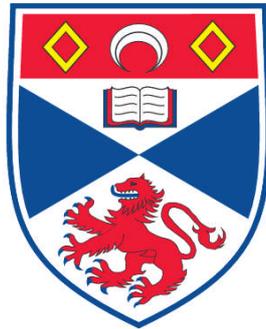


# THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF LAND TENURE IN ETHIOPIA

Steven Davies

A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of PhD  
at the  
University of St. Andrews



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**The Political Economy of Land Tenure in Ethiopia**  
*By Steven Davies*

PhD Thesis  
School of International Relations  
University of St Andrews  
April 2008

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## **Abstract**

In surveying the literature on land tenure reform in Africa, what can readily be observed is that much of that body of work has comprised a markedly econometric and technical focus, to the neglect of evidently contiguous political factors. As a result, fundamental structural impediments to reform efforts have largely been ignored - a fact that may be reflected in the failure of many titling interventions. In light of this omission, the nature of political economy in both Ethiopia and Africa more generally is delineated in this thesis, in order to construct a more rounded conceptual framework through which the issue of land tenure can be deciphered. In so doing, the model of the 'neopatrimonial'/anti-developmental state is utilised as a benchmark against which twentieth century Ethiopian regimes, and in particular the incumbent EPRDF Government, are assessed. Considerable evidence is uncovered to support the view that, despite its unique historical experience of independence, contemporary Ethiopia nevertheless fits with many key aspects of the neopatrimonial model – most notably in the Government's pursuit of political survival and revenue to the neglect of long-term sustainable development. It is therefore argued that political imperatives have undermined the establishment of a progressive economic agenda in the country, and the ways in which this has affected land tenure are delineated. Moreover, it is demonstrated that the contemporary debate on tenure reform in Ethiopia has taken a form that is somewhat myopic and circuitous, possibly in an attempt to circumvent discussion of controversial political issues. It is argued that this apolitical stance has undermined not only the debate itself, but also the practical intervention strategies that have emerged from it, such as the recent land titling and administration project in Ethiopia. It is therefore concluded that the only means of escape from this theoretical and practical impasse is to reintegrate politics into the analysis.

## Full Table of Contents

<b>Abstract</b> .....	3
<b>Acknowledgements</b> .....	7
<b>Acronyms</b> .....	9
<b>Introduction</b> .....	11
<b>Methodology</b> .....	16
<b>Chapter 1: Principles of Effective Land Tenure in Sub-Saharan Africa</b> .....	22
A. Introduction.....	22
B. Towards a consensus in the land tenure debate?.....	24
C. Economic theories of land tenure.....	28
i. The evolutionary theory of property rights.....	28
ii. The neoclassical theory of property rights and investment incentives.....	30
D. Principles of land tenure: the structure and characteristics of effective property right regimes.....	32
i. The distribution of holdings and the organisation of production.....	32
ii. Modernised versus traditional land tenure.....	35
a. The case for customary tenure.....	36
b. The case for formal registration.....	42
iii. The transferability of land rights.....	48
iv. Non-tenurial institutions and the provision of inputs and services.....	53
E. Re-conceptualising land tenure in Africa.....	59
F. Concluding remarks.....	63
<b>Chapter 2: Africa and the Politics of the “Hegemonic Drive”</b> .....	65
A. Introduction.....	65
B. Postcolonial state formation in Africa.....	66
C. The conditions of neopatrimonial rule.....	71
i. Defining Neopatrimonialism.....	71
ii. Manifestations of ‘personalism’ within neopatrimonial Regimes.....	74
iii. Rational-legalism and clientelism – impossible allies?.....	77
D. The postcolonial economic mission.....	82
E. The well dries up: the decline of patronage revenues.....	88
i. The decline of external patronage.....	88
ii. The proliferation of policy interventions and aid conditionality.....	91
F. Conceptualisations of state and political crisis in contemporary Africa.....	96
i. The ‘democratic’ response to crisis.....	97
ii. Economic and political crises in ‘spoils politics’ states.....	101
a. Warlordism.....	102
b. Populist revolt.....	104
iv. Politics as an evolutionary process.....	106

v. A simplified typology.....	109
G. Concluding remarks.....	113
<b>Chapter 3: A Political History of Ethiopia: The Rise of a Centralised</b>	
<b>Authoritarian State and the Genesis of Neopatrimonial Rule.....</b>	<b>118</b>
A. Introduction.....	118
B. State and power in pre-modern Ethiopia.....	120
i. Historical Abyssinia .....	120
ii. The southern marches.....	123
C. Absolutism and the birth of a neopatrimonial order.....	126
i. The intrusion of global capitalism.....	126
ii. Haile Selassie and the rise of absolutism.....	128
iii. The genesis of neopatrimonial governance.....	132
D. Revolution and military rule.....	136
E. The rise of ethnic politics.....	141
i. Ethnonationalism and the fall of the Derg.....	141
ii. The EPRDF takes the reins.....	144
F. Contemporary politics in Ethiopia.....	146
i. Ethnofederalism - devolution of power to the periphery?.....	147
ii. Neopatrimonialism in contemporary Ethiopia.....	154
G. Concluding remarks.....	163
<b>Chapter 4: Land Tenure and Socioeconomic Decline in Ethiopia</b>	
<b>since the Late Nineteenth Century.....</b>	<b>165</b>
A. Introduction.....	165
B. Economic structures in pre-modern Abyssinia.....	166
i. The political ecology.....	166
ii. The rist-gult system of land tenure.....	170
C. New market imperatives and the Ethiopian state.....	178
i. Territorial expansion and the southern tenure system.....	179
ii. The decline of economic autonomy in the north.....	181
D. The growth dilemma – macro and microeconomic development in	
the twentieth century.....	187
i. The Selassie era.....	187
ii. The Derg and the emergence of state landlordship.....	189
iii. The EPRDF’s development strategy – ADLI or façADLI?.....	192
E. Competing narratives: alternative accounts of socioeconomic	
decline and land tenure.....	200
F. Concluding remarks.....	206
<b>Chapter 5: The Debate on Land Tenure Reform in Ethiopia.....</b>	<b>209</b>
A. Introduction.....	209
B. The Federal Government on land tenure, part 1 – rhetoric.....	211
C. Ethiopian economists on land tenure.....	215
D. Donor organisations on land tenure in Ethiopia.....	225
E. Case study: land tenure ‘reform’ in Amhara state.....	232
F. Ethiopian farmers on land tenure.....	244
G. The Federal Government on land tenure, part 2 – reality.....	248
H. Concluding remarks.....	253

<b>Conclusion</b> .....	256
<b>Bibliography</b> .....	274
<b>Internet Sources</b> .....	287
<b>Appendix</b> .....	288

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useful people upon first arriving in Addis, and so to her I am also indebted. I should however make clear that the views expressed in this work are entirely my own, and should not in any way be construed as indicative of those held by the individuals mentioned above.

Finally, on a more personal level, I must express my fullest gratitude to my friends and family for the multitude of ways in which they have aided and encouraged me while working on this thesis, and in particular to my parents, Margaret and Gary Davies, for their untiring support throughout my studies.

## Acronyms

ADLI	Agricultural Development Led Industrialisation
AMC	Agricultural Marketing Corporation
ANDM	Amhara National Democratic Movement
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
CUD	Coalition for Unity and Democracy
DFID	Department for International Development (British)
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
ECA	Economic Commission for Africa
EDU	Ethiopian Democratic Union
EEA	Ethiopian Economics Association
ECPRI	Ethiopian Economic Policy Research Institute
EFFORT	Endowment Fund for the Rehabilitation of Tigray
EHRCO	Ethiopian Human Rights Council
ELTAP	Ethiopian Land Tenure and Administration Project
EPDM	Ethiopian Peoples Democratic Movement
EPLAUA	Environmental Protection, Land Administration and Use Authority
EPLF	Eritrean People's Liberation Front
EPPF	Ethiopian People's Patriotic Front
EPRDF	Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front
EPRP	Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party
EU	European Union
EWLA	Ethiopian Women Lawyers Association
FAO	Food and Agricultural Association of the United Nations
FDRE	Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GVP	Gross Value of Production
IFI	International Financial Institution
IMF	International Monetary Fund
MEISON	All-Ethiopian Socialist Movement (translation of Amharic name)
MLLT	Marxist Leninist League of Tigray
MoARD	Ministry of Agricultural and Rural Development
MoFED	Ministry of Forestry and Environmental Development
MoI	Ministry of Information
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
OLF	Oromo Liberation Front
ONLF	Ogaden National Liberation Front
OPDO	Oromo Peoples Democratic Movement
PA	Peasants' Association
PASDEP	Plan for Accelerated and Sustained development to End Poverty
PDRE	People's Democratic Republic of Ethiopia
REST	Relief Society of Tigray
SAP	Structural Adjustment programme
SEPDM	Southern Ethiopian People's Democratic movement
SIDA	Swedish International Development Agency
TDA	Tigray Development Association

TGE Transitional Government of Ethiopia  
TPLF Tigray People's Liberation Front  
USAID United State's Agency for International Development

## **Introduction**

Upon considering the seemingly interminable quandary that is Africa's underdevelopment, the issue of land tenure would seem to be of critical importance. For many of the continent's beleaguered states, the agrarian sector is the primary component of the economy, and subsistence agriculture the only available livelihood for the majority of its peoples. This is especially so for those countries that have not been endowed with an abundance of mineral wealth, such as oil reserves or precious stones. In such instances, effecting improvements in the agricultural sector would seem to be the most realistic means of achieving increased productivity growth, and hence the rules governing land tenure may constitute a pivotal constraint on that process. Ethiopia is one example of a country that is heavily dependent upon agricultural produce, and has been selected as the primary object of this study for reasons that will be outlined below. What will be undertaken is an in-depth analysis of the political economy of land tenure in Ethiopia. With one eye on the country's economic prospects, questions will be asked such as the following: In what ways has land tenure interacted with other socioeconomic phenomena throughout the modern era, and what role might it feasibly play in future societal transitions? How have the key actors interpreted land tenure, and in what ways and to what ends has it been utilised as a political and economic tool? What factors underlie contemporary perceptions of tenure, and how has this coloured the debate on land reform? And indeed what is the realistic potential of land tenure reform – a prospect that economists have heavily emphasised in the literature - as a means to stimulate investment and productivity growth in Ethiopia?

Turning now to the issue of how to justify the aforementioned subject choice, the above has more or less answered the question of why land tenure in particular has been singled out as a component of Africa's underdevelopment that is worthy of investigation. In short, it constitutes the institutional and legislative framework within which the majority of the continent's microeconomic activity takes place. What

remains to be clarified is as follows: Firstly, why has Ethiopia been singled out for analysis? And secondly, why study the political economy of land tenure specifically? Dealing firstly with the former, as noted above Ethiopia is a country that is particularly dependent on agriculture, due to a lack of mineral deposits. It is one of the poorest countries in the world in terms of GDP, and suffers from systemic food insecurity and aid dependency. Rural areas are heavily populated, with around 80% of people engaged in subsistence farming (EEA, 2005, p.161), and the country has suffered three major famines in the last thirty years (1973, 1984 and 2002). This is compounded by soaring population growth rates and a decreasing availability of suitable cropland. Moreover, the current ruling party has largely persevered with the land policy inherited from the previous Marxist government, which prevents the private ownership or transfer of land, against the advice of both international and indigenous economists. Therefore, the subject of land tenure in Ethiopia would seem a highly relevant and indeed pressing one, when one is concerned with the broader problem of the country's economic underdevelopment.

The latter question of why to study the political economy of land tenure is more complex. The following quote from the Ethiopian Economics Association provides an apt introduction to the issue.

The policy and politics of rural and agricultural tenure mark important events in Ethiopian socio-economic and political history. Ownership, access to land and tenure security have been important elements of not only agricultural and rural life but also of the social, economic and political relations in the country. (EEA, 2005, p.292)

Land tenure is both an economic and a political institution. In regard to its latter aspect, the specific rules of a tenure regime must be implemented within, and indeed be derived from, a given society, and hence the political entity that governs and legislates that society must also be a primary determinant of both the nature and efficacy of the

tenure system. This point will be more thoroughly expounded in chapter one, but the above should nevertheless constitute sufficient grounds to provisionally uphold the choice of a political economy study of land tenure. Moreover, as will also be discussed in the following chapter, the majority of contemporary studies of land tenure, and in particular those conducted by donors and IFIs such as the World Bank, have focused almost exclusively on the narrower and more technical economic aspects of land tenure to the neglect of broader political influences. Occasionally, somewhat cryptic references are made to political impediments or agendas, but the nature and extent of these constraints are rarely explored. This would seem to be a glaring omission, and indeed one that may even undermine the prognosis of such studies, given the potentiality for political phenomenon to impact upon land tenure. Therefore, in orientating its focus towards the political economy of land tenure, this study will attempt to rectify this deficiency for the case of Ethiopia, and produce a more thorough and penetrating analysis of land tenure in that country.

There are further reasons why a study of political economy may be of particular relevance in this case. There is an extensive literature on African politics that suggests, amongst other things, that African states may be to a great extent anti-developmental. There would seem to be something about how government predominantly operates within the continent that undermines efforts to engineer economic development, and many scholars have utilised the theory known as ‘neopatrimonialism’ to decipher this recurrent phenomenon. Therefore, if the theory has merit, then some of its key concepts may further elucidate the nature of political economy in contemporary Africa, and shed considerable light upon the mode of interaction between government, land tenure policy and the more concrete tenure regimes themselves. Furthermore, upon considering the various conceptions of neopatrimonialism, it is evident that Ethiopia is a uniquely interesting case. Although the precise root causes of neopatrimonial rule are imperfectly understood, the colonial experience is often thought to be a key antecedent. However, Ethiopia did not undergo a colonial experience that was qualitatively similar

to the rest of Africa, and yet its twentieth century regimes have been included in many different scholarly typologies within the neopatrimonial framework. Much has been written about Ethiopia's historical political development, but few studies have considered how, and to what extent, it has morphed into a broadly neopatrimonial polity. Therefore, in light of this evident gap, a twofold opportunity exists to further knowledge in this field, and will be carried out in this thesis as follows: Firstly, we will undertake a synthesis of the Ethiopianist and contemporary Africanist (neopatrimonial) literature, in an attempt to more precisely expound the evolution and contemporary nature of political economy in Ethiopia. This will involve detailing the country's own unique historical experience as well as that of the continent more broadly, and explaining how the two may have converged, if the term 'neopatrimonial' is applicable to the more recent Ethiopian regimes. Secondly and consequently we will then utilise this political analysis as a conceptual framework through which to decipher the issue of land tenure within the country – in terms of its historical transformations, contemporary form and potential role as a developmental tool. Hence we will construct a novel conception of political economy in Ethiopia, and in turn produce a more realistic and penetrating analysis of its land tenure system than has previously been possible.

