinions, failing to implement the constitution and postponing elections.

²⁶ Ibid. p. 1044

²⁷ Negash, Tekeste & Tronvoll, Kjetil (2000) *Brothers at War: Making Sense of the Eritrean-Ethiopian War*, Oxford: James Currey

²⁸ Reid, Richard (2009a) 'Introduction' in Richard Reid (ed.) *Eritrea's External Relations: Understanding its regional role and foreign policy*, London: Chatham House

²⁹ Tronvoll, Kjetil (2009) pp. 64-65

³⁰ G-15 letter cited in Tronvoll (2009) p. 65

1.2 Form of government – definitions

This study attempts to answer the research question *why has Eritrea failed to democratise?* It will thus analyse the period from independence to the present. Democracy is defined as popular control over public affairs on the basis of political equality. In addition, democracy is characterised by the qualities of participation, authorisation, representation, accountability, transparency, responsiveness and solidarity.³¹ Democratisation is thus defined as processes and decisions taken in order to achieve democracy. Democracy is not perceived as a teleological concept, but rather a dynamic form of government where processes and decisions are taken constantly to improve the abovementioned definition of democracy. In other words, democratisation is something that begins when decision-makers make the choice of moving a state towards democracy, but which does not end when democracy is officially achieved.

It must be noted that there is a difference in this thesis' definition of democracy and the Eritrean government's idea of democracy. The abovementioned definition of democracy is a definition of liberal democracy. The vocabulary of democracy as used by EPLF/PFDJ during the struggle and after independence implied a Marxist-Leninist understanding of the term.³² Inherent in this understanding is the concept of democratic centralism where a vanguard would make the key decisions. The people cannot be trusted to rule themselves and what is needed is a 'guided democracy' where an enlightened few would decide for the people.³³ Furthermore, the EPLF/PFDJ's 'National Charter for Eritrea: For a Democratic, Just and Prosperous Future', adopted in 1994, states that democracy: "is dependent not on the number of political parties and on regular elections but on the actual participation of people in the decision making process at community and national level."³⁴ Their understanding of democracy is thus that the EPLF/PFDJ represent the masses and will make the decisions, with the

³¹ Törnquist, Olle (2004) 'The Political Deficit of Substantial Democratisation' in John Harriss, Kristian Stokke and Olle Törnquist (eds.) *Politicising Democracy: The New Local Politics of Democratisation*, Houndmills: Palgrave, p. 201

³² Tronvoll, Kjetil (2009) p. 50

³³ Connell, Dan (2005a) 'Redeeming the failed promise of democracy in Eritrea' in *Race & Class*, vol. 46: 4, p. 74

³⁴ EPLF, *A National Charter for Eritrea, For a Democratic, Just and Prosperous and Prosperous Future*, Nacfa, February, 1994, cited in Tronvoll (2009) p. 50

citizens participating under the condition that they follow EPLF/PFDJ ideas and policies.

As this chapter asks why Eritrea has failed to democratise, it is thus helpful to establish what type of regime the country is today. Linz considers a system totalitarian when certain characteristics exist: First, there is monistic centre of power, and whatever pluralism of institutions or groups exist, they derive their legitimacy from that centre and are largely mediated by it. Second, there is an exclusive, autonomous, ideology with which the ruling group and the party serving the leaders recognise and affiliate, which they use as a basis for policies or manipulate to legitimise them. The ideology goes beyond a specific program or definition of the boundaries of legitimate political action. It works to supply some ultimate meaning, sense of historical purpose, and interpretation of social reality. Third, citizen participation in, and active mobilisation for political and collective social tasks are encouraged, demanded, rewarded and channelled through a single party and many monopolistic secondary groups. Finally, in each realm of life for each purpose, there is only one feasible channel for participation, and the overall rationale and direction is set by one centre, which defines the legitimate goals of those organisations and ultimately controls them.³⁵

In Eritrea, President Isaias is the ultimate leader. All groups, institutions and organisations are to a large extent controlled, mediated or supported by him and a few selected advisors.³⁶ Moreover, the PFDJ's core value is national unity, placing it above anything else. Following the ideology of creating an Eritrean nation-state devoid of sectarian presence is thus the prime goal of the government. It gives some ultimate meaning and a sense of historical purpose.³⁷ All types of participation in and active mobilisation for political and collective social tasks are channelled through the PFDJ, its mass organisations and the national service programme, which is compulsory for all citizens between 18-40.³⁸ This is also the only possible channel for participation and

³⁵ Linz, Juan (2000) *Totalitarian and Authoritarian Regimes*, London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, pp. 70-71

³⁶ Connell, Dan (2005a)

³⁷ Kibreab, Gaim (2009a) pp. 206-221

³⁸ See Human Rights Watch (2009) *Service for Life: State Repression and Indefinite Conscriptioin in Eritrea*, New York: Human Rights Watch

the president and his advisors set the direction. While many of these elements will be touched upon throughout this thesis, this brief section serves to show that Eritrea is to be considered a totalitarian state.

1.3 Methodology

1.3.1 Research design

A democratisation process is perceived as a complex phenomenon involving many actors as well as structural factors like war, stability, external influences and cultural elements. Hence, in order to understand and research the complexities of the failed democratisation in Eritrea, this thesis will use a qualitative research approach. This allows the research to go further in depth and highlight the wide range of factors contributing to the case at hand. According to Yin, in order to analyse and understand a complex social phenomenon a case study is preferred.³⁹ Hence, this study will analyse the failed democratisation in Eritrea as a case study. This allows the researcher to devote all focus to Eritrea and to go deeper into the research material in order to answer the research question posed. These factors would be limited in for instance a comparative research design. Moreover, regarding this thesis' research question, the use of case studies is suitable when looking to answer the 'why' question in a contemporary context.⁴⁰ However, Yin points out that generalisation of results, from either single or multiple case studies, is made to theory and not to populations.⁴¹ In other words, regarding the potential for drawing general conclusions, statistical studies are better. Single cases can confirm a theory or work as a falsification of a generalisation. A single case study is not a strong approach if one wants to generalise a population, in this case failed democratisation in general. This is important for the researcher to keep in mind when drawing conclusions about Eritrea.

Good in-depth qualitative research requires a wider approach to the complex issue at hand. This thesis will thus adopt an eclectic theory of democratisation to

³⁹ Yin, Robert K. (2003) "Case Study research. Design and Methods, 3rd edition", in *Applied Social Research Methods Series*, vol. 5. Sage Publications Inc, p. 2

⁴⁰ Yin (2003)

⁴¹ Yin, Robert K. (1994) *Case Study research: Design and methods (2nd edition)*, Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, p. 10

analyse how three different factors contributed to the failure of democratisation in Eritrea. The three factors are the state, society and external relations. Former analyses of Eritrea often incorporate a certain idea to explain the current situation. In such a complex case as Eritrea however, one theory is not sufficient. Grugel argues that on its own, no single theory will completely explain a particular case, but they are useful in that they ask important questions and contribute to particular explanations.⁴² This thesis will thus thoroughly analyse different democratisation theories and attempt to incorporate different theories into an eclectic framework. As a result, the thesis will manage to analyse the failed democratisation in Eritrea more comprehensively.

1.3.2 Research Methods

It is, according to many scholars, extremely difficult to undertake independent critical research in Eritrea.⁴³ No official research permits are granted to independent researchers, and certainly not for the study of political development.⁴⁴ The extensive security and intelligence surveillance in Eritrea prohibits and impedes any gathering of information on what has gone wrong in Eritrea, without jeopardising the life and wellbeing of any informant. Furthermore, if one should persuade someone to talk, the information given may solely be the result of government propaganda and thus prove unreliable. Even Eritrean citizens are not allowed to undertake research activities without research permits.⁴⁵

Field research is therefore not a useful method to gather primary information concerning political development in Eritrea. Furthermore, as it is next to impossible to get interviews with government representatives, this research relies on official statements of the government, from other government sources such as official Eritrean websites and government-controlled media. In this case it is also important that one take into account that the information offered by the government is not necessarily correct as it has a need to be perceived as legitimate in the eyes of its citizens. All this

⁴² Grugel, Jean (2002) *Democratization: A Critical Introduction*, Houndmills: Palgrave, p. 46

⁴³ See for instance, Reid, Richard (2009b) 'The Politics of Silence: Interpreting Stasis in Contemporary Eritrea' in *Review of African Political Economy*, vol. 36: 120, p. 210, Kibreab, Gaim (2009a) p. 10, and Tronvoll, Kjetil (2009) p. 16

⁴⁴ Tronvoll, Kjetil (2009) p. 16

⁴⁵ Kibreab, Gaim (2009a) p. 10

is clearly a methodological constraint when analysing the political development in Eritrea. It is therefore vital that these types of primary information be crosschecked in order to ensure reliability and validity. These kinds of sources will mainly be used to identify government's opinions and views on issues rather than facts. In addition, the former Norwegian ambassador to Eritrea, Arman Aardal has through a long conversation with the author shared his opinions and experiences from his time in the country. This information has been used as complimentary to the research conducted and his opinions are omitted when they are not found in academic literature.

The lack of primary sources in form of interviews, one could argue, is a weakness of this research. However, there are two major reasons why it has not been included. First, the question of Eritrea is a very sensitive issue amongst the Eritrean diaspora in Norway, and receiving objective information on political development in Eritrea is thus hard to come by. A wide range of Eritreans the author has been in contact with are loyal to the President and do not recognise any faults with Eritrea. At the same time, Eritreans opposing the regime are either too afraid to talk or blame everything on the government. Interviews would therefore demand an amount of work that does not fit into this thesis' time limitations. Second, due to time and financial limitations it has not been possible to travel abroad to visit either government officials or larger diaspora communities. Also, for the same reasons, the author has chosen not to conduct interviews with researchers or NGO workers with experience from Eritrea.

Consequently, the research conducted relies first and foremost on literature, either through anthropological studies or other secondary academic research. In other words, the researcher has collected, compared and analysed existing texts as well as re-analysed existing data from other investigations. There is an extensive amount of literature on Eritrea, so no shortage of information exists.

When it comes to literature concerning Eritrea, there are two challenges that need to be highlighted: The first is a lack of objectivity. Dorman argues that "foreign journalists and academics have played almost as important a role in narrating, documenting, and advancing the nationalist agenda as the Eritrean fighters

themselves.”⁴⁶ Gilkes writes that a “surprising number of eminent scholars and journalists have taken [...] the EPLF at its own evaluation and its historical claims as facts”.⁴⁷ Secondary literature concerning Eritrea can thus be influenced by misconceptions and biases. It should be noted that some of the sources used here are from authors who have been visiting the EPLF and supported them during the liberation struggle or have in fact participated in the liberation struggle. Dan Connell visited the EPLF during the liberation struggles on several occasions and supported EPLF’s cause. However, today Connell’s praises have turned into disappointment, illustrated by his article ‘Enough!’⁴⁸ This change is worth bearing in mind as it can reflect his ability to objectively analyse the situation in Eritrea. Another scholar, Bereketeab, notes that his background and participation in the Eritrean liberation movement may give his work a certain biased perspective.⁴⁹ Furthermore, due to the difficulties of doing fieldwork in Eritrea, many rely on previous fieldwork and interviews, as well as other secondary literature. The challenge, due to lack of updated information, is thus that secondary literature can reproduce misconceptions and biases. Due to the lack of primary sources, it is thus important to be critical to the secondary literature and use more than one source if necessary. This is particularly important when it comes to the interpretations of the liberation war. In addition, this thesis has tried to emphasise when using the EPLF/PFDJ’s interpretations of events in order to separate facts from interpretations.

The second is finding sufficient information concerning political developments. As both time and finances are limited, most research will be conducted using libraries and other sources of information that can be accessed without having to travel too far. It is thus important to get relevant sources and use them effectively to obtain sufficient information. There are always obstacles or limitations present when conducting research. Access to information, access to correct information and an appropriate

⁴⁶ Dorman, Sara R. (2005) ‘Narratives of Nationalism in Eritrea: Research and revisionism’ in *Nations and Nationalism*, vol. 11: 2, pp. 203-222

⁴⁷ Gilkes (1991) p. 626, cited in Tronvoll, Kjetil (1998a) *Mai Weini, a highland village in Eritrea: a study of the people, their livelihood and land tenure during times of turbulence*, Lawrenceville: The Red Sea Press, p. 8

⁴⁸ Connell, Dan (2003) ‘Enough! A Critique of Eritrea’s Post-Liberation Politics’, found at <http://allafrica.com/stories/printable/200311060876.html>, accessed on 10 March 2011

⁴⁹ Bereketeab, Redie (2000) *Eritrea: The making of a nation 1890-1991*, Uppsala: ReproEkonomikum, p. 30

theoretical framework are some important limitations to recognise. As a researcher, the goal is always to create a fine product by setting the standards in the research design and by critically analysing sources so that certain influences do not foul the conclusion.

1.3.3 Existing Literature

Most relevant literature deals with the current state of affairs in Eritrea today. There are many different explanations given for this, ranging from biopolitics, the liberation war, to regional insecurity.⁵⁰ For the most part, the academic literature analyses the government to explain either the state development, human rights issues or external relations.⁵¹ While this perspective is relevant and significant, this type of perspective tends to neglect other factors like civil society, the society as a whole and the international context. Furthermore, when doing an analysis of political development, the assumption that the state is fully responsible for the development is misleading. It is misleading in the sense that the state always functions in relationship to the wider society. Nevertheless, the academic literature on the Eritrean state is comprehensive and the majority points to the liberation war to explain the political development.⁵²

There are also studies, which have been done on Eritrean citizens, villages and ethnic groups.⁵³ These studies point to another relevant aspect of Eritrea, namely the citizens. The accounts give a clearer picture on how communities act and react to state

⁵⁰ See for instance: O’Kane, David and Hepner, Tricia R. (eds.) (2009) *Biopolitics, militarism, and development: Eritrea in the twenty-first century*, New York: Berghahn Books, Pool David (2001) *From Guerillas to Government: The Eritrean People’s Liberation Front*, Oxford: James Currey and Lyons, Terrence (2009) ‘The Ethiopia-Eritrea Conflict and the Search for Peace in the Horn of Africa’ in *Review of African Political Economy*, vol. 36: 120, pp. 167-180

⁵¹ See Kibreab, Gaim (2009a), Tronvoll, Kjetil (2009) and Mengisteab, Kidane (2009) ‘What has gone wrong with Eritrea’s foreign relations’ in Richard Reid (ed.) *Eritrea’s External Relations: Understanding its regional role and foreign policy*, London: Chatham House

⁵² See Pool, David (2001), Hebru, Debessay (2003) ‘Eritrea: Transition to Dictatorship, 1991-2003’ in *Review of African Political Economy*, vol. 30: 97, pp. 435-444, Cliffe, Lionel (2008) ‘Eritrea 2008: The Unfinished Business of Liberation’ in *Review of African Political Economy*, vol. 35: 116, pp. 323-330, Connell, Dan (2005a), Tronvoll, Kjetil (2009)

⁵³ See Tronvoll, Kjetil (1998a), Müller, Tanja (2005) *The Making of Elite Women: Revolution and Nation Building in Eritrea*, Boston: Brill Leiden and Bereketab, Redie (2009a) ‘Conceptualising Civil Society in Afirca: The Case of Eritrea’ in *Journal of Civil Society*, vol. 5: 1, pp. 35-59

policies and decisions. Moreover, it provides a better understanding of how a liberation movement has managed to gain sufficient support and strength to control Eritrea today. As studies of Eritrean political development tend to focus exclusively on the state, these accounts are useful in obtaining a more comprehensive picture of the situation. In particular how the two spheres influence or reconstitute each other. While there is a lack of this type of study on Eritrea, there are however useful accounts from neighbouring country Ethiopia.⁵⁴

Finally, since Eritrea is on the Horn of Africa, a region dominated by violence over the last century, some scholars emphasise the international factor when analysing Eritrea. A number of academic literature focus here on the regional factor and the history of the region, while others takes it further out and stress the international context, the role of US and the role of the international community as a whole.⁵⁵ The importance of looking beyond the borders are recognised by most Eritrea scholars and are accordingly incorporated in an analysis of the state.⁵⁶

There are, however, few attempts to emphasise the failed democratisation as the topic of analysis. Where this topic is addressed, it does not explicitly deal with the term of democratisation, but rather explains why the things are the way they are at the time of analysis (human rights violations, proxy wars, government crackdown on dissent etc.). Moreover, most studies do not use theory. The current government is a totalitarian one, and with the narrative of democracy at the time of independence, it is peculiar that this issue has not been dealt with more explicitly. When it has been dealt with, none of the sources try to adopt a more comprehensive framework to analyse the complex process that is democratisation.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ See Lefort, René (2007) 'Powers – mengist – and peasants in rural Ethiopia: the May 2005 election' in *Journal of Modern African Studies*, vol. 45: 2, pp. 253-273 and Vaughan, Sarah & Tronvoll, Kjetil (2003) *The Culture of Power in Contemporary Ethiopian Political Life*, Stockholm: SIDA Studies 10

⁵⁵ See Müller, Tanja (2007) 'Understanding the Dynamics of Foreign Policy-Making in a New State: The Case of Eritrea' in K. Adar and P. Schraeder (eds.) *Globalisation and Emerging Trends in African Foreign Policy*, Lanham: University Press of America and Cliffe, Lionel, Love, Roy and Tronvoll, Kjetil (2009) 'Conflict and Peace in the Horn of Africa' in *Review of African Political Economy*, vol. 36: 120, pp. 151-163

⁵⁶ See Bereketeab, Redie (2007), and Mengisteab, Kidane and Yohannes, Okbazaghi (2005) *Anatomy of an African Tragedy: Political, economic, and foreign policy crisis in post-independence Eritrea*, Trenton: The Red Sea Press

⁵⁷ See Connell, Dan (2005a), Hedru, Debassay (2003), Kibreab, Gaim (2009a)

1.4 Structure of the thesis

The next chapter will go through different democratisation theories and critically analyse them. Based on the theories, the remainder of the chapter will propose an alternative framework for analysing democratisation. The framework will build on the theories and attempt to adopt a more eclectic approach on the phenomenon that is democratisation. The analysis will then go through three analytical dimensions: the state, society and external relations. Chapter 3 will first give a brief account on how the EPLF operated during the liberation war. It will then proceed to analyse the EPLF/PFDJ in government. It will argue that the reasons why the state has failed to democratise are to be found in the liberation war. Chapter 4 analyses how the role of the society and different actors within society has contributed to the failure of democratisation in Eritrea. It will look at the Eritrean society in a historical perspective to show how it has shaped political development. The chapter looks at four different aspects; General characteristics of the rural population in Eritrea, Eritrea's history of domination and political organisations, the liberation struggle and how the liberation movements mobilised Eritreans, and associational life in Eritrea today, in particular civil society and opposition movements. Chapter 5 analyses the last analytical dimension, external relations. The chapter will first analyse the international community's role in order to understand the government's worldview. It will then look at Eritrea's relationship with Ethiopia before looking at certain elements with Eritrea's foreign policy. It will conclude by analyse how external relations have impeded the democratisation process in Eritrea. Chapter 6 will then conclude and summarise the main findings of this thesis before moving on to some theoretical implications of the study.