In light of the above, and in order to guide our investigation towards an eventual analysis of contemporary land tenure in Ethiopia, the study will be structured as follows: Chapter one will undertake an evaluation of the general land tenure literature, with particular emphasis upon work derived from African case studies. We will elucidate the theory and empirical evidence that has emerged from that material in order to aid our understanding of what constitutes an effective tenure regime. We will also consider the deficiencies of that body of work, most notably in its neglect of political factors, and outline the ways in which this may undermine and/or necessitate revisions of its overall prognosis. Chapter two will constitute an analysis of African politics. The relevant literature will again be surveyed, and the ways in which structural factors and neopatrimonial exigencies beget political economies that are innately anti-

developmental will be delineated. Chapter three will then outline Ethiopia's unique political history. It will firstly elucidate the key events and/or phenomena that have conditioned the country's political and economic trajectories since the genesis of the modern state in the late nineteenth century. Secondly, it will evaluate the extent to which Ethiopia 'fits' with the neopatrimonial model, and this will in turn allow for an assessment of the explanatory power of those concepts in deciphering Ethiopia's twentieth century political economy - especially under the most recent regime. Moreover, this section, along with the fourth and fifth chapter will draw upon primary data gathered during field research - which comprised a two-month stay in Ethiopia between February and March of 2007, during which time interviews were conducted with key actors in the field (see Appendix one). Chapter four will augment the preceding chapter by undertaking a survey of land tenure and broader socioeconomic development (or decline) in Ethiopia throughout the same pre-modern to twentieth century period. It will delineate the economic forces that have underpinned the contemporary Ethiopian state since its creation, and detail the development strategies that have been adopted by the three most recent regimes, including the underlying political rationale of these strategies. The evolution of land tenure throughout this period will be expounded, in terms of its interaction with, and indeed derivation from, broader political and socioeconomic conditions. The chapter will conclude by considering how this depiction of land tenure corresponds with the conventional, more straightforwardly economic and technocratic presentations of the issue that have featured in studies on Ethiopia's economic development. Chapter five will constitute the culmination of the project, by examining the contemporary debate on land tenure reform in Ethiopia. It will seek to present and critique the views of the main actors involved in the process, i.e. government, donors, indigenous analysts, and ordinary farmers, based upon the political economy conceptual framework constructed previously. In so doing it will seek to answer the research questions raised above about the nature and developmental potential of land tenure in Ethiopia, as well as how it has been perceived and utilised by those involved.

## **Methodology**

Before proceeding with our analysis, some detail will next be provided about the methodology that has been employed for this research. It has essentially comprised two primary dimensions – on the one hand, relating to the use of secondary literature, and on the other, to interviews that were conducted during fieldwork. We will discuss the approach that was taken to each of these components in detail below, with particular emphasis on the latter process, in order to provide a suitable research context within which our findings can be situated.

The first aspect of our methodology has involved conducting an in depth survey of various secondary literatures that were identified as pertaining closely to key aspects of the land tenure problem. More specifically, the literatures that were studied, and the justifications for the inclusion of each, are as follows. Firstly, the conventional neoclassical economic literature that has informed the majority of contemporary research into land tenure in Africa was analysed. Indeed this body of work was made the object of the first chapter, as critiquing the theoretical roots of the prevailing discourse on tenure reform provided a fruitful means of engaging with the issue. In uncovering the conceptual limitations inherent in this narrowly focused body of work, it was possible to then argue for an expansion of the theoretical basis of land tenure to incorporate two other contiguous and hitherto neglected literatures. These proposed inclusions consisted of: on the one hand, studies of African politics, which were the object of chapter two; and on the other, accounts of Ethiopian political and economic history, which were depicted in chapters three and four. Their inclusion was justified on the grounds that both political economy and history would constitute central pillars of our theoretical approach to this issue. These literatures had not previously been used in tandem to analyse the issue of land tenure in contemporary Ethiopia, despite their evident relevance, and it was in synthesising this disparate material into a unified and

coherent perspective that this thesis has made one of its primary contributions to the field.

This first dimension of our methodology has hence comprised a critical approach to a range of secondary theoretical and analytic resources, which has allowed for the construction of a broad conceptual framework for the study of contemporary land tenure. The other aspect of our methodology that need be discussed pertains to our approach to, and mode of, primary data collection. That data would of course constitute the raw material to which our theoretical framework would later be applied. And whilst some recent empirical studies were utilised, the perceived inadequacies in that work necessitated that more extensive use was made of firsthand data gathered during fieldwork. Therefore, a qualitative approach to data collection, which involved conducting around forty semi-structured interviews with informed actors, was the primary means by which this was achieved. In light of the host of methodological issues that are raised by conducting such interview-based research, considerable detail will be provided below about that process, in terms the practical, ethical and other such relevant and constraining factors that were encountered. Firstly though, it is necessary to provide further clarification of the ways in which other contemporary studies have erred, in order to more clearly distinguish how and why the approach taken here has differed.

As will be discussed later in the thesis, much of the contemporary published research on the subject of land tenure in Ethiopia suffers from a lack of political and historical analysis, and has rather confined itself to a comparatively shallow and conceptually restricted econometric approach to the issue. A lengthier exposition of this situation will again be provided later, but for now suffice to say that two main reasons can be identified for the limitations to this body of work. Firstly, debates on this issue have been largely smothered by the prevailing neoliberal/neoclassical discourse that economists and organisations such as the World Bank, USAID, DFID etc have

advanced in recent years. Much of that output has comprised a striking lack of political analysis, and an overwhelming emphasis on pseudo-scientific, econometric explanations. This has no doubt coloured economic research within Ethiopia. Secondly, land tenure is an intensely political subject in Ethiopia, for reasons that will again be outlined. The Federal Government has in the past responded repressively to perceived political dissent, and has been pointedly severe in its response to calls for land tenure reform. In the 2004 Prime Minister Meles Zenawi famously declared that land reform would only happen 'over the ruling party's dead body' (Devereux et al., 2005, p.122). Indeed, at the time of my fieldwork in Ethiopia, one of the key architects of the last major study of land tenure in Ethiopia (EEPRI/EEA, 2002), Dr Berhanu Nega, was in jail for his role as a membership of the urban based Coalition for Unity and Democracy (CUD) opposition party, which has favoured the privatisation of land. Therefore, academic publications on the subject of land tenure reform in Ethiopia have unsurprisingly avoided discussing its more sensitive political dimensions. Hence, in light of the aforementioned political economy approach to the issue adopted here, it was necessary for the author to conduct field interviews in Ethiopia in order to try and compensate for this dearth of published material, and uncover sufficient information on the political dimensions of the land tenure debate.

A series of semi-structured interviews was carried out in Ethiopia by the author during February and March of 2007. Most interviews lasted for around forty-five minutes to an hour, and comprised between six and ten open-ended questions, which were varied somewhat according to the specific vocation and/or background of the individual in question, and to which interviewees were encouraged to respond at length and in depth. Whilst there was considerable variance in the questions asked, several issues central to thesis were, in most cases, raised in some form, such as: the extent to which the interviewee considered the land tenure system as whole and the narrower problem of tenure insecurity an obstacle to development; their views on the potential of land tenure reform to instigate productivity growth, as well as the efficacy of the current land titling

initiative that is being conducted by various regional governments; and finally whether, to what extent, and in what ways they believed that politics have surreptitiously influenced land tenure policy making and practise, and related developmental activities. Interviewees were also encouraged to describe their own individual involvement in land tenure-related activities/projects.

The full list of interviewees is included as appendix to the thesis, and consists of: Ethiopian academics, economists, government representatives, opposition party members, and donor and NGO staff. Such a range of actors was selected for interview in an attempt to garner a representative array of views that would correspond to the range of persons and organisations that have inputted into the contemporary debate on land tenure reform. In some instances specific individuals were requested to participate in an interview on the grounds that they had published material on the subject of land tenure, e.g. Dessalegn Rahmato, Yigremew Adal and Berhanu Adenew. In other cases, organisations such as donor agencies or branches of government directly involved in land related work were approached, and individuals from within these agencies responded to my request, offering to meet with me on behalf of their employers. However, despite their role as representatives of their respective organisations, many were willing to provide more nuanced, personal interpretations of the issues at stake, on the condition that they were not directly quoted. Indeed, many of the interviewees stated that they were willing to be included on the list of interviews, but did not want to be personally quoted on any sensitive issues. Some were concerned that they could be professionally or even personally jeopardised were they to be identified as having voiced critical views of the Government on this issue – a fact that, as shall be explained in chapter three, reflects the prevailing uncertainty about the extent of free speech that will be respected in Ethiopia, in light of the Government’s repressive actions in the period following the disputed 2005 election. An unprecedented degree of free speech and criticism had been tolerated in the pre-election period, only to be swiftly reversed thereafter. In light of this fear and uncertainty, many of the quotes that have been

utilised within the thesis are simply attributed to ‘indigenous analysts’ or ‘donor representatives’, in order maintain a high degree of anonymity and minimise the possibility of any subsequent difficulties for any of the interviewees.

One important group that have not been well represented amongst the interviewees, are Ethiopian farmers – a fact that perhaps requires justification. Whilst some farmers were interviewed at the land titling site in Debre Markos with the assistance of local officials, the fact that the officials were translating the farmers responses into English for the author, and that these farmers constituted the local council, rather than being a random sample from the area, are clearly constraints that undermine the impartiality and representativeness of that data. Indeed the logistical and linguistic difficulties that would be involved in attempting to garner a representative sample of views from such a diverse group as Ethiopian farmers, or even Amhara farmers, would be far and beyond the scope of the fieldwork that was practicable for this thesis. And in fact, as is discussed in chapter five, the most recent major survey of farmers’ preferences that was conducted by a team from the Ethiopian Economic Policy Research Institute (EEPRI, 2002) failed to yield results that depicted a coherent range of preferences. However, attempting to somehow procure qualitative data on the preferences of Ethiopia farmers with regard to land tenure reform, whilst a very interesting and worthy endeavour, was not in fact requisite to meet research questions posed by this dissertation. This is for the reason that it is the contemporary *debate* on land tenure reform that is our focus here, rather than simply the array of views on the subject that exist within the country. The distinction lies in the fact that the debate has mainly taken place amongst the country’s elites and intellectuals, and farmers’ voices have not significantly inputted into the proceedings. Hence, whilst this exclusion of farmers views may constitute a component of the political economy that is itself relevant as an object for analysis here, it is nevertheless a set of circumstances that this thesis could not or indeed should not have sought to remedy. In essence, we have attempted to analyse the extant debate, in whatever restricted form it has taken place, and to gain insights from those individuals

situated within the process and knowledgeable about it, rather than to try and present a fresh and more inclusive debate.

Having collected this range of informed perspectives, the latter chapters of the thesis (and in particular the final chapter) then applied our political economy conceptual framework to the data in order to produce an interpretation of the politics of contemporary land tenure in Ethiopia and its concomitant debate. Lengthy quotes were included where appropriate and an attempt was made to present a spectrum of views on the issue, highlighting recurrent areas of agreement/disagreement, as well as accentuating any relevant individual nuances of perspective that might shed new light on it. Building upon such astute insights provided a fruitful means of developing a more penetrating and refined understanding of some of the issues at stake. Therefore, our research output was of an analytic and interpretative nature, in contrast to the more econometric analyses that have been prevalent in the field. However, the relatively unquantifiable insights that were obtained as a consequence of the methodology adopted here can contribute much to an enhanced understanding of land tenure and its related issues. And indeed, given our stated objective of expanding the dominant and restrictive neoclassical economic conception of land tenure to incorporate contiguous political and historical influences, this qualitative approach to the problem would seem to have been the most appropriate way to proceed.

# Chapter 1: Principles of Effective Land Tenure Applied to Sub-Saharan Africa

## Section (a) – Introduction

In this first chapter we will survey the literature on land tenure reform, paying particular attention to the empirical evidence that has emerged from African case studies. The objective is to elicit some insight into the more robust hypotheses about what constitutes an effective property right regime, in order to establish a sound theoretical basis for our later examination of the Ethiopian tenure system. However, over the course of this chapter, it will become clear that the phrase ‘land tenure theory’ is somewhat of a misnomer. Unfortunately there are few models of land tenure that have been adequately substantiated by way of empirical evidence, especially in the African context, and arguably throughout the developing world as a whole. There are many relevant insights that can be gained from the literature, but theories from which practicable strategies can be derived are notably lacking. In light of this difficulty, many donors have, in the post-Cold War period, recognised that standardized, universal models of land tenure simply do not work (World Bank, 2003, p.62-63), (Toulmin and Quan (DFID), 2001, p.3), (UNECA, 2004, p.6-8). The logic of this statement is delineated below and, as shall also be discussed, some agrarian development strategies have been formulated in spite of this seemingly compelling rationale. To spend time detailing these now redundant models would be of limited value, hence the business of this chapter will be confined to merely uncovering those key *principles* of land tenure that can be extrapolated from the contemporary literature. This should hopefully allow for the pertinent insights to be extracted in isolation from the defunct theoretical baggage that has in the past accompanied them.

It should be noted that what will emerge from this chapter will be as much an insight into what *does not* work with regard to interventionist land reform strategies in Africa, than what does. This is merely a reflection of the fact that many interventions into

property right systems have been attempted, and very little that could be deemed to be a success has been observed. What does work has as yet failed to progress much beyond the speculative stage, and this anomaly may well be suggestive of a fundamental deficiency in either the logic of intervention itself, or the understanding of the contexts within which it is being applied. As will become clear, an undertaking to intervene in the workings of a property rights regime, without a full understanding of the political and sociocultural ramifications this may have, is highly unlikely to have the predicted results. Hence it will be argued that, based upon the empirical studies examined in this chapter, sufficient evidence exists to warrant caution and more research ahead of further disruptive interventions into customary tenure systems.

In light of such prevailing limitations to the theoretical basis for land tenure reform, this chapter will attempt to provide the foundation for a renewed conceptualisation of the issue, comprising a broader and non-teleological conceptual framework, i.e. one that incorporates all relevant variables and does not presuppose any specific course of action to be appropriate. Such an undertaking will necessitate that a relatively extensive amount of material be surveyed, in order that a suitably comprehensive representation of land tenure can be constructed. Therefore, the analysis will deliberately be confined to the dominant themes and fundamental issues at stake, to the neglect of some of the more technical aspects of land tenure commonly explored in other contemporary studies. As shall be argued, the highly particularised focus and technocratic methodology of much of that work has often resulted in the opposite problem, i.e. a loss of the big picture. Hence this dissertation will seek to restore a greater degree of real-world applicability to the issue, by fully integrating those contextual factors that have in the past been omitted from research.

The above task will be undertaken as follows: Section (b) will briefly outline the context within which contemporary thought on land tenure has evolved. Section (c) will outline two important economic theories of land tenure that have served as a foundation

for research and policy. Section (d) will delineate the key principles of land reform that can be deduced from the empirical evidence found in the contemporary literature. Section (e) will attempt to explore the limitations in the prevailing discourse on land tenure in light of these findings, and argue for a reformed conceptualisation of the issue. This will be rounded off with a short summary.

### **Section (b) – Towards a Consensus in the Land Tenure Debate?**

Perhaps the first point that one should consider when investigating the issue of land tenure and indeed economy and society more broadly in Africa is the extent to which ecological factors have impacted upon emergent social formations. The indigenous systems that have evolved in the region have done so in response to an erratic and often inhospitable natural environment, giving rise to a great diversity of customary property right regimes. Mobility, risk management and flexibility in production are common features of survival strategies in Africa, and so inter-regional land tenure arrangements differ greatly depending upon the specific subsistence requirements of a given locale. For example, the fertile soils and moderate rainfall of the Ethiopian Highlands have proved very conducive to sedentary agriculture. Land tenure regimes in this zone have been characterised by individualised family-farm plots and ambilineal inheritance practices - due to their inherent suitability for such a context (McCann, 1995, p.72-73). In contrast, the arid lowlands of the Afar and Somali regions have mainly supported transhumant pastoralist societies. The critical need to move herds between water sources has resulted in tenure arrangements that allow for freedom of movement and common 'ownership' of vast grazing areas (Markakis, 1995, p.1-3).

This disparity in land tenure arrangements between environmentally marginal zones is in stark contrast to the comparatively homogenous property right systems found in North America and Western Europe. There, the relative geniality of climate has ensured that ecological factors are much less of a constraint on the standardisation of tenure regimes. Hence nationally integrated, formal-legal systems of privatised freehold

have developed in the West that are broadly similar between countries. Furthermore, and of critical importance to development policy, many thinkers and policy makers within organisations like the World Bank subscribe to the belief that this high degree of both uniformity and formalisation of property rights has been integral to the rapid productivity growth that Western countries have undergone over the last few hundred years. As the prominent economist Hernando De Soto (2000, p.9) has pointed out, exactly why this capitalist system of production has so effectively generated economic growth is still poorly understood. However, as will be discussed below, for De Soto, privatised property rights are the bedrock upon which this system has flourished, and this is a view that fits in well with the developmental ideology that many Western states, International Financial Institution's (IFIs) and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) have long adhered to. Therefore, recurrent attempts have been made to try and export private property regimes to developing countries as part of a modernisation agenda<sup>1</sup>. Indeed this process has been going on for over fifty years, to varying degrees of success. However, in the absence of a complete understanding of exactly what works, where it works, and why this is so, developing countries have in the past been used as a laboratory within which Western (and also Soviet) developmental hypotheses have been tested. In Sub-Saharan Africa, this has generally brought about disruption and further economic deterioration. In the words of Schultz (1965, cited Warriner, 1969, p.63):

It was our [Westerners'] unquestioned good fortune that community education experts, grain marketing analysts, home economists, vocational counsellors, communications specialists, or public safety advisers had not been invented [prior to the industrial revolution]. Had these existed, attention would have been drawn from the strategically central tasks of getting the farms settled and the railways built. And they would have been a burden on the backs of people who could not yet afford such luxuries.

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<sup>1</sup> The early theory from which this approach has been derived was that of Rostow (1962), who conceptualised Western mass-consumerism as an advanced stage of a 'natural', societal growth trajectory.

Numerous empirical studies have been presented over the last twenty years, many of which will be discussed below, that exposed the consistent failure of efforts to impose Western-like property right regimes upon Sub-Saharan Africa. In relatively recent years this fact has finally permeated into the development policy of donor agencies and NGOs. In the World Bank's 2003 report, 'Land Policies for Growth and Poverty Reduction', it is acknowledged that:

the almost exclusive focus on formal title in the 1975 paper<sup>2</sup> was inappropriate, and much greater attention to the legality and legitimacy of existing institutional arrangements will be required (World Bank, 2003, p.xiv).

The end of the Cold War has made it possible for Western donors to attain a hegemonic position in the sphere of overseas development<sup>3</sup>. De Soto has aptly characterised the situation as one in which liberal capitalist economic policies are, in effect, "the only game in town" (De Soto, 2000, p.242), at least for those countries seeking input from donors. Hence in the field of land policy there has been a "modification of ideological positions and a considerable convergence of opinion on basic principles among major stakeholders", according to the World Bank (2003, p.190). This has meant that, on the one hand, the options for donor-assisted economic reform and restructuring have been greatly limited – specifically to within the confines of neoliberal thinking. But on the other hand, the lack of a major ideological rival to consider may also have made it

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<sup>2</sup> This refers to World Bank's prior major land policy report: "Land Reform: Sector Policy Paper" (World Bank, 1975, cited World bank, 2003, p.xi)

<sup>3</sup> Exactly what would constitute 'development' in Africa is of course highly debatable, and an issue that has been deeply affected by conflicts of value and ideology throughout history. In this thesis it will simply be recognised that there are a vast array of different perspectives on exactly what the process does or should involve, and we will not confine ourselves to the interpretation of any particular school of thought, such as neoliberalism or socialism. Rather, we will adopt an elementary definition of the term, which is that 'development' simply refers to a growth or betterment - in this field, specifically of social and economic conditions, and acknowledge that precisely what any given commentator may envisage this process as comprising may vary markedly. At times we will be interested in the specifics of a given interpretation, and of course the political and economic implications of the stance, but out with such explicit discussions, we will simply assume that social and/or economic betterment of some kind is meant by the word.

possible for Western donors to utilise certain policy options that had previously been precluded due to a perceived association with socialism. For example, to advocate a redistribution of land to the poor, or to recognise the merit of certain ‘communal’ tenure regimes, is unlikely now to be conceived of as a communistic move. In light of this possible opening of the policy space, the potential would now seem to exist for a greater degree of political neutrality in development planning (from the perspective of donors at least), and for a shift in the primary focus of policy-making from geostrategic considerations to the genuine needs of the poor. The extent to which this has in actuality come to pass is an issue that will be explored in later sections.

As will be illustrated below, contemporary development policy now mandates a greater caution in tinkering with the workings of indigenous systems, and the evident superiority of customary arrangements in certain contexts (primarily those at the ecological margin) is now widely accepted (Home and Lim, 2004, p.154-155), (World Bank, 2003, p.62-69). It could therefore be argued that there is now a ‘consensus’ in the literature regarding: the need for contextually relevant development strategies; the importance of building upon indigenous knowledge and institutions; and the merit of certain customary tenure regimes. However, considerable disagreement still exists, primarily relating to the degree to which external intervention into indigenous tenure regimes is desirable. It seems that many scholars remain unconvinced that any significant development can occur unless it is led by external actors such as the state or donor agencies - a view that usually stems from an economic reasoning based upon property rights theory.

In light of debates such as the above, the next section will present a brief description of two relevant economic models from which the theoretical underpinnings of contemporary land policy and prescription can be better understood. This will be followed by an exposition of the key hypotheses of effective tenureship described in the literature - hence allowing for a distinction to be made between those prescriptions that

are theoretically assumed and those that are empirically justified. This is necessary because, as will be shown, these economic theories may provide representations of African societies that do not sufficiently encapsulate sociopolitical dynamics, but are nevertheless used to justify the use of relatively standardized, interventionist development strategies. Such strategies are often characterised by: registration and formal land titling procedures; measures to facilitate the supply of formal credit; measures to aid the formation of land markets etc, all of which will be discussed in subsequent sections. In so doing it will become apparent that what primarily exists in contemporary thought is not so much consensus as collective myopia.

## **Section (c) – Economic Theories of Land Tenure**

### **(i) The Evolutionary Theory of Property Rights**

The first theory we will consider, which has been widely discussed in the literature, is the evolutionary theory of property rights. It quite simply asserts that as land becomes increasingly scarce or sought-after, for example, due to population growth, then the universally rational response is for occupants to demand greater tenure security. Therefore, indigenous systems that evolve under such economic pressures will tend towards some form of increased individualisation and formalisation (Platteau, 2000, p.51-73), (World Bank, 2003, p.8-11), (Barrows and Roth, 1990, p.205-209). The logic underlying this is that an increase in the supply of a non-land factor of production (i.e. labour or capital) will necessarily increase the relative value of land, since it is in fixed supply. This increase in value is assumed to bring about a heightened sense of insecurity in a communal tenure regime, because land will now be increasingly desired within a property system that does not provide immovable rights for a given plot. Therefore, residents will seek to further assert their formal control over land holdings in order to guarantee their subsistence. Because this incentive will be felt throughout the community, it seems plausible that customary rules will become increasingly

interpreted/adapted in such a way as to complement the phenomenon, hence something akin to individualised rights will likely evolve over time.

There is a considerable amount of empirical evidence to support this proposition in the African context. Barrows and Roth (1990, p.209-214) described how in Kenya population pressure prompted an increased tolerance and legitimisation of land transfer via sale under the customary tenure system, despite the tradition of resistance to the transfer of land outside of the kin group or even the family. Andre and Platteau (1998) argued that something similar was occurring in Rwanda throughout the 1980s and 1990s, in spite of government law prohibiting land sale. Firmin-Sellers and Sellers (1999) and Hunt (2005) showed that in Cameroon and Kenya respectively, selective elements of government titling programmes were incorporated into customary arrangements in order to increase individual tenure security under conditions of rising land scarcity. Finally, Lawry (1993) described how in Lesotho informal rental/“borrowing” has become increasingly tolerated in response to land shortages, despite the inflexibility of the traditional system with regard to more formal measures to privatise land. Such examples provide supportive evidence for the proposition that traditional tenure regimes undergo legislative transformation in response to a change in factor prices. In all cases, rapid population growth has brought about a rise in the demand for land, hence an increase in its price relative to labour. The customary response has been to legitimise the more individualistic elements of land tenure, evidenced by, for example, the emergence of land markets.

Overall then, the evolutionary theory appears to be reasonably credible. Indeed, in the literature there is little dispute over the essential logic of the notion. However, when it comes to the real-world mechanics of the phenomenon, and specifically the degree to which the process must be externally ‘assisted’ due to market imperfections, there is uncertainty. This is primarily because the need for some form of external intervention is often implicitly assumed, such as in the recent World Bank (2003, p.178-191) and

British Department for International Development (DFID) studies (Toulmin and Quan, 2000, p.48-49), and hence is rarely reflected upon. However, the empirical evidence cited above to support an evolutionary effect referred specifically to cases in which institutional reform was directed by predominantly internal forces. Hence it is apparent that such prescriptive studies have been derived from theoretical groundings in addition to that of the above - which implied no specific role for external actors. What in fact can be observed in such studies is the application of property right economics to the aforementioned evolutionary model to provide the theoretical justification for top-down, proactive land reform strategies. Therefore, before we can proceed to an analysis of the case for intervention itself (and from this extrapolate some of the more rudimentary principles of land tenure), it will firstly be necessary to outline the economic rationale behind this second key theory.

#### **(ii) The Neoclassical Theory of Property Rights and Investment Incentives**

Productivity growth in the agrarian sector is critically dependent upon the level of investment in agriculture. The resources that a farmer dedicates to his crops, in terms of seeds, fertilisers, capital equipment etc will determine his individual return, and collectively, the surplus generated by a country's agrarian sector will, in the case of under-developed agrarian countries, such as contemporary Ethiopia or South Korea in the 1950s, constitute the bedrock of the economy. Therefore, it is essential to ensure that farmers are not deterred from making these micro-level investments. The land tenure system must hence provide security of holdings (Bruce, 1993), (Feder and Noronha, 1987), (Sjaastad and Bromley, 1996). In so doing, it will guarantee that farmers reap the returns on their investments, and indeed are sufficiently motivated to undertake them in the first place. Security of tenure should also ensure that resources are not wasted on defence expenditure or litigation (Barrows and Roth, 1990, p.208-209). This situation of tenure security may be contrasted with the famous 'tragedy of the commons' scenario (Hardin, 1968), in which an unprotected finite resource, such as a plot of land, may be recklessly overexploited due to the lack of a designated owner,

who would otherwise have held a vested interest in maintaining the land for his own livelihood, and possessed the legal status to guarantee this. It is therefore envisaged that as an agrarian society moves away from this latter scenario and towards one of tenure-secure individual rights over land, an increase in productive investment will take place. However, plausible as this description would seem, and in contrast to the evolutionary theory, it has proved difficult to empirically substantiate the effect.

As described above, evidence to tentatively corroborate the presence of an evolutionary effect can be gathered by, for example, recording changes in the number of land transfers. However, empirically establishing a direct link between feelings of security and investment decisions is more difficult, given the intangible nature of the former variable. For example, Besley (1995) found that one region of Ghana experienced increased investment following a formal titling programme, whereas another region showed no change. Antle et al (2003) found that formal titling had no discrete effect on productive investment in Peru. More supportive results were obtained by Hunt (2005) and Firmin-Sellers and Sellers (1999), who found that formal titling projects increased peasants' reported feelings of security, in Kenya and Cameroon respectively. In the former, an increase in investment was experienced, but this may have been primarily intended to demonstrate occupancy to strengthen land claims, e.g. by tree planting or boundary marking, rather than to actually improve crops yields. A similar effect was reported by Carter and Olinto (2000) for Paraguay, who found that formal titling increased 'fixed' investment (e.g. trees, buildings etc), but at the expense of more productive 'mobile' investments, such as cattle. Therefore, while it may well be the case that tenure insecurity can be an inhibiting factor, formal titling projects in Africa and other parts of the developing world have failed to consistently increase productive investment. Furthermore, it is not at all clear whether these titling programmes necessarily bring about a greater sense of security than do customary arrangements, as will be discussed in the next section. In conclusion, it would seem then that strong

evidence to support a tenure security-investment link, and hence justify formal titling interventions is currently lacking.