2. Democratisation Theory

To impose order to the complex phenomenon of democratisation, theories have been created in an attempt to explain why countries democratise. Most theories draw upon elements of three distinct approaches: modernisation theory; historical sociology and transition theory.⁵⁸ Furthermore, one can find attempts to isolate and explain post-conflict democratisation. Nevertheless, as this chapter will demonstrate, on their own none of these theories manage to capture the whole picture. Theories are useful in that they ask vital questions about democratisation and contribute to particular explanations.⁵⁹ Researchers have too often tried to take sides, favouring one particular factor over others. Provided the four abovementioned theories all have some truth in them, the challenge then is not to choose which one is superior, but to theorise how the different factors interplay in the democratisation process.⁶⁰

This chapter is divided into two main sections. The first will briefly go through different democratisation theories and critically analyse them. Based on the theories, the second section will propose an alternative framework for analysing democratisation. The framework will build on the previous theories and attempt to adopt a more eclectic approach on the phenomenon that is democratisation. The analysis will then go through three analytical dimensions: the state, society and external relations. Since theories are attempts to impose order and find patterns in the complex reality that is human life, they are bound to be partial explanations. It is thus an advantage to take on a more eclectic approach if one seeks to create a more comprehensive picture of the case at hand.

2.1 Modernisation Theory

Looking at capitalist development and democracies after the Second World War one can see an apparent link between the two. Modernisation theory uses this link to argue that economic development is necessary for a country to democratise. It is an

⁵⁸ Grugel, Jean (2002) p. 46

⁵⁹ Ibid. p. 46

⁶⁰ Welzel, Christian (2009) 'Theories of Democratization' in Haerpfer et al. (eds.) *Democratization*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 75

attempt to theorise the fact that democracies have emerged in the modern world under capitalism.⁶¹ Because of the link, modernisation has often been championed as the decisive driver of democratisation. Seymour Martin Lipset first codified modernisation in 1959 in his article ‘Some Social Requisites of Democracy’. In his article, Lipset argues that the more well to do a nation, the greater the chances that it will sustain democracy.⁶² By using the variables of urbanisation, industrialisation, wealth and education, Lipset found that the countries that scored highest are the most democratic.⁶³ According to Lipset, capitalism produced wealth, led to an educated middle class and produced cultural changes favourable to democracy.

In 1996, Leftwich wrote the most influential restatement of modernisation. According to Leftwich, stable and secure democracies are rarely found in really poor societies. Many new democratic governments inherit an economy in which grotesque degrees of inequality exist and democratic politics has never been the politics of radical change. Therefore, democracy is improbable in societies polarised by sharp differences in income, class, ethnicity, culture or religion.⁶⁴ Using the examples of South Korea, Chile, Hungary and Taiwan, Leftwich points out that these countries have emerged or re-emerged into democracy from more or less lengthy but intense periods of non-democratic economic development. He concludes then by arguing that the West should support developmental elites that are seriously bent on promoting economic growth rather than insisting blindly on democracy. By raising the level of economic development, according to Leftwich, it will also help to establish or consolidate the real internal conditions for lasting democracy.⁶⁵

While modernisation still has some stronghold today, it has been subjected to a large amount of criticism. Firstly, by assuming that that all societies can replicate a transition that actually occurred at particular moment in space and time, modernisation can be perceived as quite ahistorical. Secondly, modernisation is to some extent ethnocentric because it has extended the application out of the experiences of the

⁶¹ Grugel, Jean (2002) p. 48

⁶² Lipset, Seymour (1959) ‘Some Social Requisites of Democracy: Economic Development and Political Legitimacy’ in *The American Political Science Review*, vol. 53: 1, p. 75

⁶³ Ibid. pp. 75-80

⁶⁴ Leftwich, Adrian (1996) ‘Two Cheers for Democracy?’ in *Political Quarterly*, vol. 67: 4, pp. 336-337

⁶⁵ Ibid p. 339

Western world for the entire world.⁶⁶ Third, a typical criticism against modernisation is about the methodology employed within modernisation studies. As Grugel argues, “put simply, Lipset claimed to have proved that more telephones, more cars, more consumption – in sum, more capitalism – leads to more democracy.”⁶⁷ Finding a correlation between capitalism and democracy is not the same as arguing that economic development causes democracy. It provides at best a clue to some sort of causal connection without indicating its direction.⁶⁸ Thus, democracy might cause economic development and not the other way around. Hence, one can argue that modernisation theory is an over-simplified explanation of a very complex process because it isolates too many variables that affect a democratisation process.⁶⁹

Furthermore, Przeworski and Limongi demonstrate that modernisation only helps existing democracies to survive but does not help democracy to emerge.⁷⁰ According to them, transitions are increasingly likely as per capita income of dictatorships rises, but only until it reaches a level of about \$6000. Above that, dictatorships become more stable as countries become more affluent.⁷¹ Democracies are not produced by the development of dictatorships. If they were, the rate at which dictatorships make the transition to democracy would increase with the level of development. However, research indicates that this is not the case.⁷² In other words, while the modernisation theory is wrong in thinking that development under dictatorships breeds democracies, Lipset was correct to argue that once established in a wealthy country, democracy is more likely to endure⁷³.

Nevertheless, Carles Boix and Susan Stokes used the same data as Przeworski and Limongi to show that modernisation operates in favour of both the emergence and

⁶⁶ Grugel, Jean (2002) p. 49

⁶⁷ Ibid. p. 50

⁶⁸ Rustow, Dankwart A. (1970) ‘Transitions to Democracy: Toward a Dynamic Model’ in *Comparative Politics*, vol. 2: 3, p. 342

⁶⁹ Other factors may include: mentality, culture, history, ideology etc.

⁷⁰ Przeworski, Adam and Limongi, Fernando (1997) ‘Modernization: Theories and Facts’ in *World Politics*, vol. 49: 2

⁷¹ Ibid. p. 159

⁷² Przeworski et al. (2001) ‘What Makes Democracies Endure?’ in Larry Diamond and Marc F. Plattner (eds.) *The Global Divergence of Democracies*, Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, p. 168

⁷³ Ibid. p. 177

the survival of democracy.⁷⁴ Thus, modernisation theory retains influence today through its ability to identify the link between capitalism and democracy. However, it is unable to explain why trends in democratisation are often contradictory and partial. The link between capitalism and democracy does not go so far as to explain why democracies emerge.

2.2 Historical Sociology

Historical sociology concerns the analysis of social change over a broad perspective. It uses history as an instrument by which structures are discovered. Historical sociology attempts to study the past in an attempt to determine certain patterns. In other words, by looking at the history it tries to identify trajectories of development or paths. For instance, state development to modernity through war or revolution. Its main goal is to go through history in order to explain how things have become. Historical sociology traces the transformation of the state over time, through class conflict, in order to explain how democracy has sometimes emerged. It is interested in how the relationship between the state and classes shapes the political system.⁷⁵

One of the most influential historical sociologists is Barrington Moore and his work on dictatorship and democracy. Here he examines the roles of different social groups during the transformation from agrarian to modern industrialised societies.⁷⁶ The specific aim was to trace the conditions that led to the emergence of democracy or the rise of dictatorships.⁷⁷ According to Moore, the routes to democracy or dictatorship are not alternatives that are in principle open to any society. Rather they are specific conditions of successive phases of world history.⁷⁸

In reaction to the excessively society-based accounts of political change in 1960s, other historical sociologists offered a more state-centred view. Skocpol by

⁷⁴ Boix, Carles and Stokes, Susan (2003) 'Endogenous democratization' in *World Politics*, vol. 55: 4, pp. 517-549

⁷⁵ Hobden, Stephen (1998) *International Relations and Historical Sociology – Breaking Down Boundaries*, London: Routledge

⁷⁶ Moore, Barrington (1967) *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*, Boston: Beacon Press

⁷⁷ Hobden, Stephen (1998) p. 33

⁷⁸ Moore, Barrington (1967) p. 5

looking at historical trends, for instance, argues there can be little question whether states are to be taken seriously in social scientific explanations of a wide range of phenomena. One thus has to bring the state back into politics.⁷⁹ Rueschemeyer, Stephens and Stephens, in response to the dominance of modernisation theory and based on Moore's work, see democratisation as the imposition of reforms on a capitalist state, not as an automatic outcome from the development of capitalist relations of production. Without successful and self-conscious reformist strategies on the part of the subordinated classes, capitalist states will in fact, almost inevitably be authoritarian.⁸⁰ For them historical research gives insight into conditions, and that is indispensable for developing valid causal accounts. They believe a political system of a particular country concerns a broader question of social power. By stressing the impact of three power structures – relative class power, the role of the state and the impact of transitional power structures – they look through sequences of state development to see how a political system has developed.⁸¹

The common factors with these authors are that they all agree that it is not possible to understand present-day political and social formations without an analysis of their history. Historical sociology has its strength in that it is richly grounded and explanatory. Furthermore it is not ahistorical like modernisation. De Schweinitz for instance concludes that development of democracy in the nineteenth century was a function of an unusual configuration of historical circumstances and cannot be repeated. The Euro-American route to democracy is no more. Other means must now be devised for building new democratic states.⁸² Historical sociology links democracy with conflict and sees confrontations as a normal part of the pattern of the emerging democratic order. With its emphasis on history, conflict, class and the state, historical sociology can also contribute to explanations of partial or incomplete democratisations.⁸³

⁷⁹ Skocpol, Theda (1985) 'Bringing the State Back In: Strategies of Analysis in Current Research' in Peter B. Evans et al. (eds) *Bringing the State Back In*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 28

⁸⁰ Grugel, Jean (2002) p. 54

⁸¹ Rueschemeyer, Dietrich, Stephens, Evelyn H. and Stephens, John D. (1992) *Capitalist Development & Democracy*, Cambridge: Polity Press

⁸² Schweinitz, Karl De (1964) *Industrialization and Democracy*, New York: The Free Press of Glencoe

⁸³ Grugel, Jean (2002) p. 54

Needless to say, historical sociology has its strengths, but has been the subject of criticism. In particular, it has been criticised for putting too much emphasis on structures. Przeworski argued that it was too deterministic and treats democracy as an outcome uniquely determined by conditions, and history goes on without anyone ever doing anything.⁸⁴ In other words, the success of democratisation was given by past conditions and did not depend on political actors' strategies and choices. Furthermore, empirically, historical sociology has not been able to account for the sudden democratisation in East and Central Europe and the countries of the ex-Soviet Union. Here there was little evidence of struggle for democracy or class agitation, except shortly before the collapse.⁸⁵ This resulted in a new paradigm of democratisation that focused more on agents than structures; transition theory.

2.3 Transition Theory

Transition theory argues that modernisation theory and historical sociology see the economy, history and development of a state as determining political outcomes. Transition theory, however, sees democracy as created by conscious and committed actors. Thus, democracy is not a question of waiting for a certain level of prosperity or the right moment in history, but a question of actors' choices. In other words, democracy can be created independent of the structural context.⁸⁶ Przeworski, in his critique of structural theories, argues that the protagonists in the struggle for democracy could not and did not believe that fate of their countries would be determined either by current levels of development, or by the distant past.⁸⁷

Transition theory's starting point grew out as a critique of modernisation.⁸⁸ Rustow argues that modernisation theory gets it wrong by arguing that if some conditions will help to preserve a democracy, then they will be even more essential to bring it into existence. For him, the only background condition for democracy is national unity. "It simply means that the vast majority of citizens in a democracy-to-be

⁸⁴ Przeworski, Adam (1991) *Democracy and The Market: Political and economic reforms in Eastern Europe and Latin America*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 96

⁸⁵ Grugel, Jean (2002) p. 55

⁸⁶ Ibid. p. 57

⁸⁷ Przeworski, Adam and Limongi, Fernando (1997) p. 176

⁸⁸ Grugel, Jean (2002) p. 57

must have no doubt or mental reservations as to which political community they belong to.”⁸⁹ Against this single background condition, Rustow argues that democratisation is a dynamic process and is set off by a prolonged and inconclusive political struggle.⁹⁰

The key reference for transition theory has been the seminal transitologist analysis of democratisation by Schmitter, O’Donnell and Whitehead. Here, it is a focus on the processes of democratisation by examining the interactions, pacts and bargains struck between authoritarian leaders and the democratic opposition. This leads to transition phase where institutional rules are laid down for the practice of democracy and successful transition depends on agreements between elites on both sides. Skilful leadership and a degree of luck was the key which lead to democracy.⁹¹

Transition theory offers a more political explanation of democratisation and views it as a process where actors are actively involved and the process is dependent on their choices. The common theme is the emphasis on actors and the interactions of elites rather than structures. The pacts made shape the terms of transition and those terms may not be conducive to democratisation. Its strength is its focus on actors, because democracy will never be consolidated without actors, and on processes, because democracy is never consolidated over night. By divesting democracy of its structural context, the transition perspective suggests that democracy can take root outside Western Europe and that the global uprisings in the last decades of the twentieth century were in fact struggles for democracy, like for example India and Indonesia.⁹²

Nevertheless, by mainly focusing on the transition phase and on short-term changes, transition theory fail to examine deep-rooted obstacles to democratisation over the long term. As Grugel puts it: “When democratisations go wrong it is, by

⁸⁹ Rustow (1970) p. 350

⁹⁰ Ibid. p. 352

⁹¹ Grugel (2002) pp. 57-58, O’Donnell, Guillermo and Schmitter, Philippe C. (1986) *Transitions From Authoritarian Rule: Tentative Conclusions about Uncertain Democracies*, Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, and Schmitter, Philippe, C. (1995) ‘Transitology: The Science of Art of Democratisation’ in Joseph S. Tulchin and Bernice Romero (eds.) *The Consolidation of Democracy in Latin America*, London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, p. 18

⁹² Grugel (2002) pp. 62-63

implication, because individuals ‘get it wrong’.”⁹³ Its explanation of why outcomes are different places all the emphasis on leadership or the correct policies being implemented. This explanation is inadequate because it leaves out the roles of structural factors like culture, history and external actors. Furthermore, transition theory has been accused of being very elitist in the sense that it views democracy as a set of procedures for government negotiated by and between political leaders. It also consigns the majority of the people to the role as mere bystanders. Empirical evidence points to the role of popular struggles and civil society in some transitions as the determining element in unleashing democratisation in the first place.⁹⁴

2.4 Post-Conflict Democratisation

Building on transition theory, there has also been a debate on how to ‘design’ a democracy. Many countries in the transition phase to a democracy often experience conflict or ethnic bloodshed. As a consequence, researchers have tried to establish how to avoid conflict and introduce a more peaceful transition that does not exacerbate old tensions. Edward Mansfield, Jack Snyder and Thomas Carothers are perhaps the most famous researchers within this field. Their debate on sequentialism versus gradualism has dominated the discussion on how to best tackle the problems facing states in a transition phase from authoritarian rule to democracy.

Troubled by violent conflict breaking out in former authoritarian states, Mansfield and Snyder argue that democratising states are in fact more conflict-prone than stable autocracies.⁹⁵ Their research shows that transitional countries that were comparatively well endowed with the prerequisites of democratic politics, such as competent and impartial state institutions, were unlikely to detour into violence. Rather than pushing states to democratise before the necessary preconditions are in place, one should pay special attention to fostering those preconditions. Their general rule is to start the democratisation process by building the institutions that democracy

⁹³ Grugel (2002) p. 61

⁹⁴ Grugel (2002) p. 61 and Baker, Gideon (1999) ‘The Taming of the Idea of Civil Society’ in *Democratization*, vol. 6: 3, p. 14

⁹⁵ Mansfield, E. and Snyder, J. (1995) “Democratization and the Danger of War,” in *International Security*, vol. 20 pp. 5-38

requires, and then encouraging mass political participation and electoral competition only after these institutions have begun to take root.⁹⁶

As a response to Mansfield and Snyder's sequentialism, Carothers argues that gradually introducing key components of political competition is a better alternative than putting off democracy until institutions are in place. He believes that the idea of sequencing is mistaken because rule-of-law development and autocracy go poorly together. For Carothers, the lines of accountability between citizens and the state that elections help to create, however imperfectly, fortify efforts to hold public officials to law, which is a central part of rule-of-law development. Gradualism is different from sequencing in that it does not put off elections until the institutions have begun to take root, but only postpones these at most for several years. This allows in-depth negotiations between opposing political groups so that the main political forces can get used to dealing with one another peacefully and agree on the rules of the game before potentially divisive elections are held.⁹⁷

Post-conflict democratisation theory differs from transition theory in that it focuses more on institutions than agents and isolates the democratisation process after a transition has begun. Both these approaches have faith in the elite facilitating and building a democracy, but they do not account for how citizens who have lived for decades under a non-democratic regime suddenly become democratic. As Törnquist argues, the technocratic approach of designing institutions that will facilitate a peaceful democratisation process is both empirically and theoretically flawed. Autocratic leaders have been, and will in the future, be masters at being perceived as democratic through building the 'right' institutions, but still maintaining full control over the state.⁹⁸ While both approaches are correct in emphasising the transition process itself, a democracy is not built only 'by getting the institutions right'. It is just as important to emphasise popular capacity building and organisation building and a

⁹⁶ Mansfield, E. and Snyder, J. (1995)

⁹⁷ Carothers, Tom (2007) 'How Democracies Emerge: The "Sequencing" Fallacy' in *Journal of Democracy*, vol. 18: 1, pp. 12-27

⁹⁸ Törnquist, Olle (2009) 'Introduction: The Problem is Representation! Towards an Analytical Framework' in Olle Törnquist, Neil Webster, Kristian Stokke (eds.) *Rethinking Popular Representation*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 3-4

government that is ready to dedicate itself to facilitating popular representations. In other words, institutions should utilise demands from below.⁹⁹

It is worth noting that while none of the approaches try to explain why a democracy emerge, they can provide important tools for analysing why a country undergoing a transition to democracy either fails or succeeds to democratise. They can be viewed as complimentary framework to analyse a state after the democratisation process has begun and can further explain why a state fails to democratise. This is crucial for the analysis of Eritrea.

2.5 An Alternative Framework:

Towards an Eclectic Model for Analysing Democratisation In Eritrea

The different theories explored so far put their emphasis on several different, yet, important factors. They shed light on different aspects of regime breakdown, transition and immediate post-transition politics. Modernisation theory's strength is its ability to show the link between democracy and economic development. Historical sociology emphasises that it is not possible to understand present-day social formations without an analysis of their history. With its emphasis on history, conflict, class and the state, historical sociology can also contribute to explanations of partial or incomplete democratisations. Transition theory stresses the role of actors and understands that without choices, democratisation will never succeed. Post-conflict democratisation highlights the initial transition period and how the institutions are designed as important factors for the democratisation process to avoid any form of reversal.

Nevertheless, as mentioned in the introduction of this chapter, on their own none of these theories manage to capture the whole picture of any country in transition, not least Eritrea. Democratisation is a complex and risky process, and even if it commences with transition it does not always end in democratic consolidation. Most of the theories discussed in this chapter have placed their main focus on

⁹⁹ Webster, Neil, Stokke, Kristian and Törnquist, Olle (2009) 'From Research to Practice: Towards the Democratic Institutionalisation of Nodes for Improved Representation' in Olle Törnquist, Neil Webster, and Kristian Stokke (eds.) *Rethinking Popular Representation*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan

explaining why democracies emerge, but not why they fail. Furthermore, none of them, on their own, explains sufficiently why some may start out as democracy, but during the democratisation process fails to consolidate. Hence, none of these theories can on its own give a comprehensive picture of why a state succeeds or fails to democratise

Thus a need for a more holistic approach exists if one desires to fully analyse a state's democratisation process. In order to create such a framework, this thesis will base itself on the theories discussed and create a more eclectic model for analysing democratisation. The model first and foremost builds on the insights of historical sociology. In other words, history and the structures it creates are central for explaining outcomes. However, instead of analysing only class struggles and conflicts, the model will put its emphasis on actors. The contribution from transition theory, that democratisation is a dynamic process, shaped by human behaviour and choices is thus the second central element in this model. Modernisation theory have been concerned with understanding why democratisation begins. So far, this chapter has been very critical to modernisation theory, but its long-term perspective is worth following. Democratisation requires collective action. A strong working class or other subaltern groups that organise to promote political change is further strengthened if a state is more economically developed. In Eritrea, the large majority of citizens are peasants, and one can thus argue that peasants' involvement in politics is more likely if they live under economically developed conditions. It is important to at least acknowledge this fact when analysing a state's democratisation process.

Additionally, the insights garnered from post-conflict democratisation theory, namely that one has to look at how democratic institutions are implemented, will also be incorporated. How the institutions work in further promoting, not only a democratic leadership, but also a democratic culture amongst their population is crucial in consolidating democracy. The model will thus pay extra attention to the choices taken during a transition. To summarise, actors are necessary to analyse because they are the only ones who can democratise a state. But rather than analysing them only during the transition period, this model will use the insights from historical

sociology and see how structures shaped their choices and mentality. Such structures include culture, history, economic development and international politics.

To do this, the model makes use of three analytical dimensions to analyse the democratisation process, namely the state, society and external relations. This is based on the analytical frameworks of Rueschemeyer, Stephens and Stephens and Grugel.¹⁰⁰ In both these works they propose a three-dimensional framework, but whereas the former focus on power and class struggles the model used here will focus on actors. It is more similar to Grugel's framework, but where Grugel believes in the concept of globalisation, this model will place more emphasis on the state's relationship with the international society and other states, in particular its neighbouring states. The aim of this section is to review the three analytical dimensions. The assumption is that a democratisation process is affected by several factors. To explain the success or failure of such a process one has to analyse how these three dimensions have influenced it. The construction of these dimensions is gathered from the readings on democratisation theory. It is worth noting that these analytical dimensions are suggestive and the author will return to the importance of them in the conclusion. This chapter will now proceed to review these dimensions, relating them to the case of Eritrea, and justifying why these three are important when analysing the success or failure of a democratisation process.

2.5.1 The State

According to Lindberg, there is emerging consensus that successful democratisation requires settling the issues of how to form the idea of a single nation and how to agree on the legitimacy of the territorial state.¹⁰¹ But the state is more than just its nationhood and borders. It is who controls it and the choices they make. And it is at the top-level that important decisions are taken. The ones who are in power are the ones with both the authority and resources to make the fundamental changes. In a democratic state, the state itself is a major actor and it must prove to its citizens that it

¹⁰⁰ Rueschemeyer, Dietrich, Stephens, E, and Stephens J (1992) and Grugel, Jean (2002) pp. 68-139

¹⁰¹ Lindberg, Staffan I. (2006) *Democracy and Elections in Africa*, Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, p. 154

is both effective and real. It is at state level that political decisions are realised and the right institutions and policies can facilitate a better democratic transition.

The state is the embodiment and essence of political power and is vital to democratisation in a number of ways. First, democratisation is about building a democratic state. This includes changes within the state: who controls the state policies through representative change and the range of state responsibilities. Second, democratisation implies that the state makes promises that people will live more secure lives and the judicial system works impartially. For this to happen, states need to be able to carry out complex functions. Third, states are actors with interests and the power to invest in these interests. As a result, states may have interest in either subverting or promoting the democratisation process.

Grugel emphasises that the centrality of state culture, practices and embedded legacies, is a means to understand why democratisation projects so often fail to live up to their initial promise.¹⁰² Historical sociology argues that previous state structures and regime forms shape later political developments.¹⁰³ It is thus important to look at how both previous regime structures and possible conflicts and other historical events shape the democratisation process. Eritrea is a totalitarian state and the agent of analysis is thus the government party, the PFDJ, since they have total control over the state apparatus. The PFDJ has its origins from the liberation war and it is thus important to analyse how this period has shaped the PFDJ's outlook, ideology and policies. Here are general characteristics, history, how they managed to mobilise Eritreans and how this has affected the state's perception of autonomy and other influences. Furthermore, one has to analyse not only how the history has shaped later political development but also look at the choices made by decision-makers during the actual democratisation process.

2.5.2 *Society*

Whereas the state has the power and resources to facilitate a democratisation, the society has the power to affect and pressure the decision makers. Bratton states that the democratisation in the 1990s in Africa occurred mainly because ordinary Africans

¹⁰² Grugel (2002) p. 91

¹⁰³ Rueschemeyer, Dietrich, Stephens, E. and Stephens, J (1992) p. 76

began to demand greater accountability from their leaders.¹⁰⁴ Democracy describes a particular relationship between the state and society: popular control over public affairs. Grugel argues that democracy represents a shift in the power balance within civil society and as a result, any explanation of democratisation must pay attention to the role of mass participation and the struggles for rights and citizenship.¹⁰⁵ In his framework he emphasises the civil society. It is a means for checking and controlling the state and a tool to push the state towards deeper reforms. A weak civil society implies a thin democracy, where patterns of participation are low and where the state has few obligations to listen to society.¹⁰⁶ In Eritrea, there is no civil society, since all popular organisations must register with the government. The consequence is lack of holding the government accountable, and needs to be further explored.

Lindberg supports a theory that a strong and active civil society is the outcome of liberalisation and electoral practice and not their cause.¹⁰⁷ But looking at society as a whole, it is clear that movements, associations and large groups of normal citizens, which are recognised as carrying out upsurges against an authoritarian regime, were formed long before transitions and arose during period of severe repression.¹⁰⁸ Society is defined as a community of people, and the Eritrean society is thus the whole Eritrean community of people. In a democracy it is the people who, at least in theory, rule the country. The point here is that civil society is often characterised in more structured forms as controlling the state actions in form of checking and balancing¹⁰⁹ the state's decisions. But looking at it in broader terms it is also possible to analyse how a country's society act, behave and organise also during repression and or if no independent civil society is allowed to exist. Eritrea is a peasant community and thorough exploration of how this community works, can improve an understanding of the democratisation process in the Red Sea country.

¹⁰⁴ Bratton, Michael (2009) 'Sub-Saharan Africa' in Christian Haerpfer et al. (eds.) *Democratization*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 341

¹⁰⁵ Grugel, Jean (2002) p. 66

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.* p. 115

¹⁰⁷ Lindberg, Staffan (2006) p. 151

¹⁰⁸ Baker, Gideon (1999) p. 14

¹⁰⁹ This thesis defines checks and balance as holding someone accountable. This term originates from the idea of separation of powers, from Montesquieu's tripartite governments, but in this study is used more loosely in the sense of holding someone accountable.

Hence, one has to look at the country's society in a more historical perspective to see how that shape later political developments as well. Additionally, one will need to analyse the pressure from the society during the democratisation process as well. It is clear that many citizens have strong grievances and their demands can influence the democratisation process as well. As the society can be seen as a counterpart to the state, similar things will be looked at, general characteristics, history, mobilisation and society's autonomy and influences.

2.5.3 External Relations

Most analyses of democratisation have treated it as primarily a national issue by paying little attention to the influences from the international environment. The factors that were attributed explanatory power belonged mainly to the domestic social and political life, implying that democratisation had little to do with the forces operating outside national borders.¹¹⁰ However, as Evans et al. argues, it is not enough simply to trace processes over time within national boundaries.¹¹¹ This framework bases itself on two frameworks that pay attention to the international context. Rueschemeyer et al. argue that states do not exist in isolation from each other. It is only as a part of a system of states the modern state and its development can be understood.¹¹² Grugel emphasises the global character of the international system and that the fate of democratisation is largely bound up with globalisation.¹¹³ Lindberg, who states that, at least in Africa, international support for elections have facilitated a move towards better and more stable democracies, contributing to the experience of greater freedoms for a greater number of people, further confirms this.¹¹⁴

The focus on globalisation and how democracy has turned into the only legitimate form of political domination is thus central. It is central in that there are forces outside a state that influence the domestic actors' choices. Powerful states

¹¹⁰ Yilmaz, Hakan (2009) 'The International Context' in Haerpfer et al. (eds.) *Democratization*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 92

¹¹¹ Evans, Peter B., Rueschemeyer, D, and Skocpol, T (1985) 'On the Road toward a more adequate understanding of the State' in Peter B. Evans, D. Rueschemeyer, T. Skocpol (eds.) *Bringing the State Back In*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 350

¹¹² Rueschemeyer, Dietrich, Stephens E. and Stephens, J (1992) p. 69

¹¹³ Grugel, Jean (2002) pp. 66-67

¹¹⁴ Lindberg, Staffan I. (2006) pp. 157-158

seeking their own agenda, transnational non-governmental organisations and international agencies all have the means and power to both influence the state and society and assist in easing the transition process. According to Whitehead, the key actors involved in democratisation may have been overwhelmingly domestic, but their strategies and calculations have often been strongly shaped by the pressure of externally designed rules and structures.¹¹⁵ It is thus important to see to what extent the international community has contributed to political development in Eritrea. This can also give a better understanding of the Eritrea's reactions and perceptions to foreign influence.

Nevertheless, Gleditsch and Ward found that the probability that an autocracy will become a democracy markedly increases when most of its neighbouring states are democracies, or experiencing transitions to democracy.¹¹⁶ Thus, while international factors are important to evaluate, regional relations are just as important. Neighbouring states can be enemies or allies, have destabilising effects on the democratisation process, and affect trade and the state policies of its neighbours. Eritrea's relationship with Ethiopia, a relationship characterised by hatred and violence, is thus another factor that needs to be explored. As a result, state development must be analysed by also looking at its external relations. It is important to understand the difference between external policy and external relations. While Eritrea is itself exclusively responsible for its policies, external relations entail a complicated relationship where different actors' behaviour affects each other. That is how international forces and regional actors try to influence domestic state policies, but also how domestic state policies react to external pressures.

2.6 Conclusion

This chapter has critically analysed some of the most influential democratisation theories and argued that while all of them have some stronghold, on their own they cannot explain the complexities involved in a democratisation process.

¹¹⁵ Whitehead, Lawrence (1991) 'Democracy by Convergence and Southern Europe: A Comparative Politics Perspective' in Geoffrey Pridham (ed.) *The International Context of Regime Transition in Southern Europe*, Leicester, Leicester University Press, pp 45-46

¹¹⁶ Gleditsch, Kristian S. and Ward, Michael D. (2006) 'Diffusion and the International Context of Democratization' in *International Organisation*, vol. 60: 4, p. 929

Modernisation theory identifies economic development as the benchmark for an emerging democratic order and adapts a long-term strategy of analysis. Historical sociology emphasise the centrality of the invisible structures for understanding any political order. Transition theory argues that if elites and leaders are able to engage with a view to achieve compromise, democracy will eventually succeed. Finally, post-conflict democratisation theory calls attention to the importance of how a democracy should be designed after the transition. None of them are insignificant in an analysis of democratisation, but none of them manage to capture the whole picture. In addition, none of them pay sufficient attention to factors outside the domestic structures.

As a solution, this chapter has proposed a more eclectic model of analysis using three analytical dimensions: the state, society and external relations. By stressing the importance of actors and their choices, but by looking at it in a more long term perspective the model bases itself first and foremost on transition theory and historical sociology in order to analyse democratisation. In addition, it takes into account the decisions made after a transition. In a democracy, the people are central and whilst the transition theory does not pay sufficient attention to mass participation, the model still bases itself on the fact that actors are central. And both post-conflict democratisation theory and historical sociology have paid attention to the citizens. Thus the society is included as another important actor. Furthermore, it is clear that no state acts totally isolated from outside forces. It is hence important to include the international context in one's analysis. In other words, the character of the required analysis in all three dimensions is historical and sequential, with the focus on actors who potentially influence the democratisation process.

3. The State – The Liberation war and its legacies

The ruling party, the PFDJ, controls the state in Eritrea: They control the government and the few ‘NGOs’. And without an independent judiciary, autonomous civil society and any opposition in the country there are no checks and balances at work in Eritrea. When analysing the state in Eritrea, it is therefore vital that one analyses the ruling party and their political culture. The PFDJ has its roots in the liberation war where it was called the EPLF. Many of its central figures have been with the party since the beginning of the liberation struggle. As mentioned in the previous chapter, it is important to look at previous regime structures and conflicts to see how they have shaped the current government in the democratisation process. In this case it is the liberation war and how that has influenced the PFDJ that will be an important element. This chapter will first give a brief account on how the EPLF worked during the liberation war. It will then continue and analyse the EPLF/PFDJ in government. It will argue that the ruling party has failed to transform itself into a *civilian* party. The reasons for why the state has failed to democratise can be found in the liberation war. The ruling party is still characterised by the same war-mentality it had during the liberation struggle.

3.1 The Liberation War

The Eritrean liberation war began in 1961 when Eritrean autonomy was being gradually dismantled and Ethiopia’s intentions of annexing Eritrea became clear. The early years of the liberation war were dominated by the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF), but due to differing views on liberation strategy and ideology, four groups left the ELF and formed the Popular Liberation Forces (PLF), which later developed into the Eritrean People’s Liberation Front (EPLF). The ELF was multi-religious and multi-ethnic and this in turn exacerbated factionalism within the ELF.¹¹⁷ The lack of unity within the ELF made it weaker and less efficient in its struggle for independence.

¹¹⁷ Iyob, Ruth (1995)

The liberation war was not only liberation movements fighting the different Ethiopian regimes, but also a fight over who had the hegemony over Eritrean liberation forces. As a result, the years between the early 1970s and early 1980s witnessed sporadic wars between the ELF and the EPLF. In 1981, the EPLF emerged victorious, expelling the ELF into Sudan. Thereafter, the EPLF set about presenting itself as the sole legitimate expression of nationalist aspirations.¹¹⁸ The main reason the ELF fell apart during the liberation war was ethnic division. Based on this experience, the EPLF wanted a highly united, disciplined and centralised authoritarian structure devoid of any type of religious or ethnic sentiments. Therefore, the EPLF had hegemony of the Eritreans liberation war and could define the nationalist narrative of the Eritreans seeking independence. The success of the EPLF in suppressing its internal rivals and external enemy enabled it to exert stable control over the population and territory. Thus opening up access to the goods produced within the territory, rendering it the sole rulers.¹¹⁹ Furthermore, the highly united character, which focused on being Eritrean rather than the ethnic or religious identity, made the EPLF a strong force with support from all over Eritrea. The EPLF's main achievement, according to Connell, was the mobilisation of the people from nine distinct ethnic groups into a united, highly motivated and well-disciplined force.¹²⁰ It mobilised the Eritreans through a social revolution. It focused on abolishing what the EPLF saw as primitive ethnic traditions, curbing the importance of the Orthodox Church and strengthening the role of women. All these underpinned the attempt at reaching the higher goal of national unity, since it would break down other identity categories such as ethnicity, religion and gender. As a result, national unity and focus on a single goal (independence) was translated into uncritical loyalty and unquestioning obedience.¹²¹

Another striking feature of the EPLF was the clandestine nature of its operations. This was apparent long before EPLF's formation. When the 1958 strike in Asmara was violently suppressed by the Eritrean unionist government in collaboration with their allies in Ethiopia, all avenues of peaceful resistance were closed. Eritrean

¹¹⁸ Pool, David (2001)

¹¹⁹ Bereketeab, Redie (2007) p. 409

¹²⁰ Connell, Dan (2005a) p. 70

¹²¹ Hedru, Debessay (2003) p. 435

nationalists were left without any alternatives but to go underground and secretly organise the pursuit of the struggle in a more clandestine fashion.¹²² Throughout the war of independence, a clandestine inner party, called the Eritrean People's Revolutionary Party (EPRP), secretly led the EPLF. This structure was headed by Isaias and was established in the beginning of the 1970s. Isaias was strongly influenced by Maoist ideology and principles of 'democratic centralism'. The EPRP worked as an inner decision-making unit, providing ideological guidance to the struggle and defining the premises for EPLF's operational policies. The EPRP secretly convened ahead of every important EPLF congress or gathering, deciding on the formulation of the EPLF programme and putting the 'right' individuals in place for the so-called 'elected' positions in the EPLF.¹²³