Having outlined the key economic theories that underpin much of the developmental thinking on tenure reform in Africa, and exposed some weaknesses in the empirical basis of that work, we are now in a position to shift our focus from theory to practice. We will investigate the kinds of practical interventions to have emerged from the above theoretical foundations, and hopefully ascertain some insight into what does and does not work in the field. In so doing, the objective is twofold: Firstly, it is intended that some broad principles of sound land tenure can be elucidated from the real-world cases that sufficiently encapsulate the differing facets of an effective property right regime. Secondly, the analysis should further illuminate any shortcomings in the prevailing developmental paradigm, in order that a revised and expanded theoretical framework through which the tenure issue can be deciphered is provided within this thesis. It is to these two tasks that we now will now turn.

## **Section (d) – Principles of Land Tenure: The Structure and Characteristics of Effective Property Right Regimes**

### **(i) The Distribution of Holdings and the Organisation of Production**

One area of research in the land tenure literature that has generated a degree of consensus in recent years concerns the issue of redistributive land reform and, specifically, the appropriate scale and structure of the farming enterprises that it should seek to establish. There has emerged considerable support for the idea that small-scale, owner-operated, family farms are most suitable for the African context, for reasons such as follows: Firstly, given the low levels of technological development and large agricultural workforces in Africa, a labour intensive strategy is evidently required to best absorb the armies of peasant farmers (El-Ghonemy, 1990, p.133-135). Secondly, as Warriner (1969, p.27-30) has pointed out, capital-intensive production may be

ecologically unsuitable for many African countries, due to their population growth rates and climatic volatility. And thirdly, a smallholder, family-operated arrangement could in theory provide superior incentives to farmers over that of a large-scale tenant or collectivised system, in regard to the maximisation of production and diversification of economic assets (World Bank, 2003, p.80-83). This is because it accords peasant families with a much greater degree of control over their output than say a system of tenancy. Furthermore, a familial element to labour relations is also likely to minimise monitoring costs (World Bank, 2003, p.84). Nevertheless, as Manji (2006, p.59-60) has pointed out, there could be the unfortunate side effect that certain family members, and in particular women, are exploited under this informal system of labour relations. This is because employed workers would (ideally speaking) enjoy certain labour rights - at least minimally in terms of getting a wage. However, the family farm model leaves it to families themselves to adjudicate working conditions, and in societies where there are unresolved issues of gender inequality then there is a possibility that female members may be used as a form of unpaid labour under this system.

The efficiency benefits associated with the above view of the family farm are supported by much of the empirical evidence on agricultural organisation and productivity in developing countries. In the 1970s and 1980s, much of the land reform prognoses had emphasised the efficacy of large-scale mechanised enterprises, based on the wealth and productivity growth that this had generated in countries such as the USA (El-Ghonemy, 1990, p.119-123). However, subsequent data from the Philippines, Brazil and India indicated that agricultural efficiency might nevertheless be highest on smallholder farms (El-Ghonemy, 1990, p.131-133). Prosterman and Riedinger (1987, p.40-52) examined data from a large number of countries and found that productivity per hectare was consistently highest on owner-operated farms. For example they estimated that potential grain output, as a percentage of the maximum capacity, was 96% under smallholder production, 80% under a collective system and 34% under a tenancy regime. Dessalegn (1993, p.289-294) was particularly sceptical of the productive

capabilities of large scale collectivised agriculture, and in his study showed that owner-operated farms were about a third more productive than producers' cooperatives in Ethiopia, despite the latter receiving large government subsidies. Bowen (1993, p.335-336) uncovered similar results for the case of Mozambique. He found that the redistribution of collectivised land to independent peasant producers brought about a four-fold increase in output over a five-year period. Powelson and Stock (1989, p.61-82, 323-353) have also lamented the forced collectivisation policies implemented in Tanzania and Nicaragua, which decimated the agricultural sector in both cases. They concluded that, while peasants can and do organise cooperative ventures when it is attuned to both their "natural" inclinations and rational economic interests, a primarily individualised system of landholding is invariably most attuned to indigenous preferences: "In land reforms all over the world, at any time in history, peasants have, without exception, opted for private rather than collectivised land" (Powelson and Stock, 1990, p.326).

It should also be noted that, according to the literature, the aforementioned smallholder system of production does require a relatively egalitarian distribution of land in order to function most effectively. Indeed, a model that is based on individualised family plots could not conceivably function if most of the land was concentrated in the hands of the few, and so some degree of equality of holdings is requisite for its success. Redistributive land reform, involving the dismantling of large feudal estates and reallocation of land to peasants, has historically been the vehicle through which this has been achieved in other parts of the world, e.g. Bolivia, Kerla (India), Taiwan and South Korea (Powelson and Stock, 1990). This of course has been an issue of great political and ideological conflict. We can however be spared an exposition of this debate here, due to the aforementioned post-Cold War ideological thaw in the sphere of development. Even the World Bank now acknowledges the possible value of

redistributive reform<sup>4</sup>, and so the issue is no longer a major point of contention. Furthermore, an in-depth discussion of land redistribution can be omitted from this dissertation, because in most parts of Sub-Saharan Africa land is already fairly equally divided (Toulmin and Quan, 2000, p.51) (with the obvious exceptions of Namibia, Zimbabwe and South Africa). Therefore, the prevailing distribution of land in Africa does not constitute an impediment to the above model, and hence as a precondition that has effectively been fulfilled, the issue can be largely omitted from the remaining discussion.

Overall then, what may be extrapolated from the above is that an agricultural strategy based upon smallholder, family farm production would seem to be the most suitable option for Sub-Saharan Africa, and that in some cases, most notably in southern Africa, this may need to be preceded by a redistribution of land. This can be taken as the first key principle of effective land tenure. A qualification to this contention would however be that the model might in certain contexts comprise secondary social issues, such as gender inequality, that should also be taken into consideration.

## **(ii) Modernised versus Traditional Land Tenure**

Having outlined how agricultural production may best be structured in Africa, we can next consider the rules under which that system should ideally operate. Section (c) indicated that development strategies derived primarily from neoclassical economic theory might advocate a profound reconstruction of customary tenure arrangements, in order to enhance security of holdings - for example, via land titling projects. Hence as a means to assess the case for reforming Africa's indigenous property right regimes, an analysis of the efficacy of those customary systems will next be presented. Following that, an evaluation of the effects of formal titling interventions will be carried out,

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<sup>4</sup> They have stated that in the 1970s certain options within the sphere of land policy reform were inadmissible due to the "preconceived notions and ideological viewpoints" of some policymakers and other key stakeholders. However, they assert that the contemporary, developmental policymaking environment is now less confined by such political considerations (World Bank, 2003, p.ix-xi).

based on the available literature. In so doing, a key question will be addressed that should contribute towards a broader understanding of the tenure security issue, which is as follows: Do customary property right systems suffer from inherent tenure insecurity, to the extent that productive investment is deterred? The qualification that the insecurity is suffered specifically due to *inherent* weaknesses of the system in question is key here, because if insecurity of tenure is due to other sources, then it may be that it is those exogenous sources of insecurity, rather than the property right regime itself that should be tackled. Considering tenure insecurity, as it relates to both the customary and reformed systems extant in Africa, will allow for a broader conceptualisation of the phenomenon to be undertaken in the next section. Moreover, it is intended that some insight into what constitutes suitable tenure arrangements for facilitating growth in an underdeveloped economy can be gleaned, as a furtherance of our endeavour to elicit principles of effective land tenure.

#### **a. The Case for Customary Tenure**

In order to consider the issue of indigenous land tenure within an appropriate conceptual framework, it is firstly worth reflecting upon what existed prior to colonialism and the subsequent restriction of many Africans to ‘reserve’ areas (Okoth-Ogendo, 1993, p.248-254). Bates has characterised the situation as follows:

Isolation, subsistence, and lack of involvement in an exchange economy were not commonly found in the “primitive” [pre-colonial] economies of Africa. Where they were, these traits characterized so small and insignificant a group of African societies that it would be nonsensical to base a general theory of social exchange upon them (Bates, 1984, p.241).

Thriving mercantile economies comprising markets, coinage and international trade routes existed throughout the continent, and ancient and medieval empires spanned

what are now Ghana, Zimbabwe and Ethiopia, to name but a few<sup>5</sup>. In light of such examples, it is apparent that the stereotypical image of the primitive African peasant eking out a living on an arid scrap of scrubland is greatly distortive. The conceptualisation of rural Africa as being frozen in the primeval past is a legacy of colonial discourse, which has in the past led to the production of misleading narratives about customary institutions such as land tenure (Leach and Mearns, 1996). What can be taken from the historical experience is that, even if parts of contemporary Africa do somewhat resemble this stereotypical image of poverty and degradation, they have not always been, and need not always be so. Hence the assumption that a paternalistic approach to development is required to overcome this is unwarranted. Therefore, land reform prognoses ought not to assume that imposed change will necessarily bring about a superior outcome to that which prevails or will in time emerge from within, as circumstances change. In light of this fact, this subsection will attempt to uncover some inherent strengths as well as limitations of customary land tenure practices, in order to assess whether, and in what circumstances, they might have innate advantages over imposed, Western-style formalised tenure. This argument will be further developed in section (d) part (iv), which considers the worth of indigenous institutions more generally.

As established previously, customary tenure arrangements are highly dynamic, and have been shown to evolve over time in response to changes in the prices of factors of production like labour or capital. In light of this fact, and notions such as were expressed in the above paragraph, Bruce (1993, p.35) has argued that representations of indigenous land tenure have often overemphasised the degree to which it is communal. Arguments based on the aforementioned ‘tragedy of the commons’ dilemma have at times been derived from such simplified conceptions of traditional tenure in order to justify formal titling interventions. In actuality, with the exception of regions where

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<sup>5</sup> See McCann (1999, p.109-138), for an account of the Asante empire in Ghana; Beinart and McGregor (2003, p.60-71), for an account of the Mutapa (greater Zimbabwe) state; Marcus (2002, p.1-16), for a description of the Axumite civilisation in what is now Ethiopia.

population density is extremely low (e.g. pastoralist zones), land is rarely ‘open-access’ or subject to frequent capture or eviction. Despite their informality, customary property systems are often highly nuanced, and have rationally evolved to be so in order to best ensure stability and the viability of subsistence in a given region. For example, Bruce has pointed out that ecological conditions have often necessitated that customary production and tenure arrangements are geared towards “risk management” above all else, even if at the expense of some long term productivity growth:

African farmers often stand with one foot in subsistence and one in the market. At this moment in their history the farmers’ well-being and productivity can be adversely affected by focusing too exclusively on either. (Bruce, 1993, p.36)

This point is reinforced by Van Den Brink et al. (1995, p.373-399), who found that output in the Sahel region can be maximised by allowing both customary pastoralist and sedentary agricultural tenure regimes to coexist simultaneously, although they did note that their potentially competitive nature might require government mediation of disputes. Gavian and Fafchamps (1996) also found that optimal allocative efficiency of resources could potentially be achieved by the customary tenure system in Niger.

Therefore, it appears that some indigenous systems have evolved to maximise efficiency of production without any external stewardship, under the constraint of certain contextual limitations. The time factor in this is worthy of emphasis, as many of these customary systems have incrementally adapted over a period of decades or more in order to best accommodate ecological and sociological factors, as they have been encountered. There can be no substitute for this kind of adaptation in the field, since no two contexts are exactly alike. Hence imposed tenure systems, based upon a combination of theorising and the replication of other scenarios, cannot plausibly achieve such a high level of integration with constituent societies in the short to medium term. Furthermore, the greater the attempt made to precisely customise a given

intervention strategy, the greater the resources that must be directed towards it - whereas, customary tenure systems do this job for free. This is an especially important point for Sub-Saharan Africa, given that many states already face severe budgetary pressures. For example, Barrows and Roth (1990, p.12-15) described how in Kenya certain less influential groups like women, younger siblings and pastoralists lost out under the 1960s land registration programme, as financial limitations necessitated that land be registered to a single owner. This failed to capture the subtle complexities of the indigenous system, which had awarded different kinds of rights to different groups. Hence the formalisation profoundly altered the balance of power in the region, by marginalizing many people to the benefit of others. This point is further illustrated by the work of Kangwa (2004, p.142), who described how attempts to formalise tenure in Zambia were hampered by a lack of state funds. This situation is somewhat of a paradox, as the more impoverished a country is, the greater is the perceived need for it to reform tenure. However, the less resources it can actually dedicate to the process, the less diverse, locally attuned and hence effective a newly imposed tenure regime will be. Therefore, it would be extremely advantageous to such countries if agrarian development could be achieved under the customary tenure system.

Another important advantage of indigenous property right regimes is that they can provide, “a form of social security for the poor, old and disabled” (Lin and Home, 2004, p.22). The problem of landlessness is avoided, as all members of a given community are usually allocated a portion of land upon which they can grow crops. In contrast, a privatised system that is not accompanied by a diversity of economic opportunities could result in a ‘kulakisation’ of society, whereby the wealthier individuals accumulate a disproportionate amount of the land, leaving others landless and destitute. A related point is that the award of land titles in contemporary Africa could be biased towards societies’ elites, hence formally cementing inequalities that the redistributive mechanisms of customary tenure could have alleviated. Firmin-Sellers and Sellers (1999, p.1122) noted that in Cameroon urban, non-farmers obtained more

than twice as many formal titles as rural peasants during a land registration programme. Similarly, Hunt (2005, p.212) found that in Kenya titling augmented inequalities derived from power rather than wealth, as the process was distorted by the nature of the extant sociopolitical hierarchy. Such effects could perhaps be justified if tenure reform brought about sufficient economic growth to raise overall living standards in the economy, but as the next subsection will show, this has yet to be achieved in most of Sub Saharan Africa.

In light of the above it would seem that, in the absence of a proven means of development, disrupting the basic channels of subsistence could simply exacerbate inequality, poverty and suffering. Furthermore, as shall also be discussed in the following subsection, it is not at all clear that indigenous tenure systems are actually the root or even a root cause of Africa's economic stagnation. Migot-Adholla et al. (1991) examined data from Ghana, Kenya and Rwanda and found that indigenous property law is not a constraint on productivity. Brasselle et al. (2002) found that customary law in Burkina Faso provides sufficient security of tenure to elicit optimal productive investment. Fourie (2004, p.31-39) outlined the key role of customary tenure institutions in providing viable livelihood strategies in peri-urban Botswana, and asserted that:

The way forward cannot simply replace customary with modern approaches, to bring certainty to land rights and land use rights, because customary tenure is a national symbol not to be lightly overthrown. ... Modern property systems, emphasising clarity and predictability, are unlikely to strengthen tenure security and access to land (Fourie, 2004, p.45).

Overall then, there is considerable empirical support for the view that in many instances customary tenure systems can and do provide a sufficient sense of security to motivate farmers to undertake productive investments.

A final, and perhaps more fundamental issue worth considering is the extent of indigenous support for the formalisation of customary tenure in Africa. What has been observed is that in many situations the behaviour of indigenous peoples has suggested that they favour informal/customary property rights over those found in formal sectors, which resemble the Western system. For example, Firmin-Sellers and Sellers (1999, p.1123-1124) found that a land registration programme in Cameroon had to be severely modified along customary lines by local government agents in order to legitimise it. Saul (1993, p.87) found that in western Burkina Faso rural people rallied behind their indigenous authorities, in the face of government attempts to reform land tenure. Productivity growth subsequently increased under this non-privatised freehold system. The use of coercive methods in countries like Ethiopia (Kaplan, 2003, p.106-119) and Mozambique (Bowen, 1993) was required in order to elicit peasant compliance with radical agrarian reform strategies in the 1980s, further illustrating that peasant preferences are for the stability of what they know best. Moreover, the importance that indigenous peoples attribute to the social, political and ritual functions of their land cannot be underestimated, and may supersede purely economic concerns. In the words of Firmin-Sellers and Sellers:

Property rights are socially constructed. ... Rights exist in a meaningful sense only when community members recognize and accept them as legitimate. Private property rights are often viewed as illegitimate because they disinherit so many community members ... Thus, community members respond to the introduction of private property rights with 'determined resistance', ignoring, violating and violently opposing those rights (Firmin-Sellers and Sellers, 1999, p.1116).

Observations such as the above can raise awkward questions for those development practitioners engaged in formal titling ventures, and may suggest that in addition to the previously outlined logistical and theoretical limitations to such interventions, there are

also ethical problems. For example, the prescriptive donor literature pays considerable lip-service to the need to “increase stakeholder consultation” (Toulmin and Quan, 2000, p.290-292), and “build on customary institutions” (World Bank, 2003, p.62-63). However, one could ask whether donors have genuinely sought to garner information in order to act on behalf of customary peoples, or rather have merely intended to legitimise their efforts to impose a preconceived agenda on a given region. If it is the latter, then in what sense are customary institutions actually being “built upon” rather than simply replaced outright? Or alternatively, if indigenous preferences and capabilities are truly held in high regard, why then is fundamental change always assumed to require external stewardship, rather than simply allowing the evolutionary effect to run its course? Such questions could ultimately lead on to a consideration of the extent to which developmental interventions necessitate the imposition of Western values onto African contexts, with the obvious ethical dilemmas that this issue raises. However, such a discussion is beyond the scope of this work, and the above points were neither raised in an attempt to refute the philosophical basis of development work, nor to romanticise customary institutions<sup>6</sup>. Rather they were intended to highlight the fact that interventions such as land titling are multifariously problematic, and should therefore not be undertaken lightly and without a keen awareness of their inherent difficulties. That being established, we are now in a position to evaluate the case for donor-led land tenure reform in Africa.

## **b. The Case for Formal Registration**

Before embarking upon an analysis of formal interventions into land tenure systems, it should firstly be reiterated that donor organisations are no longer advocating standardised titling programmes as witnessed in the past. The importance of historical and contextual factors has been taken on board, and there is now consensus that

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<sup>6</sup> Indeed African commentators such as Yeraswork (in discussion with the author, February 2007) and Dessalegn (1984, p.29) have noted the possibility that arguments in favour of maintaining traditional orders in the face of modernisation efforts may be covertly racist, in so far as they contend that a primitive mode of social organisation is sufficient for much of Africa.

universal privatisation strategies are unlikely to be successful (World Bank, 2003, p.62-66), (Home and Lim, 2004, p.154-155). This lesson has seemingly been learned, and arguments advocating the need for regional diversity are becoming redundant, and hence will be omitted. However, the differentiated nature of contemporary titling strategies does not take away from the simple fact that they are still intrusive interventions. Something new is to be externally imposed upon what may be an age-old customary system, and possibly one that enjoys popular legitimacy. Furthermore, as stated above, the greater the effort invested in moulding a titling programme to fit contextual idiosyncrasies, the more complex and expensive the venture becomes. Therefore, it is unquestionably the case that there is a practical limit to how much titling programmes can be tailored to fit a given context, and hence some degree of disruption to the customary system is inevitable. This subsection will attempt to ascertain whether or not there may potentially be an overall benefit to formalisation that could nevertheless justify this likely disruption.

One justification often used for titling schemes is that peasants do sometimes actually want the Government to actively reinforce their tenure security. For example, Firmin-Sellers and Sellers (1999, p.1122) showed that in Cameroon 68% of rural farmers applied for state-issued boundary markers, despite having to pay a hefty registration fee for them. Hunt (2005, p.222-223) found a similar effect at play in Kenya, where the vast majority of peasants were also willing to pay a fee in exchange for a formal title. Manji (2001, p.337) even described how in South Africa black peasants and white landowners have sometimes negotiated their own redistributive land reforms<sup>7</sup> due to government inertia in tackling this pressing issue. This could all be construed as evidence that some indigenous groups are unhappy with existing property right systems, and seek government/donor assistance in reforming them in order to heighten

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<sup>7</sup> It should however be noted that this was not a tenurial reform of the type that we have been discussing, but was rather a more conventional redistribution of holdings without altering the rules of the system. See Manji (2006, p.34-39) for a discussion of how the focus of land reform has shifted from land distribution to land tenure in recent years.

their security of tenure. Therefore, a case could perhaps be made for external intervention in certain circumstances. In light of this fact, the potential of these programmes to facilitate development will next be explored.

As previously noted, the case for land titling critically rests upon economic arguments, some examples of which have been given above, relating mainly to the positive influence of tenure security on productive investment. In addition to the security enhancing effects of formal tenure outlined in the theoretical discussion in section (c), the following key hypotheses from the literature can also be gleaned: Firstly, as well as directly stimulating investment by enhanced 'feelings' of security, fixed borders will remove the ambiguity of ownership that can lead to costly dispute and litigation, and this can indirectly augment productive investment by freeing up peasants' resources. Secondly, many of the transaction costs relating to the transfer of land are removed by titling; hence a freely accessible land market can emerge, facilitating the pareto-optimal allocation of resources, and commercialisation of agriculture (Barrows and Roth, 1990, p.8-9). This should, for example, effect the consolidation of inefficient small/fragmented holdings into larger, more productive ones. The ability to realise monetary investments in land via sale as well as crop returns should further reassure farmers that productive investment is worthwhile (Platteau, 2000, p.55). And thirdly, an official document of land ownership can be used as collateral with which to obtain formal credit for investment. For example, Feder and Noronha show that in Thailand farmers with collateral in the form of legal land ownership were able to obtain 50-520% more credit than those without (Feder and Noronha, 1987, p.145).

In his book, De Soto (2000) extended the above arguments by outlining a multitude of ways in which the very process of capital accumulation hinges upon the possibility of free and efficient exchange of land and resources under a formal property right system. He stated that:

For accumulated assets to become active capital and put additional production in motion, they must be fixed and realised in some particular subject which lasts for some time at least after that labour is past (De Soto, 2000, p.39-40).

De Soto asserted that capital is an abstract phenomenon that must be tangibly fixed in order to be fully realised. Its usefulness is born of its interaction with other commodities, and hence must be in the form of material property in order for this productive combining to take place. For De Soto, many of the world's poorest people possess one such primary mode of capital, i.e. their land, which they could combine with their other assets, e.g. seeds and technology, in order to generate wealth. However, the success of the process hinges upon individuals possessing formal title deeds over their land, and hence the existence of property-right institutions within a fully functioning formal-legal system (De Soto, 2000, p.36-47). Such a system would identify, describe, record and organise the economically useful aspects of a given asset according to a socially legitimate and precisely defined set of rules. From this is born a conceptual realm open to all members of society in which the productive capabilities of assets can be imagined, facilitating the transactions which make possible a physical realisation of such ideas. But in the absence of such a formalised system, e.g. as in much of rural Africa, the above processes are inhibited, and the land that is worked by the poor is effectively "dead capital" (De Soto, 2000, p.31).

In particular, De Soto (2000, p.47-62) has identified six important processes that are conducive to the generation of capital within a formalised system:

- (1) The economic potential of assets is fixed, facilitating the aforementioned conceptualisation of productive asset synthesis.
- (2) Dispersed information about property becomes integrated into a single system, greatly reducing transaction costs.

- (3) The “anonymity of informality” is lost; hence individuals are forced to adhere to the rules of formal property rights, as they now have a ‘stake in the game’ that they might lose (De Soto, 2000, p.53-55).
- (4) Formalisation increases the “fungibility” of assets, allowing for ease of transfer, combination, subdivision etc.
- (5) Citizens become ‘networked’ through this property system; hence society becomes a “mass interconnection of business agents” (De Soto, 2000, p.58-60).
- (6) Transactions are protected by the use of official registers etc.

De Soto’s thesis certainly provides a compelling insight into some of the ways in which formal property right systems may facilitate the allocative efficiency of resources in developed countries. However, it remains contentious whether or not this dynamic structure is a prerequisite or a product of economic growth. De Soto (2000, p.108-159) used the example of the ‘Pre-emption’ and ‘Homestead’ Acts during the settlement of the American West, to argue that formal rights may serve as the bedrock upon which developing countries can construct their economies, in a similar manner to the US. In order to further assess the validity of this claim, at least in terms of its universal applicability, it is worth returning to the empirical evidence on property right formalisation in Africa.

It should firstly be noted that, as Hunt (2005, p.200) pointed out, there is little evidence provided by the data from Sub-Saharan Africa to support the view that titling interventions stimulate long-term productivity growth. The unsuccessful cases of Ghana, Kenya, Cameroon were discussed in section (c), and other examples of failed titling interventions include: Ivory Coast (Bassett, 1993), Zambia (Kangwa, 2004) and Somalia (Roth, 1993), to name but a few. Feder and Noronha (1987, p.145) have provided more supportive evidence based upon data from Thailand, and World Bank study chronicles some tentative evidence from East Asia, and more persuasive results

from Latin America (World Bank, 2003, p.42-48). Feder and Noronha (1987, p.163) postulated that this geographical disparity may be because Africa has not reached a sufficient “stage of growth” for this occur. A discussion of Rostowian philosophy will be avoided here, but suffice to note that, regardless of whether or not Africa can follow a similar ‘growth trajectory’ to the West, formalisation of land tenure has consistently failed to initiate this process. This suggests that either formal property rights are not the primary stimulus to productivity growth – in contradiction to De Soto’s view, or that some variable that is endogenous to Africa is inhibiting any progression. However, at this stage in our discussion we have not yet uncovered sufficient evidence to determine which of these possibilities is most plausible. We will however return to the issue in section (e).

In light of the above, it is clear that the extent to which land tenure regimes are responsible for Africa’s underdevelopment is uncertain. For example, Bruce (1993, p.45) has suggested that in countries with high population growth rates, such as Rwanda or Ethiopia, “the real problem is population pressure on a limited resource, not rules, and land tenure reform is not a very effective tool in this context. It cannot create more land”. Moreover, as will be discussed in detail below, insecurity may be due more to inadequate legislators rather than legislation. This would be the case if law-issuing authorities, i.e. governments, suffered from a perceived lack of legitimacy, derived from a failure to enforce the law consistently and impartially. Nevertheless, contemporary land titling strategies appear to rest upon the implicit and unsubstantiated assumption that the tenure system is at the root of the poverty problem. De Soto may have offered a plausible hypothesis to explain the Western experience, but the efficacy of his model for Africa, and indeed the broader process of property right formalisation in rural areas, is as yet empirically unsubstantiated. And in light of its past experiences, the continent is unlikely to benefit from again being used as a laboratory for testing out developmental hypotheses – especially given the precariousness of the ecological conditions.

In conclusion, what can be taken from this section by way of a principle of effective land tenure is very limited. It appears that the dynamics of property right systems and their synergistic role in fostering economic growth remains imperfectly understood. Furthermore, the extraneous fabrication of new formalised titling regimes has generally fared poorly in the field. Therefore, it would seem that in cases where indigenous tenure systems are functioning relatively uninhibitedly and enjoying widespread legitimacy, formal titling ventures under the prevailing financial constraints may be unlikely to instigate any marked degree of socioeconomic improvement. Rather, the empirical data suggests that, with regard to land tenure, what has indigenously developed has generally been superior to what has been socially engineered. Therefore, it would seem that expensive and intrusive titling programmes would best be avoided until Africa's enduring poverty, and the precise ways in which it relates to land tenure, have been more thoroughly explained. This issue will again be addressed in section (e) and chapter two.

### **(iii) The Transferability of Land Rights**

The preceding subsection has illuminated some of the conceptual and empirical limitations underlying the case for developmental interventions into land tenure. The following two subsections will extend this analysis by considering the case for intervention into indigenous land-related institutions more broadly. The former will consider the value of transferable land rights in the African context, which, as will be shown, may or may not be present in either customary or formally registered tenure regimes. Section (iv) will then examine the merit of non-legislative institutional interventions, for example via service or credit delivery schemes established by the state or donors. In so doing, it will become apparent that these broader efforts to socially engineer development are also subject to serious limitations.

The phrase 'tenure security' can be more broadly defined than was previously suggested. Feder and Noronha (1987, p.159) described it as, amongst other things, "the ability of an occupant to undertake land transactions that would best suit his interests". The key word in this is 'transactions', as, regardless of whether or not customary systems sufficiently reassure peasants that they will not be evicted from their cropland, it is apparent that in many cases they do prevent the transfer of land outside of either the family or kin-group. Conventional economic theory would suggest that land must be freely transferable if it is to be most efficiently distributed and utilised (Barrows and Roth, 1990, p.209). The right to sell and rent would, for example, be an essential prerequisite for the De Soto model outlined in the previous subsection, as synthesising capital assets will frequently require a change of ownership. In the sphere of land tenure this should allow for efficient farmers to expand their holdings, hence increasing overall productivity. Legal transfer may also facilitate the mobility of peoples and economic diversification, as peasants wishing to move out of farming and into other employment will be compensated for the loss of their subsistence base, rather than it merely being returned to the community without remuneration. For example, Deininger et al. (2003) found that the restrictions on land transfer in Ethiopia (imposed by the state not the customary authorities) have inhibited peasant movement into non-agricultural employment, and ultimately constrained economic development.