Influenced by the Chinese, any EPRP or EPLF members who broke the rules would be punished mercilessly and then rehabilitated.¹²⁴ The EPLF could be ruthless in dealing with dissenters. In 1974, it executed at least 11 dissidents. The victims objected to the use of force to suppress criticism. The leadership's actions set the tone for the way in which Eritrea society was mobilised by the leadership during the armed struggle.¹²⁵ Anyone opposing the EPLF's decisions was perceived as an enemy, no matter how high-ranking the person was. Because there were other groups fighting for Eritrean independence, there were many violent internal conflicts. It was a war of who had the right to represent the Eritrean liberation war. As a result, the legitimate questioning of authority was regarded as a threat to the very survival of the organisation and was automatically placed on the security agenda. In order to ensure loyalty to EPLF, members were subjected to systematic indoctrination and intimidation. This again, Kibreab argues, produced obedient, intolerant and atomised cadres led by a few individuals who were not accountable to anyone. The shunning of accountability was mostly under the pretext of the threat of insecurity.¹²⁶

¹²² Kibreab, Gaim (2009a) p. 147

¹²³ Tronvoll, Kjetil (2009) p. 48

¹²⁴ Connell, Dan (2005a) p. 72

¹²⁵ Human Rights Watch (2009) p. 13

¹²⁶ Kibreab, Gaim (2009a) p. 147

A fourth feature of the EPLF during the liberation war was its strategy of self-reliance. While the Eritrean unionists and their Ethiopian allies were supported by the two superpowers during the Cold War, the EPLF had only themselves to rely on. The EPLF's departure point was that any outside support would ultimately lead to external interference.¹²⁷ By the 1980s, the EPLF had developed the strategy of self-reliance to a level probably never achieved by any liberation movement before or since. As time wore on, spontaneity gave way to the conscious development of the principle, such that it became a distinguishing feature of the EPLF.¹²⁸ During the war, the EPLF's self-sufficiency strategy was very effectively. According to Kibreab, it was actually one of the factors that contributed to the survival and growth of the EPLF despite the unfavourable international situation.¹²⁹ It is worth noting, however, that the EPLF received financial support from the diaspora as well as international NGOs. Self-sufficiency was not only self-reliance in the sense that it did not receive anything from external sources; it was also in the neutral sense of partnership rather than dependence.¹³⁰

Eventually, the EPLF gained more and more control over Eritrean areas and in May 1991, the EPLF threw out the last remaining outposts in the country and the capital Asmara was liberated. In 1993 Eritrea gained its *de jure* independence after a referendum and the EPLF as the dominant Eritrean force took the seat as a provisional government until a new constitution had been written and implemented and elections had been held.¹³¹ The EPLF's principles of national unity, self-reliance and the clandestine nature as well as the war-mentality of dealing with enemies were now to be transformed into a civilian party and a culture of peace. In 1997 the Constitution was ratified, but, according to the government, due to the second war with Ethiopia (1998-2000) it has not been implemented. All elections have been postponed

¹²⁷ Kibreab, Gaim (2009a) p. 172

¹²⁸ Tesfai, Alemseged (2003) 'Land & Liberation in Eritrea: Reflecting on the work of Lionel Cliffe' in *Review of African Political Economy*, vol. 30:96, p. 249

¹²⁹ Kibreab, Gaim (2009a) p. 173

¹³⁰ *Ibid.* p. 173

¹³¹ Tronvoll, Kjetil (2009) p. 136

indefinitely.¹³² The remaining parts of this chapter will now look at how the EPLF/PFDJ dealt with the four abovementioned aspects.

3.2 EPLF/PFDJ's characteristic - National unity

The EPLF's process of forging an Eritrean nationality during the liberation war was in some respects well advanced. Neither the religious or ethnic hostilities, nor the pressures of the absolutist state that controlled Eritrea, were strong enough to contain the emergence of widely diffused and popular Eritrean nationalism. Nevertheless, the process of forming a national identity was not without tensions. The character of the Eritrean nationalism that emerged was, as Makki observes, increasingly conditioned by the imperatives of order and discipline.¹³³

After independence, the EPLF, learning from past experiences, called for unity of all ethnic groups, regions, religions and classes under its exclusive leadership. Because the EPLF successfully quashed its internal rivals and external enemies during the liberation war, there was neither the incentive nor the compulsion to open the corridors of power and share them with others. After all, that power had been earned through literal sweat and blood.¹³⁴ The provisional government declared that Eritrea and its mass organisations were open to all individuals, regardless of their previous political affiliations, provided they renounced their previous political convictions and embraced the EPLF.¹³⁵ As mentioned above, ethnic and religious tensions caused the ELF to fall apart and EPLF's ability to unite religious and ethnic groups was a key to its success. Consistent with the EPLF-fighter ethic, heterogeneity was perceived as being divisive and was undesirable. As a result, the government sought to deny the heterogeneity of Eritrean society.¹³⁶

The focus on national unity is very clearly exemplified in the PFDJ's *National Charter for Eritrea*. The Charter, ratified at the PFDJ's third congress in 1994, states six basic goals for the future of Eritrea; national harmony, political democracy,

¹³² Connell, Dan (2005a)

¹³³ Makki, Fouad (1996) 'Nationalism, State Formation and the Public Sphere: Eritrea 1991-1996' in *Review of African Political Economy*, vol. 23: 70 p. 478

¹³⁴ Bereketeab, Redie (2007) p. 409

¹³⁵ Kibreab, Gaim (2009a) p. 187

¹³⁶ Ibid.

economic and social development, social justice, cultural revival, and regional and international cooperation. These six goals will be pursued through the means of different principal guidelines where national unity is declared as the paramount guideline to which all work and policies will be aligned. All divisive attitudes and activities are rejected and places national unity above everything else.¹³⁷ National unity is thus the EPLF/PFDJ's *core value*. One of the prime policies of the PFDJ government, in order to further unite Eritrea has been the implementation of compulsory national service for all men and women when they reach the age of eighteen. Under normal circumstances, the national service is supposed to last eighteen months, but after the border-war with Ethiopia in 1998-2000, it is now indefinite.¹³⁸ By putting youth from the different ethnic groups together under military order to fight for and defend their common motherland, Eritrea tries to foster national unity and eliminate sub-national feelings. This will, according to the PFDJ, enhance and cement the national spirit that was created during the liberation war.¹³⁹

The emphasis on national unity was an advantage for the EPLF in wartime and what Kibreab calls, a “necessary contingency in an ethnically heterogeneous and impoverished country.” Nevertheless, post-independence, national unity has created policies that have not only denied ethnic groups the protection of their cultural or minority rights but also banned many religions and only allowing four (Lutheran, Orthodox, Catholic and Islam) to exist. If these four religions do in fact make statements that the government finds to pose a threat to the principle of national unity, it will intervene like it did when the Orthodox Church leaders protested against human rights violations and tried to assert the church's autonomy. As a result, the patriarch was put under house arrest in 2005 and a government-controlled patriarch took his place.¹⁴⁰

More importantly, the PFDJ has banned all political parties and postponed elections under the banner of national unity as it would divide the people rather than

¹³⁷ Tronvoll, Kjetil (1998b) 'The Process of national building in post-war Eritrea: created from below or directed from above?' In *Journal of Modern African Studies*, vol. 36: 3, p. 462

¹³⁸ Human Rights Watch (2009) pp. 43-44

¹³⁹ Tronvoll, Kjetil (1999) p. 1045

¹⁴⁰ Kibreab, Gaim (2009a) p. 92

unite them. As a consequence, national unity based on exclusion is not a step towards democratisation - it is a step away from it. Needless to say, the implementation of national unity is very vague in the Eritrean society, this is because policies and decisions are often created behind closed doors.

3.3 History of dominating - Clandestine nature of the party

In the name of national unity the EPLF created an ideology that emphasised the centrality of the leadership as the body that could realise EPLF's historic mission. In the post-liberation period the central figure Isaias' grip on the body politic grew even wider and tighter with the concentration of the reins of power in the office of the president.¹⁴¹ At the EPLF's third congress in 1994, when it morphed into the PFDJ, Isaias also convinced many veterans to step aside from the leadership in order to bring new blood into the political movement. Needless to say, he rarely used the front's newly elected bodies to decide issues. Instead the PFDJ's 19-member executive council spent most of its time discussing how to implement policies determined elsewhere.¹⁴²

The PFDJ copied the EPLF's operational forms during the liberation struggle, but with one minor difference: there was no organised party providing the guidance – no collective body, however secret, operating behind the scenes. There was only one man and his personally selected advisers.¹⁴³ In this respect, the EPLF's operational form during the liberation struggle, when the clandestine EPRP had 'guided' the organisation, is similar to that of the post-independence period where the president and his advisers 'guide' the government. The same was true of the state. Though the new government had the appearance of a separation of powers, it was an illusion. The cabinet did not provide a forum for debate or decision-making. It served mainly as a clearing-house to determine how policies created elsewhere would be put into practice.¹⁴⁴ This was also the case with regional and local stakeholders.¹⁴⁵ Furthermore, while the process leading up to the draft constitution was carried out in

¹⁴¹ Mengisteab, Kidane and Yohannes, Okbazaghi (2005) p. 11

¹⁴² Connell, Dan (2003)

¹⁴³ Connell, Dan (2005a) p. 73

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Tronvoll, Kjetil (1998a)

an open and inclusive manner, Tronvoll states that the secretary to the commission personally oversaw that the final version was in line with the interests and ideology of the EPLF/PFDJ. As such “it did not necessarily reflect the opinions and interests advanced by the Eritrean public during [the constitution making] process.”¹⁴⁶

What was a clandestine feature of a liberation movement has become even more secretive post-independence. By centralising everything around Isaias and his closest, there is no room for voicing disagreement, because it is difficult to know who to talk to. Thus, over-centralisation, as Mengisteab argues, hampers the development of institutions throughout the government.¹⁴⁷ The secrecy around the central decision-making personalities during the liberation war was most likely a smart move because of the fear of hostile infiltrators, however in post-independence it is a major obstacle to an open and tolerant Eritrean society.

3.4 Mobilising Eritreans - Dealing with dissent

The Eritrean government claim that they are the true representatives of the Eritrean people’s and state’s national interests, justifying this with the result of the referendum of national independence.¹⁴⁸ In fact, the EPLF/PFDJ does not believe that anyone else is in a position to do a better job.¹⁴⁹ They had fought for national independence and defeated not only Ethiopia, but also other liberation movements. The internal war confirmed in the minds of the EPLF’s leadership that there was no room for debate and dissent in the vortex of competing nationalisms, and in the face of a powerful enemy. Nevertheless, the perspective that enemies were still out there was still a dominant narrative in the Eritrean government. The secrecy and internal strife during the liberation war was still present post-independence. It is the legacy of conflict among Eritreans that informs the government’s current intolerance of dissidence.¹⁵⁰ The people could not be trusted to rule themselves, especially because enemies and spies could manipulate them against their interests.

¹⁴⁶ Tronvoll, Kjetil (2009) p. 33

¹⁴⁷ Mengisteab, Kidane (2009) p. 49

¹⁴⁸ Kibreab, Gaim (2009a) p. 160

¹⁴⁹ Reid, Richard (2009b) p. 211

¹⁵⁰ O’Kane, David and Hepner, Tricia R. (2009a) p. xx

Kibreab writes that the Eritrean government has exhibited an unmistakable appetite to over-securitise issues.¹⁵¹ Thus, any type of opposition is put on the security agenda and is repressed on the basis of national security. As the EPLF/PFDJ had the monopoly to rule, it expected Eritreans to follow it just like they did during the liberation war. The logic of coercion as an instrument to ensure dominance during the liberation war was, according to Bereketeab, replicated during the post-independence period. In particular during the political crisis that arose in the aftermath of the second war with Ethiopia where those who entertained critical views were forcibly silenced without their case being proved in the court of law.¹⁵²

Political pluralism and debate flourished briefly in the late 1940s, as part of the underground nationalist movement in the late 1960s and early 1970s; and then even more briefly in 2000-2001.¹⁵³ However, the EPLF/PFDJ has allowed little room for discussion or dissent. This is probably best exemplified with the protest of the G-15. In the aftermath of the second war with Ethiopia, an internal dissent movement within the government party started to question the authority of, and decisions made by the President Isaias, saying that he had forgotten the basic goals and the EPLF/PFDJ's core value. An initial group of 15 top-level government officials coordinated their critique of the president, thus called the G-15. Eritrean independent newspapers and civil society representatives joined in to challenge the monopolisation of power by the PFDJ and the lack of democratic development in the country. This process was terminated in September 2001, when the president ordered a nation-wide crack down, arresting hundreds of critics, closing down all private media and curtailing all civil society activities.¹⁵⁴ It was of course a hard blow for the government that the criticism had originated within its own party. In the eyes of the Isaias, after the war and with many opposing the leadership, now was the time to focus on the core value. The nation should first be made to stand firmly on both its feet before any democratic

¹⁵¹ Kibreab, Gaim (2009a) p. 189

¹⁵² Bereketeab, Redie (2007) p. 409

¹⁵³ Ellingson, Lloyd (1977) 'The Emergence of Political Parties in Eritrea, 1941-1950' in *Journal of African History*, vol. 18: 2, pp. 261-281, Gebre-Medhin, Jordan (1989) *Peasants and Nationalism in Eritrea. A Critique of Ethiopian Studies*, Lawrenceville: The Red Sea Press, Connell, Dan (2005b) *Conversations with Eritrean Political Prisoners*, Trenton: The Red Sea Press

¹⁵⁴ Tronvoll, Kjetil (2009) pp. 12-13

development could commence. And it was the President and his closest that were the right people for this. The mental set-up led to a kind of political culture where any criticism of the leadership, difference of opinion, and attempts to reform was perceived as betraying the nation.¹⁵⁵

The establishment of the Special Court in 1996 was a clear sign that the Eritrean leadership had similar ways of dealing with dissent post-independence. This court, whose judges answer only to the President, deals with economic and political crimes. Most of the people were arrested without due process, and persons who had been tried and freed by the civil courts were later re-arrested and sentenced by the Special Court.¹⁵⁶ Furthermore, many of those arrested have been subject to severe torture and unbearable conditions.¹⁵⁷ The people arrested are often being accused of posing a threat to national security and the government. Just like the EPLF during the liberation war perceived dissent as a threat and the people voicing it as enemies, the PFDJ still perceives dissent as enemies attempting to destroy what the government is trying to build. Like a stubborn child, the Eritrean government believes it can do it all by itself.

3.5 Autonomy and influences - Self-reliance

The EPLF's point of departure was that an organisation that received foreign aid or grants, would never be able to exercise political independence without external interference. According to Kibreab, the same is true of the PFDJ today. Behind every donation, they assume there is a sinister ulterior motive.¹⁵⁸ Since independence, the Eritrean government has justified its rule and right to sovereignty by displaying the solidarity of its people and embracing the concept of self-reliance in the face of aid-dependence.¹⁵⁹ In the Eritrean government's view, the voluntary sector – civil society and international NGOs' interventions – invariably breed dependency.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁵ Bereketeab, Redie (2007) p. 417

¹⁵⁶ Hedru, Debassay (2003) p. 437

¹⁵⁷ For details see Tronvoll, Kjetil (2009), Human Rights Watch (2009) and International Crisis Group (2010) *Eritrea: The Siege State, Crisis Group Africa Report 163*, Nairobi and Brussels: International Crisis Group

¹⁵⁸ Kibreab, Gaim (2009a) p. 172

¹⁵⁹ Poole, Amanda (2009) 'The Youth Has Gone From our Soil: Place and Politics in Refugee Resettlement and Agrarian Development' in David O'Kane and Tricia R. Hepner (eds.) *Biopolitics, militarism, and development: Eritrea in the twenty-first century*, New York: Berghahn Books p. 39

¹⁶⁰ The State of Eritrea, Ministry of Finance letter to UN on 'Extension of Current UNDAF and Preparation for Another new UNDAF', 26 January 2011

Self-reliance was a strategy during the liberation war in the context of fighting a foe. It is therefore also important to see today's strategy of self-reliance in the context of enemies. Today, the Eritrean government perceives the Ethiopian government as its biggest threat to survival (this will be analysed further later in the thesis). In addition there is rhetoric of infiltrators from Ethiopia, the CIA, and so forth, that will try to destroy the very existence of Eritrea. Whether this threat is real or not is not important. But just as the EPLF managed to successfully fight off powerful enemies with its self-reliance strategy, the PFDJ believes that it cannot trust anyone else and that self-reliance is an appropriate strategy post-independence.

Self-reliance is not just rhetoric. Eritrea relies on its own resources and technical capabilities as opposed to relying on aid-organised projects or inviting tenders by foreign corporations. Much of this is organised through conscription into national service, now on permanent scale, with an estimated 400,000 young people in service.¹⁶¹ It is impossible, Kibreab argues, "for Eritrea to become self-sufficient in food and other necessities when a substantial proportion of the agricultural, industrial and service sector labour force is mobilised into the army and scarce resources with high opportunity costs are squandered in the purchase of weapons."¹⁶² World Bank and IMF reports states that the main cause of the poor economic performance of agriculture and manufacturing is a shortage of labour caused by mobilisation into the army of the skilled and unskilled labour force.¹⁶³ Moreover, self-reliance is complimented by another element, namely self-sacrifice. Isaias is known to sacrifice people to starvation in order to preserve self-reliance. The people are, according to Isaias, sacrificing themselves for the better of the state. In other words, the suffering of individuals is not important. It is the 'Eritreaness' and the nation-state as a whole that is the most important thing. Thus, someone dying as a result of self-reliance is considered a sacrifice for the Eritrean nation-state.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶¹ Cliffe, Lionel (2008) pp. 328-329, Eritrea's army has 200,000 regulars, plus 200-250,000 conscripts

¹⁶² Kibreab, Gaim (2009a) p. 186

¹⁶³ IMF and World Bank reports quoted in Kibreab, Gaim (2009a) p. 186

¹⁶⁴ Connell, Dan (1993) *Against All Odds: A Chronicle of the Eritrean Revolution*, Lawrenceville: The Red Sea Press

It is clear that the EPLF was very successful during the liberation war with its self-reliance strategy. While its enemies received support from superpowers and were still defeated, the EPLF/PFDJ's obsession with this strategy post-independence has been a main cause for poor economic performance, and exclusion of the voluntary sector and international support to help boost the economy. The politics of self-reliance is a mechanism the state uses to control society. Various religious and other NGOs have been kept out of Eritrea, and the state used this method to consolidate its power and prevent outsiders from observing conditions in the country.¹⁶⁵ Additionally, self-reliance is also, in the eyes of the government, needed to breed the 'Eritreanness' and national unity. On the other side of the coin one finds self-sacrifice.

3.6 National Liberation Movements

What this analysis has tried to show is that the Eritrean state inherited the features of the EPLF. The current Eritrean government's focus on national unity and self-reliance, clandestine character and mentality towards dissent all has its roots in the liberation war and can be seen as patent factors of the totalitarian Eritrea. Kibreab argues that appearances notwithstanding, nothing substantial has changed since the EPLF's early manifestos.¹⁶⁶ But what could be understood as necessary strategies during times of war, do not justify a state's dictatorial behaviour in peacetime. But this misfortune is by no means unique to Eritrea. National liberation movements emerge from a combination of factors, but according to Kibreab, common to them all is the subordination of liberal values to national independence.

Suttner argues that national liberation movements predisposed themselves towards a particular type of politics, self-conception and relationship with other organisations and the people or nation as a whole.¹⁶⁷ Many of these organisations were forced to work underground and then embark on armed resistance. Thus, these organisations had little experience of open organised activity and have seen participation in a liberation movement as a primarily secretive and military activity.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁵ Woldemikael, Tekle (2009) 'Pitfalls of Nationalism in Eritrea' in David O'Kane and Tricia R. Hepner, *Biopolitics, militarism, and development: Eritrea in the twenty-first century*, New York: Berghahn Books, p. 10

¹⁶⁶ Kibreab, Gaim (2009a) p. 172

¹⁶⁷ Suttner, David (2004) 'Transformation of political parties in Africa today' in *Transformation*, vol. 29: 2, p. 2

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.* p. 3

This is particularly true of the EPLF/PFDJ. Their “bunker mentality”¹⁶⁹ during the liberation war, was in no way reversed post-independence. Secretive and military activity is just as normal for the PFDJ today as it was for the EPLF during the liberation war. The lack of experience of open organised activity, combined with the experience from the liberation struggle, has not transformed soldiers into politicians, but rather continued the war-mentality post-independence.

Suttner further argues that the notion of a national liberation movement representing the nation tends to lead to the treatment of other organisations as ancillary to that effort. There was a tendency in independent African states to see organisation outside the umbrella of the movement as divisive and even aiding enemies of national unity. As a result, the early years of African independence saw widespread clampdowns on organisations established on a regional or ethnic basis. Various ethnic movements were suppressed and a variety of complex forms and identities in which people saw themselves were not allowed to find expression in the political arena.¹⁷⁰ While this could be an accurate description of Eritrea, it was also normal in many other African countries like Zimbabwe, Rwanda, Angola and Congo.¹⁷¹

The main argument is that the Eritrean liberation movement, the EPLF is by no means a unique movement. It has many of the same patterns that many other liberation movements have. This also further emphasises the importance of looking at the current Eritrean government in the context of the thirty yearlong liberation war. The EPLF’s Maoist and Marxist-Leninist influence could also be seen as a warning sign in the beginning of independence. It shares the same rural based and Marxist-inspired character as Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Ethiopia and Angola to name but a few. Barrington Moore’s description of the revolutionary communist route taken by Russia and China is thus similar to the Eritrean experience.¹⁷²

¹⁶⁹ Connell, Dan (1997) quoted in Kibreab, Gaim (2009a) p. 172

¹⁷⁰ Suttner, David (2004) pp. 5-6

¹⁷¹ Kibreab, Gaim (2009a) p. 148

¹⁷² Cameron, Greg (2009) ‘The Eritrean State in Comparative Perspective’ in David O’Kane and Tricia R. Hepner (eds.) *Biopolitics, militarism, and development: Eritrea in the twenty-first century*, New York: Berghahn Books, p. 136

3.7 Conclusion

The Eritrean state has been an agent in causing the failure of democratisation. This chapter has analysed the ruling party, the PFDJ, using historical sociology. By comparing the PFDJ's behaviour and policies today with the EPLF's behaviour and policies during the liberation war one can see few changes. One can thus argue that the liberation war created structures not conducive for democratic development during post-independence. The EPLF during the liberation war managed to unite and mobilise a multi-ethnic society against a powerful enemy. By being secretive and centralised around a few figures and being ruthless against dissent, the leadership managed to further mobilise Eritrea. Its strategy of self-reliance during the liberation war was another factor that contributed to its success. But the continuation of these features has been a hindrance for democratisation post-independence. The government's failed economic policies are inextricably linked to its failures in the realm of politics exemplified by its policy on self-reliance. At the heart of these failures lies the ruling clique's illiberal and intolerant attitudes, which makes them perceive everything not initiated by them as representing a threat to national security.

It is impossible to understand present Eritrea without studying the EPLF during the liberation war. The historical sociologist Tilly argues that politico-military organisations can be seen as mini-states. They are characterised by features that define the state. The organisations possess all the means of coercion and are very much reliant on these means of coercion to achieve their aims.¹⁷³ The EPLF inherited these characteristics and treated post-independence Eritrea in many ways similarly the way it treated it during the liberation war. While the analysis puts the emphasis on the structures created by history, this does not by any means exonerate the actions of the ruling party. But with their total control over the state, what about the people of Eritrea? It is impossible to analyse a process towards popular control over public affairs, without analysing the Eritrean society. The next chapter will thoroughly discuss some important aspects of the Eritrean society and how these contributed to the failure of democratisation in Eritrea.

¹⁷³ Tilly, Charles (1990) *Coercion, Capital and European States, AD 990-1992*, Oxford: Blackwell

4. Society – A diverse population in a united state?

Eritrea can roughly be divided into two geographically entities, the *kebessa*, or highlands, and the *metahit*, or lowlands. The most accurate way to describe the different segments of the Eritrean population is in terms of ethno-linguistic characteristics.¹⁷⁴ As mentioned in the introduction, there are officially nine different ethnic groups in Eritrea, with Tigrinya being the majority. This chapter will analyse how the role of the society and different actors within society have contributed to the failure of democratisation in Eritrea. It will look at the Eritrean society from a historical perspective to show how it has shaped political developments. This chapter is divided into four sections: The first will look at some general characteristics of the rural population in Eritrea, in particular the Tigrinya population. According to the Eritrean National Statistics and Evaluation Office, only 20% of Eritreans live in urban areas.¹⁷⁵ The liberation war was first and foremost fought in the rural areas of Eritrea and the EPLF managed to mobilise most peasants from the Tigrinya highlands.¹⁷⁶ It is thus important to examine the rural population in Eritrea. These generalisations do not give a complete account of the population, but can be useful in the understanding of Eritrean society. The second part will look at Eritrea's history of domination and political organisations. The third part will consider the liberation struggle and observe how the liberation movements mobilised Eritreans. Having these three parts in mind, the fourth part will look at associational life in Eritrea today, in particular civil society and opposition movements. It will also argue that some central characteristics of the Tigrinya socio-cultural life have in fact contributed to the growth of a totalitarian regime.

¹⁷⁴ Müller, Tanja R. (2005) p. 26

¹⁷⁵ National Statistics and Evaluation Office, Asmara, *Eritrea, Eritrea Demographics and Health Survey 2002*, <http://www.measuredhs.com/pubs/pdf/FR137/FR137.pdf> accessed on 10 April, 2011

¹⁷⁶ Pool, David (2001)

4.1 Eritrea's characteristics – Hierarchy, determinism and diversity

The Tigrinya culture stems from the Abyssinian tradition, referring to the historically dominant Orthodox Christian highland area where the languages of Amharic and Tigrinya are spoken. Due to the similar socio-cultural characteristics between Amhara and Tigrinya this part will also use the analyses of Lefort and Vaughan and Tronvoll, who mostly are concerned with Amharic culture, to describe the Tigrinya society. Both Lefort and Vaughan and Tronvoll emphasise a very hierarchical stratification of society amongst the highland peasants, where one is confined by a largely invisible but strict system of collective sanctions to obey orders from above.¹⁷⁷ This has imbued new generations with the cultural notion that people are unequal. Individuals are ranked according to certain criteria that give some people greater value than others.

Moreover, any individuals should always be subservient to any other individual regarded as superior to oneself.¹⁷⁸ In other words, you should not question your authority, as their word is the final word. After the devastating second war with Ethiopia, no one knew exactly many who had died. On Martyr's Day 2003, three years after the second war with Ethiopia, Isaias announced that Eritrea had lost 19,000 Eritreans in the war. The names were announced and families could now grieve for those they had lost.¹⁷⁹ However, many of the families were told that their relatives died of injuries many months after the fighting. The families could in fact see them and give their last goodbye, but due to the government's secrecy, this was never announced until 2003. Even then, Aardal told the author, no one would say one negative word about the government and their president. This illustrates the respect Eritrean citizens have for their superiors and more specifically their government.¹⁸⁰

The hierarchical system is also deterministic. There is an unshakeable belief in the omnipotence of God who dictates their whole existence. What happens is God's will, so opposing something is opposing God, the highest authority. Power is

¹⁷⁷ Vaughan, Sarah & Tronvoll, Kjetil (2003) and Lefort, René (2010) 'Powers – mengist – and peasants in rural Ethiopia: the post-2005 interlude' in *Journal of Modern African Studies*, vol. 48: 3.

¹⁷⁸ Vaughan and Tronvoll (2003) p. 33

¹⁷⁹ Plaut, Martin (2005) 'The Conflict and Its Aftermath' in Dominique Jacquin-Berdal and Martin Plaut (eds.) *Unfinished Business: Ethiopia and Eritrea at War*, Lawrenceville: The Red Sea Press

¹⁸⁰ Aardal, Arman (2011) *Conversation*, 13. April, 2011

therefore, according to Lefort, divine by essence because like everything else, power ultimately proceeds from God. To obey is therefore to submit to God's will. This notion of obeying encompasses the ruling party or the state and all their members and agents.¹⁸¹ An Amharic saying can be used to illustrate this: "The king who rules is my king".¹⁸²

A third characteristic of Eritrean society is that it is diverse. As mentioned above, there are officially nine different ethnic groups in Eritrea.¹⁸³ Until the establishment of the Italian centralised colonial administration, the ties that bound the various peoples of Eritrea had been based on kinship, lineage, culture and region.¹⁸⁴ According to Iyob it was only during the 1980s, when the single imperative of liberation from Ethiopian hegemonic control emerged to unite the Eritrean factions, that an all-encompassing nationalism was achieved.¹⁸⁵ Eritrean nationalist discourse rarely projects a unified Eritrea into antiquity.¹⁸⁶ Instead, it focuses on the transformation under Italian colonialism and stresses development through several stages, of a new identity based on common experiences, with the final stage of the liberation war as the decisive one.¹⁸⁷

These three features are important in different ways. Firstly, the hierarchical and deterministic view can lead to a practice where the leaders are not accountable to their citizens, but rather to those above them in the system. Secondly, the population is reluctant to challenge their superiors and act as checks and balances, which is vital in a democratic system. Thirdly, the diversity in Eritrea has historically been perceived as divisive and that can also explain the EPLF/PFDJ's obsession with unity. Finally, and maybe most importantly, is how this is perceived at the top. Because the population is inferior to them, no one is allowed to question the leadership's actions. As seen in the previous chapter this was common with the EPLF/PFDJ leadership during the

¹⁸¹ Lefort, René (2010) p. 439

¹⁸² Ibid. p. 440

¹⁸³ In reality there are even more ethnic groups. See Tronvoll (2009) Chapter 7. The point here however, is the diversity in Eritrea.

¹⁸⁴ Tronvoll, Kjetil (1998a)

¹⁸⁵ Iyob, Ruth (1995) p. 3

¹⁸⁶ It has lately been a new nationalist discourse focusing on the Ona culture, a culture that shows that Eritrea is older than Ethiopia.

¹⁸⁷ Sorenson, John (1991) 'Discourses on Eritrean Nationalism and Identity' in *Journal of Modern African Studies*, vol. 29: 2

liberation war and post-independence. This can be found in the ideology of the party where the principle of having a vanguard enforces the hierarchical order. Having these three characteristics in mind, the chapter will now move on to analyse how the Eritrean society has experienced centuries of domination and how political organisation originated in Eritrea.

4.2 History of domination – foreign intervention and political organisation

When Italy officially established the colony of Eritrea in 1890, it gave birth to the concept of Eritrea we know today.¹⁸⁸ Within this concept of Eritrea were different ethnic groups, with different religions and languages. Already at this time the area and the population in what we now call Eritrea¹⁸⁹ had experienced external forces invading from both the Ethiopian kingdom and the Ottoman Empire. Nevertheless, it was not until Italy arrived that Eritrea as a geographical entity was created. Moreover, one Italian impact was the evolution of a distinct identity on the basis of the growing gap between the socio-economic realities of Eritrea and Ethiopia. “In the 1930s”, Negash and Tronvoll argues, “the Italians had propagated the view that Italian rule had ‘civilised [the Eritrean] people’, while Ethiopia and Ethiopians were described as backward [...]”¹⁹⁰ The Italian’s main impact was thus the creation of an Eritrean identity.

With the end of Italian rule and the arrival of the British Military Administration (BMA), Eritreans were forced to interact with each other in forums of British making. The Eritreans were expected to act as a unit at a time when the majority of the inhabitants had not yet come to see themselves as part of an Eritrean nation.¹⁹¹ Furthermore, the Eritreans experienced, exploitation under Ethiopia’s Haile Selassie’s rule and the Derg after the BMA. Under each regime, peasants had been forced to fight in wars they did not believe in or understood, on behalf of the holder of power. According to Tronvoll, many peasants in Eritrea thus expressed gratitude to the

¹⁸⁸ Müller, Tanja R. (2005) p. 28

¹⁸⁹ The name Eritrea comes from the Italians. Before that, the highland region was know as *Mereb Melash* (The Land Beyond the [river] Mereb), or *Medri Bahr* (Land of the Sea) and *Barka* (lowlands), *Semhar* and *Dankalia*. See Tronvoll, Kjetil (2009) p. 134

¹⁹⁰ Negash, Tekeste & Tronvoll, Kjetil (2000) pp. 8-9

¹⁹¹ Iyob, Ruth (1995) p. 4

EPLF/PFDJ when they liberated Eritrea because it put a stop to the external forces fighting wars and exploiting the Eritreans for their own benefit.¹⁹²

The EPLF/PFDJ was not the first political party in Eritrea. In fact, during the 1940s and until the closure of the Eritrean parliament by Ethiopia in 1962, there were a number of organised political parties in Eritrea.¹⁹³ The BMA took over the administration of Eritrea in May 1941, after the Italians' capitulation in the Second World War. The BMA, acting as an interim government, tried to create an atmosphere in which all people in Eritrea could have a voice in determining their political future; union with Ethiopia or independence.¹⁹⁴ Roughly, one can argue that a considerable part of the Tigrinya Christian population favoured union with Ethiopia and became organised in the Unionist Party. A large part of the lowland Muslim population favoured independence and became organised in the Independence Bloc with the Muslim League.¹⁹⁵ While these attempts at organisation were somewhat of a success, the future of Eritrea was decided in the UN, which failed to satisfy either side.¹⁹⁶ The decision, which will be further explored in the next chapter, was that Eritrea was to be federated into Ethiopia.

The Eritrean society has thus for most of their history been dominated and controlled by external forces. When they were allowed to organise politically to voice their opinions, the result was even more domination. There are two consequences that should be emphasised here: The first is the one briefly touched upon above. After so many years of external intervention, Eritreans showed gratefulness when their own people had liberated their areas and successively made their country independent. This again may have resulted in a loyalty to the EPLF/PFDJ that made them build a country on their own terms without many people questioning the authorities. Secondly, while in fact Eritrea had a tradition of multi-party politics during the 1940s and 50s, the result of this process did not satisfy the Eritreans at the time as outside forces dictated their future anyway. As the last period of organisational politics in Eritrea resulted in

¹⁹² Tronvoll, Kjetil (1998a) p. 66

¹⁹³ Ellingson, Lloyd (1977)

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.* p. 281

¹⁹⁵ Müller, Tanja R (2005) p. 30

¹⁹⁶ Ellingson, Lloyd (1977) p. 281

federation with Ethiopia, the PFDJ have another incentive to postpone elections because the citizens are not yet ready for it. After all, the EPLF's ultimate goal was national sovereignty, thus choosing federation with Ethiopia was the wrong choice.

4.3 Mobilising the Eritreans – Peasants in the Liberation struggle

After the annexation to Ethiopia, the liberation war began. The challenge in societies like Eritrea is often to politically involve peasants. As they are more preoccupied with the conditions of the crops in the field than national issues, they are not likely to rebel. Wolf notes that most poor peasants are unlikely initiators of rebellion. They are usually dependent upon or closely tied to landlords and do not rebel unless outside forces intervene to mobilise and shield them.¹⁹⁷ This was also the case in Eritrea. Tronvoll writes that the civilian villagers were not preoccupied with the national sphere, but rather focused on their share of land, and the conditions of the crops.¹⁹⁸ With approximately 80 percent of the Eritrean population living in the rural areas, it was thus key to mobilise the peasantry to gain sufficient strength to fight. The ELF was not very centralised and let the different ethnic and religious identities live within the movement. When ELF started to fall apart (see previous chapter) the EPLF grew as the major liberation front in Eritrea. The EPLF had a different strategy:

Being a product of the division within Eritrean nationalism in the past, the EPLF had to reconcile these divisions and forge a sense of national consciousness, while at the same time appeal to and mobilise the major social classes within both the Muslim and the Christian spectrum of society.¹⁹⁹ Based on a unifying ideological framework, the EPLF introduced to its members to a programme of political education that shaped the consciousness of Front members. Acceptance of this education was as much a symbol of organisational commitment as the carrying of a gun.²⁰⁰ The mobilisation was a result of a larger social revolution that for instance gave access to land, increased gender equality and abolished church control amongst the peasantry.

¹⁹⁷ Wolf, Eric (1969) in Skocpol, Theda (1982) 'What Makes Peasants Revolutionary' in *Comparative Politics*, vol. 14: 3, p. 354

¹⁹⁸ Tronvoll, Kjetil (1998a) p. 7

¹⁹⁹ Müller, Tanja R. (2005) p. 36

²⁰⁰ Pool, David (2001) p. xv

This was, as has been mentioned before, done to remove religious, gender and ethnic divisions in the Eritrean society and to strengthen the goal of national unity. According to Müller, great emphasis was given to the rewriting of Eritrean history. Using Marxist and Maoist concepts, language divisions within society were portrayed as class divisions and thus the notion of religion and tribe as important social entities were undermined by the concept of nationality as the main cultural category.²⁰¹ This new interpretation of Eritrean nationalist history made the EPLF impervious to social, ethnic, regional, tribal, religious and ideological division.²⁰² In other words, the EPLF had a broader social agenda, not just a nationalist agenda.