As the above example suggests, there are cases in which productivity growth may be inhibited if indigenous law forbids free market transactions, as it does in, for example, Lesotho (as previously stated), Malawi (Place and Otsuka, 2001) and Burkina Faso (Saul, 1993). And indeed, in other regions customary tenure practices have adapted to incorporate land transaction out with the kin group, generally when economic forces have exerted sufficient pressure. The example of Rwanda was cited in section (c), and Kenya is another case where the customary system evolved to include land transfer mechanisms. In the latter instance, despite the existence of a parallel formal land market, over 75% of transfers carried out in the early 1970s were done informally -

perhaps indicative of indigenous preferences (Barrows and Roth, 1990, p.16-18). Therefore, it would appear that customary tenure systems do not necessarily need to be replaced in order for a land market to emerge. A Western-style private property system would obviously require a greater formalisation of transactions than customary systems can currently provide, but even the World Bank has accepted that implementing a fully-fledged, privatised free-market system could do more damage than good to some African countries at present (World Bank, 2003, p.93-98). The introduction of land sales into an environment with underdeveloped institutional and legal infrastructure and high levels of poverty could result in increased land concentration. Desperate peasants may choose to undertake 'distress sales' in order to satisfy immediate food requirements, leaving themselves landless and destitute in the long run (Platteau, 2000, p.69). Wealthier individuals may also choose to accumulate land purely as an asset for speculative or insurance purposes, resulting in a reduction of the overall quantity of productive agricultural land in use. Andre and Platteau (1998, p.24-28) found evidence of both of these effects occurring in Rwanda in the 1980s and 1990s.

In light of the above, donors like the World Bank (2003, p.129-131), Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) (2004, p.7) and DFID (Toulmin and Quan, 2000, p.44-47) recommend caution in the implementation of land sales markets, in order to avoid this polarisation of incomes. Instead they now advocate land rental as a safer means to achieve the aforementioned economic advantages of land transactions in highly impoverished countries. This offers a channel through which land can be productively consolidated or provided for the poor at a low cost. The World Bank (2003, p.85-89) has also asserted that sharecropping may be a second best option for those that cannot afford the capital outlay or rental costs of fixed-price leasing, and outright tenancy a less efficient but still potentially advantageous third option:

Tenancy has long been viewed as an important transitional stage that allows peasants to accumulate capital and gain agricultural experience. Therefore, eliminating

sharecropping as a rung on the agricultural ladder will not contribute to equity in the long run (World Bank, 2003, p.119).

It should however be noted that tenancy may result in some efficiency losses due to the need for expenditure on monitoring by the landowner to ensure that workers exert sufficient effort. As previously stated, supervision would not be required on a 'family-farm', be it operating under full ownership, fixed rental or perhaps even sharecropping, as that arrangement should, in theory, ensure that those working the land stand to directly benefit from any surplus produced. Therefore, according to the prognosis of most influential Western donor and developmental agencies, rental may be a sufficient or even superior option to full privatisation for countries utilising some version of the family farm model but still at a low level of development, e.g. Ghana (World Bank, 2003, p.106) and Ethiopia (Deininger et al., 2003b)

Returning to the issue of internal/evolutionary changes in land markets, as previously stated, it has been observed that certain customary authorities have imposed restrictions upon transfers, and this was commonly in an attempt to shelter their societies from outside incursion. A lengthier example should illuminate why it is not clear-cut whether such measures are necessarily always detrimental, from a developmental point of view. According to Bassett's (1993) account, in the 1980s and 1990s the Ivorian Government sought to encourage the immigration of Fulani pastoralists from Burkina Faso into the north of the country, in order to facilitate the expansion of cattle trade. However, their movement was onto Senufo lands, and this caused considerable material damage and served to undermine that society's communal ethos. This in turn sparked feelings of resentment by the Senufo directed towards both the pastoralists and the Government, which at times deteriorated into outright violence against their Fulani neighbours. What is of key significance for our purposes in this is the fact that the Ivorian Government had expropriated control over land from the customary authority - which had previously restricted transfer to the Fulani. The Government granted 'empty' (i.e.

communal) land to the Fulani that had in the past been administered by the Senufo authorities, without according the latter the right to decline these transfers. This prevented the Senufo from bargaining for a more acceptable tenure agreement with the Fulani, reinforcing bad-feeling and ethnic rivalry (Bassett, 1993, p.131-154). Ultimately, this process undermined both Senufo and Fulani societies, and in particular it would seem that the disenfranchisement of customary authority over the transfer of land precipitated much of the conflict.

The example described above is in fact characteristic of a phenomenon that has been observed elsewhere on the continent. For example, many pastoralist communities in the horn of Africa have become marginalized as a result of imposed land markets (Markakis, 1995), (Getachew, 2001). What may be deduced from all of this is that the effects of implementing land transfer mechanisms in indigenous communities can greatly differ depending upon the context. Some may gain from a relatively free market, whereas others face potential insurgents against whom transfer restrictions serve as a form of defence. Therefore, this suggests that if legitimate and representative customary authorities are in place in an underdeveloped country, then they may be best qualified to formulate and negotiate the rules governing land transfer. This point is recognised by the World Bank (2003, p.122-129), who note that, while land transfers can facilitate productivity growth, it would be best to tolerate certain customary restrictions and allow these to loosen gradually as indigenous law evolves in keeping with economic rationality, rather than to forcibly impose a market. Hence by way of a further principle of land tenure, this analysis simply suggests that land markets can either be useful or damaging to a given community depending upon other contextual factors. Granting customary authorities considerable discretion in legislating land transfer rules may thus be the most fruitful option in many cases.

#### **(iv) Non-Tenurial Institutions and the Provision of Inputs and Services**

An analysis of land tenure would be incomplete without some discussion of the appropriate role of complementary, non-tenurial institutions, such as credit or public service facilities. Much of the prescriptive interventionist literature places a heavy emphasis upon the need to augment land titling by way of substantive investment in things like: infrastructure; irrigation or storage facilities; agencies to provide input support in the form of seeds, fertilizers etc; extension and marketing services; and eventually, healthcare and education (Prosterman and Riedinger, 1987, p.203-230). For example, El-Ghonemy (1990, p.88) asserted that complementary programmes are an essential component of successful land reform strategies. Warriner (1969, p.24-56) offered a similar viewpoint, arguing that a lack of complementary investment could explain the failure of many past land reforms to instigate productivity growth: “In agriculture itself there are no great leaps forward, either through individual incentive or collective farming, without heavy investment” (Warriner, 1969, p.55). A belief in the key role of complementary investment has consequently become fairly ingrained in the land tenure literature. In particular, contemporary studies tend to draw attention to the role that formal credit might play in agricultural development. For example, the World Bank (2003, p.48) asserted that an improved credit supply would be the main benefit sought by a land-titling intervention. Peasants often have little access to formal credit for reasons such as: the underdeveloped state of rural financial institutions; a credit-bias towards wealthier (“credit-worthy”) farmers, given the lack of profit potential in small-scale peasant investment projects; and the impossibility of foreclosure due to a lack of formal titles and/or community opposition (Platteau, 2000, p.59-60). Therefore, it is conceivable that peasants would choose to undertake a much higher level of productive investment if funds were made available to them.

A related problem, as illustrated by Kangwa’s (2004, p.132-142) survey in rural Zambia, is that peasants are often unwilling to mortgage their land, even when they possess sufficient collateral with which to obtain credit. For many, land is the only

possible source of income, and for others it may represent a sacred/familial sanctum of kinship or identity. Therefore, there may be somewhat of an incompatibility between traditional African subsistence farming and formal lending practices, and some prescriptive writers have construed this as a major impediment to growth. For example, Prosterman and Riedinger (1987, p.231-251) have attested the need to undertake elaborate, nationwide education and institution-building programmes, all the way down to the micro level - "putting the credit administrators in a jeep or a motorbike and sending them out into the villages" (Prosterman and Riedinger, 1987, p.208). Such programmes would require considerable financing, primarily from Western donors. Furthermore, and perhaps illustrating why Kangwa's survey recorded considerable anxiety among peasants about the prospect of foreclosure, Prosterman and Riedinger (1987, p.210) also advocated the following measures to augment these (hypothetical) newly imposed credit facilities:

We would choose several cases of unexcused default on the loans at the very beginning and carry out highly publicised evictions of the defaulting parties. Recent experience suggests that repayment rates of 90 percent or better should be readily achievable in a well-administered program.

The austerity that is evident in this viewpoint perhaps captures what is a fundamental dilemma at the heart this formal credit drive - that is in its attempt to reconcile a very Western innovation with a very un-Western environment. If a given society consider their land to embody spiritual ancestors, they are unlikely to readily acquiesce to the confiscation of that land by an unpaid creditor. Clearly this is indicative of a cross-cultural incongruity, and it is difficult to conceive of a likely resolution that is compatible with the above interventionist agenda other than one culture effectively usurping the other.

Fortunately though, Tiffen (1996), who is sceptical about the efficacy of severe interventions such as the above, may have provided us with an expanded conception of the issue, which could avert the need for such stark choices. She described how the capital requirements of labour-intensive peasant farming in Africa are actually very small, and are in fact frequently met incrementally by the prudence and resolve of peasant family-farmers. If this is the case then encouraging peasants to assume large debts in order to finance costly, capital-intensive projects could be highly detrimental to their long-term welfare. Furthermore, Tiffen (1996, p.169) asserted that prescriptive writers often harbour a predilection for public sector and donor interventions (especially those studies written by donor organisations!), which has manifested in “blind spots” as to the true capital needs of peasants. Such studies often focus upon expensive items like ploughs, whereas cheaper items such as terracing, fruit trees, ponds, fences, drains etc are equally important for productivity, and peasants are generally forced to rely on their own initiative to obtain these goods. For example, farmers in Nigeria and Zambia apportion approximately a third of their incomes to these low-cost investments (Tiffen 1996, p.177). Therefore, in many parts of Africa, the true capital needs of peasant family-farmers may be fulfilled without the need to endure such a piercing assault on central aspects of their culture and traditions.

In spite of the cultural protection that Tiffen’s proposal may accord indigenous societies, there nevertheless remain unanswered questions in regard to the issue of micro-finance. Most notably, in the absence of imposed formal credit facilities, where can peasants achieve additional finance to support their true capital needs? Quite simply, indigenous credit sources in the form of moneylenders operate in many regions, and provide small-scale credit for the aforementioned types of purchases. The interest they charge on loans is often very high, in some cases as much as 30%, and prescriptive writers have argued that such exorbitance would itself justify the involvement of the state, to provide a less exploitative service (Feder and Noronha, 1987, p.144). However, Goodell (1990) has argued that peasants may still best be served by leaving the

customary credit arrangements unaltered. She asserted that the high interest rates charged by indigenous lenders are often simply a reflection of the transaction costs involved in providing inputs or credit in a severely underdeveloped region. Using the example of land reform in the Philippines, where, as shall be described below, an 'integrated development package' consisting of land reform plus credit, marketing, ancillary services etc was imposed, she highlighted the difficulties involved in trying to socially engineer an effective credit market. The following discussion of Goodell's case study will further illuminate the difficulties involved in attempting to transplant fabricated institutions onto a customary setting.

The Philippines Government created various parastatal companies, in accompaniment to its land reform programme, in order to provide complementary support. The state accorded these parastatals with an effective monopoly on marketing, credit and extension services, deliberately displacing indigenous 'middlemen'. However, these new institutions soon began to suffer from the kinds of inefficiencies commonly associated with central planning, e.g. rigidity over product types, mixes and quantities on offer; inflexibility over repayment deadlines etc. Goodell's analysis suggests that, prior to their displacement, indigenous credit systems had functioned far more efficiently, and that their replacement by externally contrived institutions significantly reduced peasant welfare (Goodell, 1990, p.16). Based on her research, some of the main advantages of customary credit arrangements in this context can be summarised as follows:

- (1) 'Exploitative middlemen' are in fact commonly successful/wealthy local farmers. They can offer contextually relevant advice on things like cropping inputs and production methods; and their local knowledge, contacts and personal relations may assist in the diffusion of agricultural innovations.
- (2) Indigenous credit sources can also offer a greater flexibility in the size, timing and duration of loans. For example, in the Philippines many peasants

liked to borrow a small amount of money for only a matter of days, and local lenders had managed to efficiently accommodate this preference. However, given the administrative limitations of central planning, the parastatal monopolists simply offered large, annually renewable credit packages (Goodell, 1990, p.29-32).

- (3) Peasants often like to deal in small quantities of things like fertilizers, as they can experiment with different kinds of products to see what best suits their specific ecological conditions. Again, for administrative simplicity parastatals generally only provide set brands/product mixes, which are standardized across many regions. This lack of diversity may constrain economic efficiency.
- (4) Peasants may actually have a greater bargaining power over local middlemen, despite the high interest rates. They are only obliged to commit themselves to one-time transactions, hence can do business elsewhere if unsatisfied. However, monopolistic parastatals may prefer to operate with long term, bulk-purchase commitments, again due to the limitations of central planning.
- (5) There is often a high rate of default on government loans. In the Philippines it was 40%, whereas the small-scale, interpersonal nature of customary services may ensure a greater level of repayment, hence economic efficiency (Goodell, 1990, p.26).
- (6) Direct state intervention in the countryside may disrupt the formation of rural-urban distribution networks formed by middlemen. The development of integrated, decentralised, intra-state economies may thus best be facilitated by the unhindered, natural development of bottom-up ventures such as indigenous financial institutions.
- (7) As will be discussed in chapter two, parastatal monopolies can foster corruption, further exacerbating efficiency losses.

One important qualification must be added to the above analysis, and that is that if parastatal enterprises are set up to compete fairly with local middlemen, or distribute useful products that cannot be locally acquired, then they may offer productive advantages to peasants and stimulate further innovative competition. However, as Powelson and Stock (1990, p.7-9) have described, the historical trend has been that states have used their influence to secure a monopoly position in these credit/input markets, to the detriment of local businesses. This is a key theme that will be further explored in the next chapter.