With the EPLF's expansion into Eritrean society and its capacity to turn political and military adversity to its advantage, this new national consciousness spread to parts of the wider population. Needless to say, the mobilisation was not always a voluntary conscription. Many peasants described recruitment and participation with a 'push model' in mind, saying that they had no other option, if they were to survive, than to join the struggle or seek refugee status in some neighbouring country.²⁰³ The nationalist ideology was learned within the Front and not something initiated in the Eritrean population. As a result, according to Tronvoll, a strong nationalist sentiment was generated through the prolonged fighting.²⁰⁴

The goal of achieving national sovereignty, and as part of the wider social revolution, the EPLF created a space for civil society affiliated with it. But the organisations were created by the EPLF to mobilise and direct the masses. They thus created organisations affiliated with the Front, not independent from them. The EPLF formed a worker's union, peasant's union, women's union and youth union. This will be further explored further down, but the main point here is that they strengthened these groups' role in society. This again would give the EPLF further legitimacy in Eritrea. Additionally, the EPLF's success in mobilising large parts of the Eritrean population depended as much on the social transformation of Eritrean society as on the

²⁰¹ Müller, Tanja R. (2005) p. 36

²⁰² *Ibid.* pp. 37-38

²⁰³ Tronvoll (1998a) p. 7

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.* p. 8

strength of its military wing.²⁰⁵ It should be emphasised that solidarity was also military enforced, as mentioned above with the “push model”.

The EPLF and their ideological framework to create a political consciousness of nationalism evolving around the ultimate goal of national sovereignty thus managed to subdue divisions in the Eritrean society and unite them towards the goal of independence. “The EPLF became thus an organisation which moulded Eritreans rather than one buffeted by Eritrean socio-historic divisions,” Müller argues.²⁰⁶ Whereas this strategy to an extent successfully mobilised peasants and other parts of Eritrean society, the negative consequences of the transformation of society have become more and more apparent post-independence. In particular, the associational life suffered in Eritrea.

4.4 Autonomy and influences – Civil society and Opposition movements

The nature of the state-society relation, and the role and place of civil society in Eritrea, was governed by the need to work towards the achievement of a common goal, namely national sovereignty. Not to distinguish and defend society against the unfettered intervention of the state.²⁰⁷ Young argues that civil society constructed out of liberated areas and militarily enforced solidarity was different from the kind that emerges from voluntary associations and electoral campaigns.²⁰⁸ To understand civil society in Eritrea today, we have to look at the society’s historical development. As mentioned earlier, to further mobilise the Eritrean population in order to gain support in the liberation war, the EPLF formed mass organisations that could actively organise and strengthen the front through education and transforming the society according to the Front’s ideology. The EPLF formed a worker’s, peasant’s, women’s and a youth union, all of them controlled by Front. The mass organisations adopted a very tight

²⁰⁵ Müller, Tanja R. (2005) p. 40

²⁰⁶ Ibid. p. 38

²⁰⁷ Bereketab, Redie (2009a) p. 44

²⁰⁸ Young, C (1994) *The African Colonial State in Comparative Perspective*, New Haven: Yale University Press p. 240

partnership with the EPLF and further promoted the ultimate goal of the Front – national sovereignty.²⁰⁹

Suttner argues that national liberation movements have generally seen organisations outside the umbrella of the movement as divisive and even aiding enemies of national unity. The national liberation movement model is collectivist and totalising, thus differentiation and deviation are always seen as profane and divisive.²¹⁰ The EPLF thus maintained close control over the mass organisations during the liberation war. According to Bereketeab, the autonomy of the civil society organisations in Eritrea at this time was severely curtailed, not only due to the total control of the EPLF, but also due to self-imposed censorship by the mass organisations. It was understood that the EPLF, as agents of independence, were prerequisites for the existence and functions of the civil society, hence the mass organisations followed the guidelines set by the EPLF.²¹¹

After independence these organisations, instead of transforming into autonomous bodies that represent the will of their members and oppose State policies that negatively affect their members, continued to function as extensions of the EPLF implementing the Front’s policies and decisions.²¹² The reason for this was that since they were formed as an extension of the Front during the liberation war, they felt a strong sense of loyalty. Bereketeab notes “they continued to perceive their role as lending a supporting hand to the government in its efforts towards national reconstruction and nation-state building.”²¹³ It was thus not only the state that was not willing to let civil society associations be autonomous, but also the self-imposed discipline and adherence to the ultimate goal of national unity that impeded these associations’ autonomy.

Civil society, defined as autonomous organisations that defend society against the unfettered intervention of the state, is non-existent in Eritrea. The only organisations in Eritrea today are not only closely affiliated with the ruling party, but

²⁰⁹ Bereketeab, Redie (2009a) p. 44

²¹⁰ Suttner, David (2004) p. 6

²¹¹ Bereketeab, Redie (2009a) p. 44

²¹² Bereketeab, Redie (2009a) p. 45

²¹³ *Ibid.*

led by the leaders of the ruling party.²¹⁴ These organisations can thus be termed a government organised NGO, or GONGO. Other groups trying to emerge post-independence have been perceived as divisive if they did not want to be affiliated with the ruling party and its ideology. Even the National Union of Eritrean Peasants (NUEP), which during the war was vital for the EPLF, was abolished in 1994 because they did not comply with the government's policies.²¹⁵ Kibreab argues that the Eritrean government had in fact rejected the idea of an autonomous civil society from the outset. In 1992, the government issued a legal notice requiring all national, non-profit-making humanitarian NGOs to register and apply for permission from the ministry of interior. Any organisation or association failing to do so would be barred from humanitarian activities.²¹⁶

This also proved difficult for religious groups and churches. These organisations have a long history predating the birth of the Eritrean state and had huge numbers of followings. Moreover, these groups had no roots in the liberation struggle.²¹⁷ In 1995, the government issued a proclamation stipulating that the state is prohibited from interfering in religious affairs, inasmuch as faith-based organisations are forbidden from interfering in national politics. Since the term politics was not defined in the proclamation, most acts of civic engagement by faith-based organisations can be interpreted as being political. Furthermore, faith-based organisations and religious institutions are banned from advocacy, campaigning, protesting and preaching on social justice issues.²¹⁸ The attempt at constraining religious groups and institutions can be explained by looking at the totalising nature Suttner speaks about. Since these groups had so many followers and no roots in the liberation struggle, the government believed that it could not realise its goals and achieve total control without stifling the autonomy and activities of the faith-based organisations.²¹⁹ The Catholic Church, for instance, answered to the Vatican. As a

²¹⁴ Kibreab, Gaim (2009a) p. 56

²¹⁵ *Ibid.* p. 57

²¹⁶ *Ibid.* p. 61

²¹⁷ Bereketeab, Redie (2009a) p. 45

²¹⁸ Kibreab, Gaim (2009a) p. 89

²¹⁹ Kibreab, Gaim (2009a)

consequence, the government threw out Italian nuns because they answered to another power than the Eritrean government.

Nevertheless, religious groups are not necessarily the most vocal organisations in Eritrea. The government subsidised the Eritrean Orthodox Church and accorded it unique privileges, like exclusive tax exemption and buildings. The financial incentives, Kibreab argues, were given to the Orthodox Church as a means of exercising political control. In return, the government expected absolute loyalty and subservience.²²⁰ It is worth noting that the Orthodox Church has throughout its history given divine legitimacy to the leaders of the territory, receiving privileges in return. The PFDJ's treatment of the Orthodox Church, and the Church's support is thus not something unique to Eritrea's period as a sovereign country. Nevertheless, as mentioned in the previous chapter, when the Orthodox Church leaders protested against the government the government took drastic and coercive measures. The coercive methods of dealing with critique from religious groups have silenced them. On the other side of the coin, the Orthodox Church continues to give legitimacy to the government, and today the four big religious groups are either silent or loyal to the government.²²¹

Being silent and loyal when people suffer can be hard. Furthermore, when one's grievances are met with violence and repression, some groups might in fact use other methods to get their voice heard. In Eritrea, attempts from opposition parties or other civil society actors to have a say in Eritrean society are counteracted by the state. This exclusionary culture, according to Vaughan and Tronvoll who write about Ethiopia, leads to a polarisation of public political debate. The government and opposition do not enter into dialogue on issues, but tend to be entrenched in their own inwardly informed political positions, from which they communicate against each other.²²² The same culture can be identified in Eritrea where the government is not interested in other people defining or even contributing to a political agenda. One outcome of such polarisation is the channelling of political opposition through other means than

²²⁰ Ibid. p. 92

²²¹ Aardal, Arman (2011) *Conversation*, 13. April, 2011

²²² Vaughan, Sarah & Tronvoll, Kjetil (2003) p. 35

peaceful statements and rallies. Additionally, one distinguishing feature of these groups is that they hold grudges against the PFDJ and hope for revenge.²²³

The government's failure to listen to other groups and the politics of revenge by opposition groups are not good signs for democratic development. It is a vicious circle that further impedes the Eritrean society's involvement in Eritrean politics and further removes all signs of checks and balances. Additionally, the politics of revenge is also believed to be one of the reasons pushing the opposition to ally with Ethiopia.²²⁴ As a result the Eritrean government support its neighbours' opposition groups. This will be further explored in the next chapter.

4.5 Conclusion

To summarise, this chapter has analysed how the role of society and different agents within society fits into the political development in Eritrea. It has tried to emphasise both the important features of the Eritrean society, as well as different agents working within it. This chapter has showed that if one were to barely focus on the state one would have an insufficient picture of the political development in Eritrea. State power is not only an attribute of the state machinery, but also a product of the interaction between the state's ruling elite and all of its citizens.²²⁵ This analysis has first tried to give a general account of the Eritrean society. By highlighting hierarchy and determinism as two central elements of society, it is easier to understand both bottom-up and top-down behaviour. Bottom-up in the sense that many citizens have a high respect for authority. A Tigrinya proverb "any sun that rises is our sun and any king that ascends the throne is our king"²²⁶ expresses this type of sentiment. Top-down in the sense that authorities have a strong propensity to think that the peasants must carry out orders from above because the authorities think they know best. The idea of a vanguard further ideologically strengthened the ideological hierarchical order amongst the Eritrean leaders.

²²³ Bereketeab, Redie (2009a) p. 47

²²⁴ Ibid.

²²⁵ Vaughan, Sarah & Tronvoll, Kjetil (2003) p. 30

²²⁶ Bereketeab, Redie (2009a) p. 41

Eritreans had a history of being ruled by external powers before fighting the 30-year liberation war. So when Eritreans liberated their country, it is clear that many showed an almost blind support towards the liberation front and the newly established government. This can also explain how the government could control Eritrea with an iron fist without many questioning the leadership. “There is no doubt”, Kibreab writes, “that a considerable proportion of the Eritrean people placed a lot of trust in the EPLF government in the immediate post-independence period.”²²⁷ This section also touched upon a democratic period of Eritrean history and Bereketeab argues that no period matched this period in the proliferation of associational life.²²⁸ Nevertheless, one consequence of the political organisation in the 40s and 50s was a federation with Ethiopia. The fact that this occurred the last time people had multi-party politics illuminates the government’s fear that such sentiment is still lingering and may also explain why Isaias, still today, talks about ‘the people not being ready for multi-party politics’.²²⁹

With the two first sections in mind the third section in this chapter analysed how the EPLF mobilised Eritreans to fight for liberation and national sovereignty. Most communities run their own business and are not interested in big politics. But through a major operation of mobilisation, the EPLF managed not only to recruit soldiers from the rural areas, but also to transform large parts of the Eritrean society through its cultural, social and ideological education. The particularity defining Eritrea was that everything was directed towards the achievement of national sovereignty. Its primary purpose was overthrowing the yoke of oppression that required mobilisation of every section of society.²³⁰

The mobilisation was also the genesis of the big GONGOs in Eritrea that today is the only thing that can resemble a civil society. The liberation era mass organisations supported the government in its post-liberation national reconstruction by simply redefining their functions and structures. The submissiveness of these

²²⁷ Kibreab, Gaim (2009a) p. 20

²²⁸ Bereketeab, Redie (2009a) p. 55

²²⁹ As mentioned in the introduction, the PFDJ believes in ‘guided’ democracy and as Isaias stated, multi-party elections will only be held when there is stability and peace in Eritrea (3-4 decades).

²³⁰ Bereketeab, Redie (2009a) p. 44

organisations was due to historical reasons and the legacy of the liberation struggle. “The historical fact that they were formed as filial to the mother organisation, the EPLF, engendered a strong sense of loyalty” Bereketeab writes.²³¹ Webster et al. argues that in a transition phase it is vital to emphasise popular capacity building and organisation building, and a government that is ready to dedicate itself to facilitating popular representation.²³² The Eritrean government’s obsession with national unity impeded these processes post-independence and, as a result, hindered democratic development. Furthermore, the EPLF/PFDJ’s mobilisation transformed the large parts of society where unity and submissiveness are dominant aspects of the Eritrean society. The submissiveness from so many parts of the Eritrean society has contributed to the lack of checks and balances that is so important in a democratisation process. The government’s way of dealing with dissent and opinions not in line with its ideological values has of course worsened the development of any types of popular control over public affairs. Dissenters are often accused of being foreign spies and the next chapter will now further analyse how external relations fit into the political development in Eritrea.

²³¹ Ibid. p. 45

²³² Webster, N, Stokke, K and Törnquist, O (2009)

5. External Relations – Actual, perceived and construed threats

As mentioned in the theory chapter, state development must be analysed by looking at how international forces and regional actors try to influence domestic state policies and how the state reacts to these influences. Eritrea is a small country in a region that has been dominated by violence for centuries.²³³ Eritrea as an independent state is the result of thirty years of violence. And since independence Eritrea has had armed conflicts with Sudan, Yemen, and Ethiopia and twice with Djibouti.²³⁴ Furthermore, Isaias has railed against the UN, the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) and its successor, the African Union (AU).²³⁵ The US and the EU have lost patience with Eritrea. And the Eritrean government only recently announced that “no UN agency will be allowed to freely and directly approach the beneficiary agents [...]”²³⁶

This chapter seeks to analyse how external relations can explain the failed democratisation in Eritrea. It is important to understand the difference between foreign policy and external relations. While Eritrea itself is solely responsible for its foreign policies, external relations imply an intricate relationship where different actors’ behaviour affects each other. The chapter will first seek to analyse the relations Eritrea has with the international community and Ethiopia. While Eritrea is perceived as a political pariah, a regional spoiler,²³⁷ and isolated from the rest of the world, it is important to understand the Eritrean government’s behaviour in relation to external actors. For instance, there are many arrests in Eritrea where the government accuses alternative voices of being Ethiopian or CIA agents.²³⁸ It is important to understand that the first parts of this chapter, that is the international community and Ethiopia, are

²³³ Tronvoll, Kjetil (1999) and Reid, Richard (2009b) ‘Eritrea’s role and foreign policy: past and present perspectives’ in Richard Reid (ed.) *Eritrea’s External Relations: Understanding its regional role and foreign policy*, London: Chatham House

²³⁴ Tronvoll, Kjetil (2009) p. 19 and Africa Confidential (2009) ‘Dangers and Dilemmas in the Horn of Africa in *Africa Confidential*, vol. 50: 18

²³⁵ Reid, Richard (2009a) p. 2

²³⁶ The State of Eritrea, Ministry of Finance letter to UN on ‘Extension of Current UNDAF and Preparation for Another new UNDAF’, 26 January 2011

²³⁷ Tronvoll, Kjetil (2009) p. 18

²³⁸ Connell, Dan (2009a) pp. 138-139

an attempt to understand the EPLF/PFDJ's worldview. It is not just an account of how the international community and Ethiopia behaved towards Eritrea and the EPLF/PFDJ, but also how this behaviour was perceived by the EPLF/PFDJ. This worldview is vital to have established if one wants to understand how external relations have affected the democratisation process in Eritrea. It is of special importance as the government uses foreign influence as reasons for impeding the democratic process they promised at the time of independence. Subsequently, on the basis of the first part, the remainder of this chapter will establish some characteristics of Eritrean foreign policy and analyse how external relations have subdued the democratic development in Eritrea. It is worth noting that this chapter first and foremost deals with states' relations. On the Horn of Africa there are a large amount of insurgent groups fighting for self-determination or other reasons. This has an effect on the democratisation process in the sense that according to the Eritrean government, they constitute a threat to their core value, national unity. However, since this chapter is concerned with the Eritrean state and their relations with other states, this factor will only be dealt with briefly when discussing Eritrea's foreign policy.²³⁹

5.1 The International Community

Eritrea can be considered as a "pawn in world politics".²⁴⁰ After fifty years of Italian colonial rule, Eritrea became a British military protectorate in 1941. It was the four major powers at that time that took upon themselves the task of deciding the destiny of ex-Italian colonial territories. They however, failed to decide and the task was referred to the United Nations. After two years of intense deliberations, the UN voted to federate Eritrea with Ethiopia.²⁴¹ It should be noted, that while scholars like Bereketeab and Mengisteab²⁴² focus on that the UN decision was contrary Eritrea's wish, Sorenson points out that there was a support for unification. The unionists and those favouring independence were also given the opportunity to share their opinions

²³⁹ For more on insurgent groups see: Cliffe, Lionel (1999) 'Regional Dimensions of Conflict in the Horn of Africa' in *Third World Quarterly*, vol. 20: 1

²⁴⁰ Yohannes, Okbazaghi (1991) *Eritrea: a pawn in world politics*, Gainesville: University of Florida Press

²⁴¹ Bereketeab, Redie (2007) p. 401

²⁴² Bereketeab, Redie (2007), Mengisteab, Kidane (2009)

although with complications.²⁴³ There was considerable support for unification with Ethiopia in Eritrea, but it was the international community that decided Eritrea's future. This is also how the PFDJ's leadership see it.