It appears then that, not only are there are serious difficulties involved in trying to supplant indigenous institutions with externally contrived ventures, but also that customary systems may actually exhibit a high degree of economic efficiency. In the empirical data there is considerable support for these contentions. Cline-Cole (1996) described how in Nigeria technocratic conservation efforts undertaken by forestry authorities to improve sustainability proved less effective than those 'eclectic' measures undertaken by indigenous forest households. In recent times official agroforestry policy has thus been revised to mimic customary practices. Mammo (1999) described how longstanding indigenous institutions might not only maximise the dissemination of local knowledge, but also actually contribute to the maintenance of the community itself. He illustrated this point by describing how effective the *equb* and *eder* cooperative financial institutions in Ethiopia have been in not only pooling scarce resources to assist kin-group members in productive investment, but also in instilling a communitarian ethos, and reinforcing social cohesiveness (Mammo, 1999, p.186-188). Powelson and Stock (1990, p.129-143) described how in Bolivia the Government was too disorganised and lacking resources to support its land reform programme with any complementary investment. Rather, peasants were simply allocated a parcel of land and left to organise their own producers' associations, marketing and credit institutions etc. However, according to Powelson and Stock, rural entrepreneurs thrived in this 'void' by creating their own autonomous agencies, such as unions and credit providers, and

this resulted in considerable microeconomic development. Their volume also analysed a host of mainly unsuccessful land reform cases, where states undertook considerable complementary investment, and concluded that the duplicitous nature of these compounding measures has been primarily responsible for the recurrence of failed reform efforts (Powelson and Stock, 1990, p.386-388). The political factors at play in land reform will be discussed in later chapters, but for now it is sufficient to note that if institutional interventions are at all influenced by a covert state agenda that does not prioritise rural development, then they can be primarily harmful to peasant societies.

In light of the above, a more fruitful goal for complementary development strategies may simply be to provide basic public services and infrastructure, e.g. roads, electricity, telephones etc. Such measures to improve the accessibility and functioning of local markets should provide a more hospitable environment within which indigenous entrepreneurs can operate. Given that infrastructural development is a prerequisite to commercialisation, and that major projects such as highway construction are usually beyond the scope of indigenous communities, this would seem to be an area in which external actors like the state would be best placed to contribute. Therefore, limiting complementary interventions to aspects of the land reform process that cannot feasibly be provided for from within the community could be construed as another general principle of land tenure. Building infrastructure and providing public services would seem to be an appropriate way for governments to assist customary peoples, whereas more institutionally penetrative measures are of dubious worth.

### **Section (e) – Re-conceptualising Land Tenure in Africa**

The preceding sections have clearly established that incursions into indigenous tenure systems and their related customary institutions in Sub Saharan Africa are fraught with difficulties. In many cases, attempts to reform land tenure regimes have led to a dead end, as practitioners have as yet been unable to manufacture systems that consistently outperform indigenous creations - and often these external fabrications do worse.

Therefore, something is clearly missing from the analysis. It will be argued below that the root of this ineffectiveness can ultimately be traced to limitations in the prevailing conception of land tenure that are extant in much of the contemporary literature.

As was described previously, many developmental practitioners have considered land tenure as somewhat of an isolated theoretical problem, and have focused upon solutions aimed at targeting the rules underlying that specific institution. However, as will be demonstrated, a land tenure system comprises many dimensions beyond its apparent legislative role. It is also a central component of a given society, comprising cultural norms and reflecting important political and economic relationships. This is a fact that will become clearer when we consider the specific example of Ethiopia in chapters three and four. For now though, the point to note is simply that there are other legitimate ways of considering the role of land tenure in a society, even when one is exclusively concerned with its impact upon economic behaviour, beyond merely its legislative status. Therefore, studies that comprise a broad and multifaceted conception of, and approach to, the issue are likely to yield the most plausible solutions to its concomitant problems. Such a methodology is notably absent in the contemporary literature on land reform, and hence it will be the objective of this thesis to produce such a reconceived, expanded and contextually integrated conceptual framework through which problems of land tenure can be evaluated for our case study country. The final section of this chapter will seek to lay the groundwork for this undertaking, by more clearly outlining the relevant and contiguous contextual phenomena that have been neglected in much of the recent analyses. These omissions will be uncovered by way of further reflection on some of the material we have examined thus far.

Perhaps the most efficient way to go about our investigation into the limits of the prevailing discourse would be to go straight to the heart of it, and examine the core assumptions upon which depictions of land tenure have rested. In so doing, what immediately comes to the fore is in fact an issue that we encountered earlier in the

analysis and at that point left unresolved. That is of course the primary enterprise of using land reform to reinforce tenure security as a means to enhance productive investment. Earlier data that was examined proved to be inconclusive on the matter, and it was noted that it is empirically difficult to establish the extent of the link between feelings of security and investment decisions. In light of this limitation, interventionist strategies have generally been formulated under the assumption that there is nevertheless a critical link, even if it is as yet empirically unsubstantiated, and have proceeded to try and augment the envisioned security-investment bond by way of formalised titling. Two pertinent questions could be asked of this approach, and they will be dealt with in turn below.

The first obvious question would seem to be, is it legitimate in the sphere of land tenure reform to formulate strategies based on this unsubstantiated premise? In light of the sketchy empirical data, it could be argued that the theoretical basis for an investment-tenure security link is unsound. Nevertheless, like the evolutionary effect discussed above, there would seem to be something quite fundamental and intuitively plausible about the theory. After all, the very essence of a property right system is that it secures property, and hence if a given system does not assure its users that their property is secure, then it would seem to be reasonable to postulate that this will have a limiting effect on the amount of property they accrue - in this context by way of the level of productive investment carried out upon their land. Perhaps then we can tentatively accept the premise that tenure security is an important determinate of investment decisions. If this is indeed the case, then it may be that the shortcomings observed in the field are not so much due to the theory itself but rather its interpretation and application.

In light of the above, the second key question that could be asked is: to what extent is formal titling an effective means of imparting greater tenure security in the African context? In the prescriptive literature it seems that feelings of tenure security have

simply been equated with formality of registration, and in so doing it has been implicitly assumed that formal titling is superior to customary tenure in providing it. However, for this to be so it must necessarily be the case that imposed formal legal arrangements comprise a greater degree of social legitimacy than customary laws and institutions. After all, it is *feelings* of security that dictate investment decisions according to the above theory, hence what should matter more is not what the official legal documents say but rather where ordinary farmers perceive accountability to rest. If in a given case there is a high degree of distrust in the efficacy of a county's governmental institutions to impart the law fairly and without ulterior motives, then farmers may choose to exercise caution and restraint in their investment decisions - despite the formal protection they have been imparted. Legislation may be extant that guarantees individuals' holdings, but if the political entity that underpins the legislation is perceived as unstable or untrustworthy, then title deeds may do very little to assure farmers that they will reap the fruits of their investments. Conversely, if a given customary tenure system is held to be socially legitimate and reliable, then investment may proceed uninhibited under this arrangement, despite its informality. Furthermore, if formal tenure constitutes an effective usurpation of power over land from the community to the state, then it could in fact be the case that security is diminished under formalisation. This is because farmers may feel better able to affect the decisions of community level customary authorities than arms of the state, in ensuring that their investment outlays are respected. Clearly then, providing tenure security is not simply a matter of issuing an ownership deed, but rather it pertains to the entire political economy within which that deed is to be issued. For the security-investment bond to hold, legislating authorities must comprise social legitimacy. This is a fact that has been neglected in much of the developmental prognosis, and would seem to be a rather glaring omission – especially given the infamous political record of some African regimes past and present.

In light of the above, it would seem to be increasingly apparent that the limited efficacy of much of the contemporary prognosis has been due to a persistent failure to apprehend the ways in which land tenure functions as an interconnected rather than an isolated mechanism. Clearly a more rounded conceptualisation of land tenure in Africa is urgently required – an exercise that would necessitate the inclusion of variables that have been omitted from prior analysis. In particular, a much fuller discussion of the political and economic bounds within which land tenure systems function would seem to be especially overdue. Therefore, having sufficiently laid the groundwork for an expansion of our conceptual framework to include such phenomena, the final objective of this chapter has now been met. It will be the purpose of the next chapter to build upon this foundation by providing an account of African politics, and the ways in which it relates to issues of economic development. Before that though, a brief summary of the above will be undertaken.

### **Section (f) – Concluding Remarks**

This chapter has attempted to formulate some general principles of land tenure, based upon the more pertinent insights found in the literature. In particular, some general points have emerged, that can be summarised as follows:

- (1) A family farm model of agricultural organisation appears most suitable for the African context.
- (2) Customary tenure arrangements have generally outperformed socially engineered systems according to the empirical data, hence external titling/registration measures may be an ineffective mechanism for promoting productivity growth, and caution should be exercised in their implementation.
- (3) Land markets may provide efficiency benefits. However, due to variance of contexts into which they can be applied, they may also have deleterious side effects on certain communities. Therefore, their external imposition in violation

of indigenous preferences may be highly problematic, and hence each case should be considered individually.

- (4) Attempts to alter customary institutions that complement the land tenure regime are fraught with potential problems. Basic service delivery and infrastructural investment may thus be a more fruitful goal for external agents seeking to promote indigenous development.

In the process of carrying out this analysis some inherent shortcomings in the general body of land tenure theory have been exposed. It seems that interventionist policies have often lacked empirical justification, and have instead relied heavily upon economic rationale. In so doing, the land tenure issue has been examined in somewhat of a narrow conceptual framework. Research has primarily focused upon the technicalities of tenure regimes and their effect on the security of land rights, in relative isolation from other contextual factors – most notably those related to the political economy of the area in question.

In highlighting these inadequacies, a possible way forward for land tenure prognosis has become evident. The issue must be re-examined against its political and economic context, in order that the full spectrum of determinants of peasants' surplus wealth and investment decisions can be integrated into a single perspective. It is only from such a rounded core of basic theory that effective applied research could feasibly be derived. That stage has not yet been reached. Consequently, well-meaning interventionists should contain their eagerness for proactive strategising until the land tenure issue has been more fully elucidated. The third, fourth, and fifth chapters of the thesis will attempt to achieve precisely this for the complex case of Ethiopia. Before that though, we will augment our bedrock of theory by way of the following chapter on African politics.

## **Chapter 2: Africa and the Politics of the “Hegemonic Drive”<sup>8</sup>**

### **Section (a) – Introduction**

The previous chapter has illustrated that developmental interventions such as land tenure reform occur within a given political and economic context, which will determine their scope and efficacy to some extent. In light of this fact, it must also be the case that those actors in possession of political power within a given region constitute a constraint on economic activity within that locale. For most of Africa, the nature of political economy is, perhaps unsurprisingly, largely a story about the African state. Even at the grassroots level, where in many cases governments have failed to deeply penetrate constituent societies, and communities subsist within what appears to be a political void, the very presence and nature of such a ‘void’ is derivative of the political structure that professes sovereignty over those regions. As will be discussed, in many instances states have been the primary determinants of development, and the specific ways in which they have conditioned socioeconomic environments is directly related to their nature and functioning. Therefore, the main focus of this chapter on African politics will be the postcolonial state, in terms of its birth, maturation, and, in some cases, disintegration.

Particular attention will be paid to the historical evolution of African politics following on from the colonial period, which is in keeping with the ‘historiological’ approach adopted in some of the key literature (Bayart, 1993), (Chabal, 1994). As shall be discussed, present circumstances can only be fully understood in relation to their historical antecedents. Therefore, the analysis will gradually build up a picture of contemporary politics by discussing relevant factors mainly in accordance with their chronological sequence, although not rigidly so. An outright discussion of present-day politics will not be undertaken until the penultimate section, and will be preceded by a thorough discussion of key antecedents in their historical contexts. Section (b) will set

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<sup>8</sup> Phrase taken from Chabal (1994, p.218)

the scene by considering the circumstances under which postcolonial states were born. Section (c) will then outline the form of government that emerged from this process, which has been termed ‘neopatrimonial’ in much of the literature. Sections (d) and (e) will largely be concerned with the economic factors at play, with the former section elucidating the ‘anti-developmental’ nature of the neopatrimonial state’s political and economic mission, and the latter describing the consequences of this affliction i.e. severe financial hardship and, in some cases, bankruptcy. This should provide an adequate foundation for section (f), which will consider the nature of contemporary African politics according to various recent conceptualisations. It will become apparent that the historiological methodology offers a fruitful mode of interpretation. Section (g) will then conclude the chapter by considering some of the implications of this analysis for interventionist development strategising. It will be found that incorporating political factors into the evaluation of Africa’s economic performance can offer considerable insight into why past efforts have rarely proved successful.

### **Section (b) – Postcolonial State Formation in Africa**

The impact of colonialism on state formation Africa has been thoroughly discussed elsewhere (Young, C., 1997), (Mamdani, 1996), hence we will confine ourselves to a brief summary of its key features in this section. In short, it is apparent that borders were primarily established in accordance with European geostrategic interests, as opposed to indigenous groupings, ensuring that emergent African states would comprise an eclectic mix of peoples. This heterogeneity was then accentuated by the administrative structure of ‘Indirect Rule’, which demarcated the governance of ‘tribes’ to traditional authorities, and shaped colonial territories into conglomerates of ethnically aligned, locally focused factions. At times, European powers would favour particular tribal groups and accord them a disproportionately high share of a country’s wealth (Sandbrook, 1985, p.50). This fostered a degree of competitiveness between factions, which proved to be an unfortunate precedent for many postcolonial states.

Governance within the tribal entities was carried out according to colonial perceptions of African social organisation, whereby a sacrosanct chief would autocratically rule over his kin-group. This resulted in the empowerment of those individuals whom colonial governments identified as ‘traditional authorities’, when in reality many customary political structures deviated radically from this simplified model (Lockwood, 2005, p.70). All colonial African territories were socially differentiated into chiefs/‘big-men’ and their subjects, in accordance with this division of power, and, once established, as with the case of inter-tribal rivalry, this arrangement would prove to be a lasting one.