But the decision should also be viewed in context with the US policy at that time. In fact, the United States during that period saw the integration of Eritrea into the Ethiopian empire as consistent with its stated goal of Eritrea and Ethiopia forming one single strategic entity on which the realisation of America's regional objective seemingly rested.²⁴⁴ Thus, when Ethiopia unilaterally abrogated the federal arrangement and annexed Eritrea, the US did not protest. It did in fact, as Mengisteab and Yohannes states, "readily endorse Ethiopia's annexation of Eritrea by militarily and financially contributing towards the pacification. Between 1953 and 1969, US military assistance to Ethiopia amounted to \$147 million, which was half of the total US military aid for all sub-Saharan Africa, supplemented by another \$195.1 million in economic aid."²⁴⁵ Furthermore, Ethiopia's violation of the federal arrangement provoked no response from the UN, although the UN was mandated to guarantee the federation.²⁴⁶

During the Cold War, the EPLF did not receive much support because of the dynamics of the two superpowers. Because of its strategic location not only the US supported Ethiopia in its attempts to pacify the EPLF and other liberation movements. By the mid-1970s the US lost its interest in that area as it had built a large base on the island Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean. This change, along with the regime change in Ethiopia that brought the Marxist military dictatorship of Mengistu to power led to the closure of US patronage of Ethiopia. The Soviet Union replaced the US as the main provider of military assistance, supplying it with over \$11 billion in armaments between 1977 and 1991.²⁴⁷ As has been mentioned in previous chapters, the EPLF thus had to rely on themselves in their fight against their neighbour supported by the

²⁴³ Sorenson, John (1991)

²⁴⁴ Mengisteab, Kidane & Yohannes Okbazaghi (2005) p. 164

²⁴⁵ Ibid.

²⁴⁶ Bereketeab, Redie (2009b) 'The Eritrea-Ethiopia Conflict and the Algiers Agreement: Eritrea's Road to Isolation' in Richard Reid (ed.) *Eritrea's External Relations: Understanding its regional role and foreign policy*, London: Chatham House, p. 117

²⁴⁷ Mengisteab, Kidane (2009) p. 63

superpowers. Furthermore, while the EPLF fought for Eritrean independence, the international community did not bring up the case of independence. Thus, the liberation war was characterised by the superpowers' support to Ethiopia and no support for the independence of Eritrea.

At the time of independence, the international community had only high praises for the new African state, mainly due to their democratic rhetoric and absence of foreign debt. Isaias was hyped as a leader belonging to the 'new breed of African leaders', destined to shepherd the 'African renaissance' to new heights.²⁴⁸ In fact, Eritrea and its government, at this time, received unconditional financial support and help in demobilising its soldiers. This fact, which seems to be totally ignored by the Eritrean government, resulted in the international community giving the EPLF free reins on how to govern.

Furthermore, the international community did not improve its reputation in Eritrea after the second Eritrea-Ethiopia war in 1998-2000. More than a decade after the end of the devastating border war, the boundary problem between the two countries remains unresolved. Territories that were adjudged to belong to Eritrea by the Eritrea-Ethiopia Boundary Commission (EEBC) still remain under Ethiopian occupation.²⁴⁹ The Eritrean-Ethiopian relationship will be further explored later on in this chapter. The point to highlight here is the international community's inertia to bring Ethiopia to comply with the ruling of the EEBC. First, the AU and the UN, who were the guarantors of the Algiers Treaty, have not been able to get Ethiopia to give up the territories. Second, the US, a witness of the Algiers Treaty failed to put the necessary pressure on Ethiopia to bring about Ethiopia's compliance.

In addition, Eritrea has never had high opinion of the AU, formerly OAU. During the Eritrean liberation struggle, the OAU sided with Ethiopia, perceiving the Eritrean struggle as a separatist movement that was seeking the destruction of a sovereign state.²⁵⁰ Most African anti-colonial movements and other movements such as the Palestine Liberation Organisation received proto-state membership and status in

²⁴⁸ Mengisteab, Kidane & Yohannes, Okbazaghi (2005) p. 163

²⁴⁹ Mengisteab, Kidane (2009) p. 46

²⁵⁰ Bereketeab, Redie (2009b) p. 119

international organisations, but the Eritrean cause was not recognised internationally.²⁵¹ With the absence of the OAU's support, other international organisations and major powers did not support the Eritrean cause either. The contempt for OAU is illustrated by Isaias speech to the organisation when he stated that "to mince our words now and applaud the OAU would neither serve the desired purpose of learning lessons from our past, nor reflect positively on our honesty and integrity".²⁵² The AU/OAU is also one of the guarantors of the Algiers Treaty, but it failed to criticise Ethiopia for its failure to implement the EEBC ruling. As a result, the Eritrean government regards the OAU/AU as incapable and indifferent to issues affecting Eritrea.

The EEBC border ruling also emphasises the importance of international law. The Eritrean government, after a conflict with Yemen, accepted an international arbitration decision. The Eritrean government also accepted the EEBC ruling. But since the US was not willing to take punitive measures against Ethiopia, or even to exert the necessary pressure, the other guarantors and witnesses to the Treaty also put little pressure on Ethiopia.²⁵³ One can thus understand the Eritrean government's suspicion towards the international community's decisions since they have failed to support something they constantly advocate - international law.

In the Eritrean government's mind, there is a clear line of continuity from the imperial machines of Italy and Britain in the nineteenth century, to the wilful ignorance of the UN, which overrode Eritrea wishes in the late 1940s and early 1950s, to the lack of international support for the liberation struggle, to the perceived²⁵⁴ inertia of the international community during and after the 1998-2000 war with Ethiopia.²⁵⁵ Furthermore the Washington's response to Ethiopia's non-compliance with the 2002 EEBC's findings is viewed by Eritreans as another slight in a consistent

²⁵¹ Healy, Sally (2009) 'Hard and soft power: some thoughts on the practice of Eritrean foreign policy' in Richard Reid (ed.) *Eritrea's External Relations: Understanding its regional role and foreign policy*, London: Chatham House p. 153

²⁵² Isaias Afwerki quoted in Connell, Dan (1993) pp. 282-283

²⁵³ Mengisteab, Kidane (2009) p. 64

²⁵⁴ I use the word 'perceived' here because the decisions made by the international community at that time were the result of calculated decisions and is a topic of a much wider analysis. The point here is that in the eyes of the EPLF, the international community did not do enough to support their case.

²⁵⁵ Reid, Richard (2005) 'Caught in the headlights of history: Eritrea, the EPLF, and the post-war nation-state' in *Journal of Modern African Studies*, vol. 43: 3 p. 483

pattern. This goes back to Washington's failure to protest against Emperor Haile Selassie's abrogation of the 1950 UN resolution that federated Eritrea to Ethiopia in the first place. This lengthy experience of neglect fuels popular anger towards the United States and encourages anti-American attitudes and actions in Eritrea.²⁵⁶

At the time of writing, Eritrea is under UN sanctions because of their involvement in Somalia and supposedly the next report from the UN Monitoring Group on Somalia due in July will produce more evidence about Eritrean support for the Somali rebels.²⁵⁷ While Eritrea objects to this²⁵⁸, it is important to understand the post-9/11 global environment. The US has justified the War on Terror in terms not unlike those invoked by Eritrean authorities when defending policies and practices as essential to national security. Thus, sovereign statehood today is more than the ability to defend national interest and territory against enemies both external and internal to the state. It also is the capacity to intervene in other struggles and societies for short-sighted national interests.²⁵⁹ In other words, it is easy to recognise what the Eritrean government perceives as hypocrisy from the international community when it is sanctioned for actions when other states receive support for what it argues are similar actions. Moreover, Ethiopia is the US ally and as a result, Ethiopia has been allowed to behave with certain impunity in the region.²⁶⁰

Eritrea can arguably be termed a pawn in world politics. This is at least how the government argues it was treated. Eritrea is by no means excused for its aggressive foreign policy and internal totalitarian character. Nevertheless, this section shows that Eritrea has been subjected to foreign exploitation, received little international support during their liberation struggle and experienced the international community's double standards. It is against this background that one can understand the current Eritrean regime's suspicion towards the international community. However, Eritrea has not always been a pawn. For instance, during independence it did receive a large amount

²⁵⁶ Connell, Dan (2009a), p. 139

²⁵⁷ 'The anti-Asmara Campaign' in *Africa Confidential*, vol. 52: 7

²⁵⁸ *ibid.*

²⁵⁹ Hepner, Tricia R. and O'Kane, David (2009b) 'Biopolitics and Dilemmas of Development in Eritrea and Elsewhere' in David O'Kane and Tricia R. Hepner (eds.) *Biopolitics, militarism, and development: Eritrea in the twenty-first century*, New York: Berghahn Books p. 168

²⁶⁰ Bereketeab, Redie (2009b) p. 100

of support from the international community. Its lack of diplomatic skills may be what pushed it further away from donors and international support. Needless to say, on the basis of what has been analysed in this section, the Eritrean government has a fundamental belief in the treachery and deception of the international community, which is seen to have failed to enforce the findings of EEBC and gone to great lengths to accommodate Ethiopia. This has also several implications for the domestic political situation, which this chapter will return to later. However, Eritrea's political situation must also be viewed in context with another external factor – Ethiopia.

5.2 The Ethiopia Factor

On 12 March, this year, Ethiopia's Prime Minister Meles Zenawi promised to work "politically or through other means towards changing Eritrea's policies or its government."²⁶¹ Whereas once Meles Zenawi was an ideological and military ally of Isaias, today they are bitter enemies and determined to get rid of each other rather than make peace.²⁶² To understand this relationship, one needs to view it from a historical perspective. This section will look at the aspiration to be the regional hegemon and the ideological ideas and relationship between EPLF and the Ethiopian counterpart, the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF).

Ethiopian leaders, the emperors of the 'modern monarchy' 1894-1974, the Mengistu regime 1974-1991 and Meles Zenawi all came to see their country as the regional hegemon. This is no coincidence, Iyob argues, since the heads of state had always assumed that the peoples of the Horn should be their vassals, and at various times during Ethiopia's history, they had been.²⁶³ Ethiopia has thus always perceived itself as the dominant power in the region and as a result has acted accordingly. The problem is that the EPLF perceived itself as the big brother in the relationship with the TPLF. As the TPLF grew larger, they started challenging the EPLF's ideas and strategies more explicit. This was one reason why the two fronts started disagreeing

²⁶¹ 'The anti-Asmara Campaign' in *Africa Confidential*, vol. 52: 7

²⁶² Kibreab, Gaim (2009a) p. 197

²⁶³ Iyob, Ruth (2000) 'The Ethiopian-Eritrean Conflict: diasporic vs. hegemonic states in the Horn of Africa, 1991-2000' in *Journal of Modern African Studies*, vol. 38: 4, p. 661

with each other and has followed the two fronts up to present day. Today, both the Eritrean and the Ethiopian government aspire to be the regional hegemon. As a result, neither wishes to see the other part to increase its power in the region.

In 1975, the EPLF established a partnership with their Ethiopian counterpart, the TPLF, later led by Meles Zenawi, to fight the Mengistu regime. However, from the very outset of their relationship tensions arose. The TPLF's 1976 manifesto declared its intentions to establish a Greater Tigray Republic. According to the TPLF, the economic, social and political problems of Ethiopia were due to the suppression of the different ethnic groups.²⁶⁴ Thus, the TPLF's cause for struggle for independence was an independent republic of Tigray. The territory of Tigray was to include Eritrean areas. This was fundamentally different from the EPLF's view, which sought to build a unitary Eritrea devoid of ethnic differences. In their view, the TPLF should define their struggle as the establishment of a democratic Ethiopia.²⁶⁵ Throughout the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s, the TPLF grew in size and felt it was strong enough to break out of its junior role in the relationship.²⁶⁶ They wanted the principle of self-determination, that ethnic groups should control their own areas, should be applied to Eritrea too. For instance, the Afar should be able to exercise the right of self-determination within Eritrea. This was perceived by the EPLF as an assault on the idea of Eritrean territory and nationhood.²⁶⁷

Whereas the relationship between the EPLF and the TPLF continued throughout the liberation struggle, they were fundamentally different from each other. Their relationship was "a marriage of necessity [rather] than a marriage of love"²⁶⁸. The EPLF needed support from the TPLF in its claim for national independence, while the TPLF depended on the EPLF's support to gain and remain in control of the country.²⁶⁹ Following the collapse of the Mengistu regime the two liberation fronts took over Eritrea and Ethiopia. But their relationship was undermined by the two sides' irreconcilable expectations. According to Bereketeab, Eritrea sought to benefit from

²⁶⁴ Negash, Tekeste & Tronvoll, Kjetil (2000)

²⁶⁵ Ibid. p. 15, Bereketeab, Redie (2009b) p. 100

²⁶⁶ Bereketeab, Redie (2009b) p. 102

²⁶⁷ Ibid.

²⁶⁸ Negash, Tekeste & Tronvoll, Kjetil (2000) p. 21

²⁶⁹ Ibid.

the Ethiopian market in order to consolidate its independence while Ethiopia aimed at political union.²⁷⁰ These fundamental differences were never attempted to be resolved, and by 1998 the two countries began a devastating war thought to have claimed an estimated 70,000 to 100,000 deaths and displaced hundreds of thousands of peoples on both sides of the border.²⁷¹

Following a June 2000 ceasefire agreement, the two countries signed an internationally brokered agreement in Algiers. The Algiers Treaty established a ceasefire, created a Temporary Security Zone (TSZ) and the EEBC to delimit the border. In April 2002, the EEBC issued its determination, but Ethiopia did not accept the modality of implementation.²⁷² Because international law supports its position, Eritrea believes that the international community should force Ethiopia to comply with the final and binding decision, whereas Ethiopia feels no need to alter the status quo.²⁷³ Today, the two countries fight each other through proxy wars, by supporting the other's foes with weapons, safe havens and soldiers.²⁷⁴ The Ethiopian factor has thus wider regional implications, which are not the focus of this study, but it has also huge implications on Eritrea. With the international community and Ethiopia as background, this chapter will now turn to Eritrea and its foreign policy

5.3 Eritrea – Foreign policies

Eritrea's foreign policy, as with many other aspects of the state, can be traced back to the liberation war. The first aspect is the government's powerful sense of isolation and having been betrayed during the liberation war. Since the EPLF's main goal was a united, independent Eritrea it is clear that the international community's decisions were perceived as being a betrayal to Eritreans and their nation. As Bereketeab argues, to a very real extent, Eritrea's isolationist stance is dictated

²⁷⁰ Bereketeab, Redie (2009b) p. 104

²⁷¹ Jacquin-Berdal, Dominique (2005) 'Introduction – The Eritreo-Ethiopian war' in Dominique Jacquin-Berdal and Martin Plaut (eds.) *Unfinished Business: Ethiopia and Eritrea at War*, Lawrenceville: The Red Sea Press, p. ix

²⁷² Both parts initially accepted, but when Ethiopia discovered that Badme was given to Eritrea, Ethiopia withdrew from the treaty arguing that it did not accept the modality of implementation. See Bereketeab, Redie (2009b) p. 110

²⁷³ Lyons, Terrence (2009) pp. 169-170

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.* p. 173

historically by the perception of external injustices.²⁷⁵ This lack of trust in the international community is also inextricably linked to the Eritrean government's policy of self-reliance. This policy during the liberation war emphasised that a victory could only be achieved by drawing on its own strength and resources and minimising foreign influence and dependency and remains present in Eritrean government policy today, in particular in relations with the international donor community.²⁷⁶ In a letter to UN Humanitarian Coordinator the Eritrean government states that: "national development will never be materialised if it is done by depending on grant financing from UN agencies [...]. It is widely believed that aid only postpones the basic solutions to crucial development problems [and] the structural, political, economic etc. damage that it inflicts upon recipient countries is also enormous."²⁷⁷ Feeling betrayed by the international community time and time again, as well as perceiving that they achieved independence more or less without any external support, thus explains the EPLF/PFDJ's hostility towards international donors and their self-reliance policy.

Another factor that dominates Eritrea foreign policy is their focus on national sovereignty. After achieving independence against all odds the Eritrean government was concerned with securing its borders and maintaining independence and internal political order against foreign and domestic threats.²⁷⁸ Against this backdrop, Eritrea became involved in armed conflict with its neighbours in order to defend what they perceived as competing claims to parts of Eritrean territory.²⁷⁹ For the government, Connell argues, the best defence of Eritrea's borders against hostile acts by neighbouring states or by opposition groups based in them is the creation and support of effective insurgent forces that will challenge their neighbours from within.²⁸⁰ Eritrea's imperative of national survival leads it to assume the role of what Iyob terms

²⁷⁵ Bereketeab, Redie (2009b) p. 118

²⁷⁶ Müller, Tanja R. (2007) p. 31

²⁷⁷ The State of Eritrea, Ministry of Finance letter to UN on 'Extension of Current UNDAF and Preparation for Another new UNDAF', 26 January 2011

²⁷⁸ Müller, Tanja R. (2007) p. 32

²⁷⁹ Tronvoll, Kjetil (1999) p. 1056

²⁸⁰ Connell, Dan (2009b) 'The EPLF/PFDJ experience: how it shapes Eritrea's regional strategy' in Richard Reid (ed.) *Eritrea's External Relations: Understanding its regional role and foreign policy*, London: Chatham House, p. 37

“diasporic state.”²⁸¹ According to Iyob, a diasporic state has a quest for a nation of one’s own against a hegemonic state. This quest is formulated as the right of a people to struggle for self-determination and protection from future victimisation.²⁸² Eritrea’s position as a diasporic state thus made them react aggressively to all perceived threats against its nation and territory. Looking back at Eritrea’s relationship with Ethiopia and the latter’s regional dominance and ideology of ethnic groups’ right to self-determination, one can acknowledge the fear that the Eritrean government has against the Ethiopian government’s influence in Eritrea.

5.4 External relations and democratisation

The external elements outlined here are complicated, but as was mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, external relations are directly linked with internal politics. Thus, this chapter has first analysed Eritrea’s worldview and external relations. To what extent has Eritrea’s external relations affected the democratisation in Eritrea? First, as Eritrea can be termed a diasporic state, it has an extreme focus on securing its territory and nationality. Thus when there is, for instance, Islamic opposition on the Sudanese borders, the Eritrean government see it as threatening its secular policies. Another example is Ethiopia and its perceived imperial interests in Eritrea. Thus, the Eritrean government believes any Eritrean with grievances that do not coincide with its policies is an enemy. Iyob emphasises that a diasporic state risks whatever democratic credentials it builds up in order to eliminate opponents to its survival.²⁸³ The EPLF/PFDJ’s legitimacy was gained because it performed a military miracle in gaining independence and promised stability, security, socio-economic development, liberty and democracy under the banner of the core value national unity (see chapter 3).²⁸⁴ After the second war with Ethiopia these promises, and thus its legitimacy, were undermined. The loss of legitimacy led to pervasive oppression. More gravely, it seriously shook the core value of the PFDJ government, national

²⁸¹ Iyob, Ruth (2000)

²⁸² *Ibid.* p. 661

²⁸³ Iyob, Ruth (2000) p. 661

²⁸⁴ Bereketeab, Redie (2009b) p. 120

unity. Since the government is highly invested in national unity, any tampering with it is seen as being the same as demolishing the Eritrean state.²⁸⁵ As a result, Eritrea has since the second war with Ethiopia, had a *de facto* state of emergency that has been used to suppress all expression of dissent. Elections were postponed, the implementation of the constitution was put on hold and mass conscriptions were reinstated. In other words, since the newly created state suddenly lost a war against Ethiopia, which they had previously defeated in 1991, the Eritrean government tightened its grip on Eritrean society in order to secure its core value.

With its legacy from the liberation war, Eritrea, as with most other states in the region, sees diplomacy as a continuation of war by other means.²⁸⁶ In other words, the Eritrean government has to some extent a war-mentality, and as a result, a tendency to identify people who disagree with their ideology as enemies who threaten its existence. This does not only include defending its territory from its regional foes, but also from the political and economic exigencies of neoliberal globalisation from the West.²⁸⁷ The international community, and in particular the influences of the West are looked at with suspicion and to cope with such global influences requires internal discipline similar to that which helped free Eritrea from Ethiopian rule.²⁸⁸ The government's oppressive behaviour can thus also be explained as a means of insuring that the 'Eritreanness' is upheld against external influences, which has done nothing but cause harm to Eritrea, the abovementioned letter illustrates this perspective.

Furthermore, the need for discipline and the need to reinforce the PFDJ's legitimacy have affected the democratic development in another way as well: it militarised the Eritrean society. Eritrea today has 200,000 soldiers, plus 200,000-250,000 conscripts.²⁸⁹ With its small population Eritrea competes with North Korea as the world's most militarised country.²⁹⁰ Conscription helps the PFDJ to keep down dissent, restrain fractious students, reduces unemployment and provides unpaid labour

²⁸⁵ Bereketeab, Redie (2007) pp. 416-417

²⁸⁶ Aardal, Arman (2011) *Conversation*, 13. April, 2011

²⁸⁷ Hepner, Tricia R & O'Kane, David (2009a) p. xv

²⁸⁸ *ibid.* p. xviii

²⁸⁹ Cliffe, Lionel (2008) pp. 328-329

²⁹⁰ International Institute of Strategic Studies placed Eritrea second, but it did not include its conscripts. 'Dangers and Dilemmas in the Horn of Africa' in *Africa Confidential*, vol. 50: 18

for state companies and senior officers.²⁹¹ According to Human Rights Watch, in 2002 a national social and economic development effort was announced. The national service of 18 months was indefinitely extended so that all male and female adults must be available to work at the direction of the state in various capacities until the age of 40.²⁹² This conscription is an apparatus used to enforce the core value in a non-democratic way and avoid any external influence or invasion.²⁹³

Finally, the international community's unconditional support at the time of independence impeded the democratic development. By giving the EPLF free reins to govern, rather than functioning as powerful checks and balances, the international community did not put further pressure on the EPLF, which could further help the EPLF in transforming itself into a democratic, civilian party. In particular, because the independent civil society was absent, a powerful international community could have assumed its role and worked as checks and balances in a very important phase of Eritrea's democratisation process.

5.5 Conclusion

To sum up, Eritrea's failure to democratise needs to be seen in context with its external relations. Its *de facto* state of emergency, since the 1998-2000 war with Ethiopia, has totally reversed Eritrea's democratic development. The implementation of the constitution has been put on hold, elections have been postponed indefinitely and any dissent is perceived as being a threat to the Eritrean national sovereignty - a sovereignty that has not received much support from the international community or its neighbours throughout history. In the beginning this chapter argued that while Eritrea itself is solely responsible for its foreign policies, external relations imply an intricate relationship where different actors' behaviour affects each other. Therefore, the international community's role was first analysed to more easily understand the Eritrean government's worldview. Subsequently, this chapter analysed what has been termed the 'Ethiopia factor'. Both the international community and Ethiopia have been

²⁹¹ Kibreab, Gaim (2009b) 'Forced Labour in Eritrea' in *Journal of Modern African Studies*, vol. 47: 1

²⁹² Human Rights Watch (2009) p. 3

²⁹³ Hepner, Tricia R & O'Kane, David (2009b)

analysed in a historical perspective to understand the current hostility Eritrea has towards them.

Whether Eritrea is subject to an actual threat is not important. What is important is to understand how Eritrea perceives and construes external threats and reacts to them. As more than 60,000 fighters and 40,000 civilians died during the liberation war,²⁹⁴ and tens of thousands in the second war with Ethiopia, the Eritrean government has skilfully utilised these sacrifices by stating that it is the only true guarantor of Eritrean independence and that the opposition would squander it. As long as there is a perceived threat to the country's independence, which is also partly reinforced by the Ethiopian government's refusal to accept the ruling of the EEBC, many Eritreans seem to be willing to trade freedom and democracy for 'security'.²⁹⁵

Eritrea had crafted its identity through the liberation struggle and worshiped its freedom fighters. It understood its success in the independence struggle as a single-handed military victory achieved against all odds. This engendered a sense of invincibility that made them see only military solutions when conflict arose. In the words of Information Minister Ali Abdu, Eritrea would kneel down for two reasons only: to pray or to shoot.²⁹⁶ When this sense of invincibility is combined with the 'do not trust anyone' mentality, the consequences are aggressive foreign policy and totalitarian domestic policies. After the devastating second war with Ethiopia, this sense of invincibility was challenged and without any help being offered from the international community, the government tightened its grip so that it could achieve its core value without any of its 'enemies' trying to destroy the Eritrean nation-state.

²⁹⁴ Government of Eritrea, 1993, cited in Kibreab, Gaim (2009a) p. 203

²⁹⁵ Kibreab, Gaim (2009a) p. 203

²⁹⁶ Quoted in Hepner, Tricia R. and O'Kane, David (2009a) p. x

6. Summarising arguments and concluding remarks

The thesis began by quoting president Isaias to illustrate the research question: why has Eritrea failed to democratise? At the time of independence, many believed that Eritrea would develop into a democracy. It spoke about elections, started drafting a constitution and the international community was willing to support the government in their nation-state building. At the time of writing, however, Eritrea has turned into a totalitarian state and the democratic narrative in the beginning of the 1990s has been changed to “we are not ready for democracy.” To answer the research question, this thesis has used democratisation theory and created an eclectic framework that analyses the state, society and external relations to see how they have contributed to the failure of democratisation. This chapter will attempt to reassess the three elements to highlight how they have impeded the democratisation process in Eritrea. Subsequently, on the basis of the findings this chapter will return to the theoretical framework and discuss some theoretical implications.

6.1 State, society and external relations – three intertwined elements

The state, which in this case is represented by the Eritrean government and the ruling party, the PFDJ, has been a major actor impeding democratic development in Eritrea. This thesis has analysed the PFDJ’s history and showed that it had failed to transform into a civilian democratic party. The EPLF during the liberation war managed to mobilise a multi-ethnic society against a powerful Ethiopia. By being secretive and centralised around a few figures and being ruthless against dissent, the leadership managed to further mobilise the people of Eritrea. Its strategy of self-reliance during the liberation war was another factor that contributed to its success. But the continuation of these features has been a hindrance for democratisation post-independence. First, sectarian grievances etc. have been subdued. Second, the idea of having a vanguard leading the masses has created a state wherein only a few people decide everything. At the centre are the president, a few selected advisors and their actions. Third, instead of letting people openly share their grievances and

disagreements, the government has dealt with it in the same way as it did during the liberation war. Finally, self-reliance and self-sacrifice is a main cause for poor economic performance, exclusion of the voluntary sector and international support to help boost the economy. The politics of self-reliance is a mechanism the state uses to control society. Various international NGOs and agencies have been kept out of Eritrea, and the state used this method to consolidate its power and prevent outsiders from observing conditions in the country.²⁹⁷ Additionally, self-sacrifice has made the government neglect many Eritreans' poverty and hunger, as building Eritrea through the core value has been more important than taking care of individuals and their difficulties. At the heart of these failures lies the ruling clique's illiberal and intolerant attitudes, which makes them perceive everything not initiated by them as representing a threat to the PFDJ's hegemony. The PFDJ identifies itself as Eritrea and, according to the PFDJ, without the party Eritrea cannot survive. Thus a threat to the PFDJ's hegemony in Eritrea is a threat to national security. National liberation movements in general have legacies that are not compatible with democratic development and there is thus a need to work hard to transform a liberation movement into a civilian party. This is where the PFDJ and its vanguard have failed.

Needless to say, to only focus on the state in a democratisation process is insufficient. Therefore, the second element of this study has been the Eritrean society. This study has highlighted some characteristics of the Eritrean society, which partly explains why the citizens have not been able to put more pressure on the government. The hierarchical structure states that any individual should always be subservient to another individual who is regarded as superior to them. But it does also explain the attitudes of the governing elite as they expect their citizens to be obedient citizens following the government's plan. This has laid the basis of a system where the government is not accountable to its citizens, but rather the other way around. Moreover, after decades of war, it is clear that many citizens showed an unconditional support to the EPLF/PFDJ during the first few years.

The development of a viral associational life, as one could see in the 40s and the 50s, is now non-existent. Apart from the GONGOs in Eritrea, the only groups

²⁹⁷ Woldemikael, Tekle (2009) p. 10

opposing state policies and development live in exile or have turned to non-peaceful methods. The explanation to this can be traced back to the mobilisation of the Eritreans by the EPLF during the liberation war. But, in the same way that the state failed to transform into a civilian party, the mass organisations failed to develop into NGOs functioning as checks and balances to the government. They continued to have close links with the ruling party and have become a tool where the government can influence its citizens, rather than become a forum that can influence the government. As the definition of democracy is popular control over public affairs based on equality, none of the abovementioned elements succeeds in promoting democracy.

The third and final part of the framework dealt with external relations and how that affected the democratisation process. The argument was that ‘relations’ was more accurate than just to focus on foreign policy. Eritrea’s relations are affected by a worldview where it does not trust anyone. This is partly due to the international community’s failure to sufficiently support Eritrea throughout history, partly due to the poor relationship they have with Ethiopia, and partly due to the EPLF/PFDJ’s military mentality. This thesis used Iyob’s term ‘diasporic’ to explain how the Eritrean government does not trust anyone and as a consequence perceives anyone who conditionally supports its policies as adversarial. Moreover, the international community’s unconditional support and high praises of ushered a lack of accountability by the recently liberated state. The EPLF/PFDJ thus had no pressure to revise its strategies and tactics.

Construed, perceived or actual threats to the national project have had several consequences for the democratisation process. First, in the eyes of Isaias, the government’s legitimacy, which stemmed from the liberation war and its core value, was challenged after the second war with Ethiopia. In order to re-impose control and rebuild its legitimacy it was made clear that no alternative voices were tolerated. In other words, the PFDJ and its leaders’ core value was the major reason for its legitimacy, and when these were at risk, the very existence of its idea of Eritrea was at risk. Hence, all grievances that did not correspond with the government’s core value were perceived as being a threat to the state. Second, in order to make sure that the ‘Eritreaness’ was upheld and outside influences was ignored, the government project

of national service has militarised the Eritrean society. This can be seen as a means to strengthen Eritrean defence against external invasion, but is also a means to enforce control over the Eritrean citizens.

The three elements analysed in this study are intertwined. The state's and the society's analysis show two factors that are always interacting with each other: the state's actions and the society's response and vice versa. Furthermore, the term external relations implies a relationship where foreign forces and the domestic forces reacts to each other. In the domestic forces' reactions, elements of the state and society are present. The lack of holding the government accountable by both the Eritrean society and the international community at the time of independence furthermore gave the PFDJ no incentive or pressure to transform into a civilian democratic party. The similarities between the liberation front and the political party in Eritrea were present already at the time of independence. Hence, the failure to democratise started already at independence, and not after the second war with Ethiopia with the 2001 crackdown. A democratisation process is a long, dynamic and complicated process where these three factors interact with each other and influence the democratic development. Based on the findings, the remainder of this chapter will now discuss some theoretical implications of the research.

6.2 Theoretical Implications

This study has argued that a theoretical challenge is to theorise how the different factors interplay in the democratisation process. As a result, an eclectic framework was adopted using three analytical dimensions. The framework is first and foremost based on transition theory and historical sociology. In addition, it is based on post-conflict democratisation theory. The framework has paid additional attention to the decisions made in the immediate transition phase. It has used the influence from the transition theory to focus on actors and their choices. Nevertheless, actors' choices are not made in a vacuum of other factors influencing the actor. Historical sociology emphasises the structures created by history through for instance war. Taken together, these two theories can create a good explanatory framework for analysing actors and the structures affecting the relevant actors.

The alternative framework created for this research has analysed the state, society and external relations in a historical sociological perspective and has showed that in order to understand why democratisation in Eritrea has failed, one needs to analyse the relevant agents by looking at how history has shaped both their mentality, and created structures, which are not compatible with democratic development. The analysis of the state has showed that in order to understand the government and its leaders today, one needs to go back to the liberation war. The analysis of the different agents in the Eritrean society shows a similar pattern where old socio-cultural characteristics and the liberation war has created conditions not favourable for a strong, independent society and civil society working to hold their leaders accountable. Finally, Eritrea's external relations today are a result of decades of decisions and violence between Eritrea and outside forces, which again has affected the democratisation process in Eritrea.

Additionally, reviewing the different theories within the post-conflict democratisation paradigm, it is clear that neither sequentialism nor gradualism give a sufficient explanation of the decisions made after a transition. Whereas these two focus on building institutions, the drafting and ratification of a constitution and creating a strong state, which can create favourable conditions for democratic development, this study has showed that the result can be otherwise. The Eritrean government has been skilful in being perceived as building well-functioning institutions, but it has not promoted democratic development. The government controls legal and administrative institutions and anyone making decisions that do not coincide with the leadership are removed from their post. If necessary elements, like the abovementioned institutions, of democracy are not included in democratisation processes but deemed external preconditions, they are by definition but non-democratic enlightened ways to generate them.²⁹⁸ In other words, if the Eritrean government believes that institutions are important preconditions for democracy, but are only controlled by the PFDJ leadership, these institutions are non-democratic. The government has failed to facilitate popular capacity building, popular organisation building and a government that is ready to dedicate itself to facilitating popular

²⁹⁸ Törnquist, Olle (2009) p. 4

representation. In order to analyse the post-conflict transition phase, one has to look at how the government has focused facilitating popular representation and capacity building, not how well the institutions are built.

In other words, in order to understand and explain the failed democratisation process in Eritrea, one needs to adopt this type of framework. It has a strong explanatory dimension and deals with the complexity of a democratisation process. Nevertheless, this framework is not static. It fits the study of the period 1991-2011, but in the future new factors may change the situation in Eritrea. Eritrea is a young country and is still undergoing transition and the framework used here has been a useful model in explaining the transition phase so far. A theoretical framework needs to fit the empirical realities on the ground and as the world is changing, new factors may play a larger role. This framework has been adapted to the 20-year timeframe based on the historical experiences of the Horn of Africa. But in the future, new realities may create the need for a new framework dealing with other factors.

In this study, the modernisation theory has been considered less relevant, as the argument has been that the lack of economic development has been the result of non-democratic policies in Eritrea, not the other way around. However, as the Eritrean government has found large areas of gold and quartz²⁹⁹, the latter used for mobile phones and being very rare, the economic situation may change in the country. This can further create new ways of analysing political development in Eritrea. Another element that can alter the situation in Eritrea is Ethiopia. As has been mentioned in the thesis, Ethiopia has at the time of writing adopted a more aggressive rhetoric towards Eritrea. Another large-scale conflict between the two countries can create new factors that will be vital in order to understand political development in Eritrea.

One can also identify a few wider implications of this study. First, as this study has shown, the case of Eritrea is by no means unique. While there of course are some unique factors, the fact that Eritrea gained its independence as a result of liberation war puts it in league with other non-democratic states, like Zimbabwe, Rwanda, Ethiopia and Angola. Many of the political parties that came to rule African states

²⁹⁹ Aardal, Arman (2011) *Conversation*, 13. April, 2011

were originally constituted as liberation movements.³⁰⁰ The need to have actors that can hold a liberation movement accountable when it assumes power is thus imperative. This is the second wider implication. The international community's unconditional support at the time of independence gave the EPLF free reins to govern. In a situation like Eritrea in the beginning of 1991, there were no autonomous civil society, and it was thus imperative that a powerful international community could hold the new government consisting of liberation fighters, not politicians, accountable. The 'African renaissance' that President Clinton talked about did not only include Eritrea, but also Ethiopia, Uganda and Rwanda. These were all countries that received unconditional support from the international community at the beginning of the 1990s, but all with democratic deficiencies today. Moreover, while it is not useful to compare the current situation in North Africa and the Middle East with the case of Eritrea, a prolonged civil war in Libya for instance can bring the abovementioned elements into actuality again. What if the insurgents assume power in Libya? How should the international community support a new government? Another case, where these questions have some relevance is in South Sudan. In any case, this framework can have certain validity in other cases in Africa where a liberation movement assumed power. It deals with three significant analytical dimensions in a historical perspective that can give a more comprehensive picture of how countries like Zimbabwe and Uganda has failed to develop democratically.

Eritrea today, however, is a result of historical realities that have affected agents on all levels to create a totalitarian state, devoid of democratic development. The PFDJ has failed to transform into a civilian democratic party and has used the 20-year period of independence as a continuation of the liberation war. Similar patterns are identified within the society as well as the last analytical dimension, external relations. As a statement by Eritrean Catholic bishops accurately put it, 'If we have learned anything from history, it is the fact that we failed to draw lessons from it'.³⁰¹ More or less, Eritrea's 20 years of independence can be summarised in five simple words: Old sins cast long shadows.

³⁰⁰ Suttner, David (2004) p. 2

³⁰¹ Catholic bishops, 2001, quoted in Kibreab, Gaim (2009a), p. 204

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