A further mode of socioeconomic division that resulted from the colonial period was between rural and urban communities. Mamdani (1996, p.20) described colonial states as “bifurcated”, in the sense that markets operated differently in rural and urban areas. In the former zones markets were constrained by customary law, whereas in the latter they could generally operate without such obstructions, in accordance with modern capitalist principles. This view is corroborated by Sandbrook (1985, p.43), who asserted that colonial African societies comprised both peasant and capitalist elements, although primarily the former, given that a dominant middle class failed to emerge. An educated, wealthy, indigenous minority did come to the fore in urban areas, but in many cases their wealth stemmed from achieving privileged positions within the colonial bureaucracy, rather than through entrepreneurial activities. As Tangri (1999, p.8) described, “embryonic” bourgeois and proletarian classes did emerge in cities prior to independence, but were vastly outnumbered by the rural peasant populations, who divided their labour between both market and subsistence activities. However, as will later be discussed, the new African political elites, for whom the accumulative logic of entrepreneurship had to take a back seat to the exigencies of politics, most fatally undermined the entrenchment of liberal capitalism.

It was mainly from within this educated urban 'class' that independence movements emerged. They were in fact the only credible candidates to continue governing the colonial political entities, given that many customary chiefs lacked a Western education and were primarily focused upon local issues. Western colonial powers had only really accepted the inevitability of African independence by the end of the Second World War. However, due to the rise of radical nationalist movements in the late 1940s, they were pressured into relinquishing control more quickly than they felt was prudent. Hence in many cases, such as Ghana and Kenya, sovereignty was promptly, and perhaps prematurely, handed over to the more moderate nationalists – favoured urban elites etc, in the hope that they would prevent major instability or full scale civil war by maintaining the fundamental structure of African polities, in terms of their territorial boundaries and Western-style administrative and political institutions (Allen, 1995, p.303-304). The former colonial rulers believed that the greatest possible degree of political continuity should be sought, in order to provide the best foundation for new states to successfully develop under their own steam (Doornbos, 1990, p.182).

At this point it is worth emphasising precisely what these new conservative, nationalist, African rulers had inherited. They were accorded sovereign status over decentralised and partially devolved, hierarchically structured, confederations of ethnically and linguistically differentiated groups. In most cases there was no history of national cohesion or consciousness beyond that which had been forged in the relatively short struggle for independence. Moreover, as Sandbrook (1985) has pointed out, in colonial and postcolonial Africa 'ethnicity' was akin to what Westerners now understand 'national' consciousness to be, i.e. "a sense of cultural uniqueness and determination to guard mutual interests" (Sandbrook, 1985, p.51). Therefore, 'citizens' of these new states were primarily allied to their ethnic factions and subservient to chiefs ahead of any national government. In sociopolitical terms, ordinary Africans were subjects dependent upon the benevolence of paternalistic leaders, and were entirely unfamiliar with the practice of exercising civil rights within a constitutional nation-state. In effect,

the new rulers of Africa assumed control of political apparatuses that were conditioned to function in a profoundly different manner from that dictated by their new official constitutions.

As Chabal (1994, p.75) pointed out, the colonial state was also a “conquest state”, relying on both collaboration and coercion to maintain its grip on power. The withdrawal of the threat of European force hence necessitated that a new political compromise be forged with ethnic and other social units (i.e. one that did not require military prowess) in order to secure and maintain loyalty to the national cause. Moreover, nationalists had made promises of material reward to their supporters, in exchange for the backing of both their independence movements and subsequent campaigns to attain sovereignty (Allen, 1995, p.304). Therefore, it was apparent that power and political survival in postcolonial Africa would rest upon the new rulers’ abilities to deliver improvements in material conditions. As will be explained below, both the structural economic constraints faced by these new states, as well as the timeliness with which remuneration in exchange for support was expected to arrive, greatly undermined the potentiality for achieving a betterment of material conditions via long-term investment and productivity growth. Rather, regimes were impelled to pursue short-term sources of revenue for redistribution to key clients. This would prove to be the fundamental political logic around which African states would revolve.

The legitimation of sovereignty by the practice of patronage was certainly not a postcolonial innovation. As Chabal (1994, p.172-173) described, colonial rule had relied upon striking a balance between coercion and patronage. Therefore, the new nationalist leaders entered a political system with a tradition of clientelistic relations, and which in fact comprised an extensive network of patron-client partnerships. Traditional leaders or local big-men had historically acted as both clients of the state and patrons of their constituencies, and this manifested itself in an overall dissemination of material rewards/personal favours from top to bottom, in exchange for

an upward movement of political support (Bratton and Van De Walle, 1994, p.458). In the words of Tangri (1999, p.10):

Political leaders have allocated public resources and amenities to key intermediaries and their ethnic clienteles in ways designed to fashion a following and ensure political support.

The new African rulers took the reins of a clientelistic system of governance. In order to secure sovereignty, they forged new political coalitions via the strategic use of investment, public sector employment and outright bribery, so that a sufficient proportion of their countries' ethnic groups could be co-opted. However, nationalist elites sought more than simply the management of a patronage system, as this position was a precarious one. The low levels of economic development, combined with the low extractive capacities of most African governments (in terms of the effective collections of taxes, licence fees, tariffs etc), meant that an adequate supply of revenue to nurture the patronage system was by no means guaranteed (Van De Walle, 2001, p.53). Furthermore, nationalist elites had promised prosperity and economic development in order to elicit support and short-term political unity, hence their long-term legitimacy was staked upon the betterment of material conditions (Chabal, 1994, p.79-80). Therefore, rulers sought to assume centralised control of the economy, in order to augment their power and propagate economic growth. This was in keeping with development ideologies of the time, which asserted that a strong state was required to orchestrate the growth process (Sandbrook, 1993, p.2). In the words of Le Vine (1980, p.666):

The post-independence elites and rulers of Africa quickly reached for those tools that promised the most rapid construction of centralised power, including not only the structures of the modern bureaucratic state, but also the traditional mechanisms of legitimacy, social control, patrimonial rule.

The following section will outline what actually emerged from this centralising mission. This will be achieved by examining some of the prevailing characteristics of postcolonial regimes, which came to exhibit a form of government that has been termed ‘neopatrimonial’.

## **Section (c) – The Conditions of Neopatrimonial Rule**

### **(i) Defining Neopatrimonialism**

Neopatrimonialism is an expansive concept, and many of its key features will be discussed below. The term is in part a reference to Weber’s notion of ‘patrimonialism’ (Weber, 1947 cited in Le Vine, 1980, p.657), which, according to Van De Walle (1994, p.131), is “a type of government organised as an extension of the ruler’s own household”. This does not necessarily mean that elites within such regimes are blood relations of the ruler, but rather, according to Le Vine (1980, p.658):

patrimonialism grants fictive kinship to those whose ties with the head of the household may be based on other than biological or family liaisons – for example, contract, alliance, coercion or titular service.

Or in words that are more familiar to the study of contemporary politics:

The patrimonial model implies an instrumentally profitable lack of distinction between the civic and personal spheres. The ruler allocates political office to his clients on the basis of patronage, rather than according to the criteria of professionalism and competence which characterize the civil service (Chabal and Daloz, 1999, p.5)

In the case of ‘neopatrimonialism’, the prefix ‘neo’ indicates that this basic underlying pattern of rule has been adapted to a modern context (Chabal and Daloz, 1999, p.9),

and hence, according to Van De Walle (1994, p.131), can be concisely defined as follows:

I designated as neopatrimonial those states – found notably in contemporary Africa – in which patrimonial logic coexists with the development of bureaucratic administration and at least the pretense of legal-rational forms of state legitimacy.

Similarly, Chabal and Daloz (1999, p.9) have observed that in such states:

political legitimacy derives from a creatively imprecise interaction between what might be termed ‘ancestral’ norms and the logic of the ‘modern’ state. The edifice conforms to the Western template while the workings derive from patrimonial dynamics.

Having outlined these general definitions of the term, our next objective will be to analyse some of the key components of neopatrimonialism that have been depicted by scholars within the field. However, we will return to the task of precisely defining the broader concept in section (f), once its more prevalent characteristics have been expounded. That will in turn provide us with a suitably detailed and apposite theoretical framework to apply to our case study country in the next chapter.

In light of the above definitions and the extensive literature on African politics, it would appear that two recurrent features of neopatrimonial governance that can be identified are as follows: Firstly, in neopatrimonial states political authority is often highly ‘personalised’, both ideologically and instrumentally (Le Vine, 1980, p.666). Secondly, such governments generally comprise a mixture of both Western-style rational-legal bureaucratic structures and clientelistic relations, working in an uneasy coalition, with the latter component dominating and often perverting the former (Van De Walle, 2001, p.51). In the following subsections these two key aspects of

neopatrimonial rule will be examined in turn, as will many other important components that can proximately be subsumed under one or other of these dimensions.

Before embarking upon a full analysis of our first key condition - personalised government, a few issues regarding terminology and methodology will firstly be addressed. In the context of postcolonial Africa, multiple notions may be implicit in the term 'personal rule' depending upon the interpretation of a given scholar, and a precise definition is difficult to pin down. Jackson and Rosberg (1982, p.17-22) emphasised the lack of political institutions as the primary attribute of a 'personal' regime. However, their use of the term to provide a general characterisation of government in Sub-Saharan Africa renders it essentially coterminous with the word 'neopatrimonial' as used in more recent sources. Van De Walle (2001, p.131-133) and Sandbrook (1985, p.89) provided a somewhat narrower definition, by associating the term particularly with traditional patrimonial or sultanist regimes. This conception may provide a clearer representation as, while most neopatrimonial regimes appear to exhibit 'personalised' rule, some also display substantive bureaucratic governance. It would therefore be misleading to say designate Mobutu's Zaire and Houphouët-Boigny's Côte d'Ivoire as being of the same *type* per say, despite both operating under a personalistic logic. Therefore, it will be contended here that personalised rule is a major but not definitive component of neopatrimonial government, and one that substantively varies in degree between countries.

In light of such variance within the neopatrimonial model, some scholars, such as Jackson and Rosberg (1982) and Bratton and Van De Walle (1994), have attempted to provide greater clarity on the issue of regime 'type', by depicting various subcategories of neopatrimonial rule, such as: 'personal dictatorship' or 'prophetic rule'. Such categorisations can provide further insight into the phenomenon, and will be discussed later in the chapter. Firstly though, the earlier sections will focus upon the more universal features of neopatrimonial rule, some of which correspond to the more

personalistic traits of such regimes. But it should be emphasised that not all of the concepts discussed will have been present either at all or to the same degree in all cases, and this point will become clearer when the differing regime types are outlined later. Nevertheless, the earlier analysis will be seek to elicit commonalities rather than divergences between countries, and by way of a starting point, those aspects of government in Africa that could be described as ‘personalistic’ will first be discussed.

**(i) Manifestations of ‘Personalism’ within Neopatrimonial Regimes**

In Sub-Saharan Africa there have been many cases in which power has been greatly concentrated around the head of state. Although ruling junta groups have also been extant<sup>9</sup>, African presidents have most commonly enjoyed a position of supreme authority as, “the centrifugal force around which all else revolves” (Sandbrook, 1985, p.90). The idiosyncratic nature of this dictatorial rule is what has primarily imbued neopatrimonial regimes with a personalistic ethos. According to Van De Walle (1994, p.131-133), sovereigns have often arbitrarily ruled the state at their own whim, as if it were their private property, and have treated the national treasury in accordance with this philosophy. This has been manifest in acts of: extreme egotism, e.g. Bokassa’s decision that he be anointed head of the Central African ‘Empire’ (Chabal and Daloz, 1999, p.154); horrific violence, e.g. the mass torture and murder carried out during Idi Amin’s tenure of rule in Uganda (Sandbrook, 1993, p.51); and prophetic idealism, e.g. Nyerere’s self-appointed role as ‘teacher’ of the nation in socialist Tanzania (Sandbrook, 1993, p.29). Moreover, as Sandbrook (1985, p.92) has argued, such divorce from reality may at times have been heightened by tenure in the reverent surroundings that rulers have created for themselves:

In this atmosphere of suspicion and intrigue, the chief can become isolated. If he falls into the trap of believing his own propaganda, of uncritically accepting the praises sung by his sycophants, he grows increasingly divorced from reality.

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<sup>9</sup> For example in Niger, Mali, Ghana, and Ethiopia (Le Vine, 1980, p.611).

Such circumstances can result in increasingly unpredictable and despotic behaviour by leaders.

In spite of the above, the extent to which personalistic regimes are idiosyncratic should not be overstated. There are also many similarities that can be observed in the behaviour of Africa's rulers that allows for some commonality of interpretation, despite the peculiarity of many individual policies. For example, leaders have frequently sought to amass vast personal fortunes. There are many well-known cases of rulers who have lived in visible opulence by pilfering the state coffers, whilst the majority of their subjects have lived in severe destitution. For example, Mobutu of Zaire accumulated nearly \$4 billion during his tenure according to Sandbrook (1985, p.95). The Côte d'Ivoire's Houphouët-Boigny would quite overtly skim 10% from the country's cocoa revenues, in order to upkeep his luxurious lifestyle (Van De Walle, 1994, p.132). And despite the high levels of poverty in postcolonial Africa, this opulence has not always engendered resentment amongst ordinary people, but rather in many cases has actually enhanced elites' public profiles. This fact is directly related to the vertically integrated, ethnically aligned nature of the patron-client system, and specifically its influence on sociocultural norms. 'Big-men' are accepted as legitimate representatives of their ethnic client groups, provided they vie for their 'collective' interests at the national level, and redistribute some of their wealth back down the chain (Van De Walle, 1994, p.132-133). The status of these 'big-men', defined by 'qualities' such as financial well being, is something that communities may actually take pride in, because their individual wealth is construed as a manifestation of collective prosperity (Chabal and Daloz, 1999, p.43). This illustrates the degree to which the top-down, ethnically differentiated structure of the patronage system negates horizontal linkages, such as socioeconomic class solidarity, serving to legitimise the grossly unequal distributions of wealth within African states (Van De Walle, 1994, p.133).

Personalised politics can also be observed in the efforts of African rulers to legitimate their rule using ideological tools. In an attempt to engender both national unity and loyal servitude, rulers have commonly drawn upon both traditional symbols of power and recent historical events such as the struggle for independence, for propaganda purposes. For example, Bongo (Gabon), Senghor (Senegal) and Houphouët-Boigny all sanctioned the release of comic-book biographies that glorified their respective ascensions to power (Sandbrook, 1985, p.90). The adoption of fanciful titles, such as Kenyatta's 'Father of the Nation' and Idi Amin's 'Conqueror of the British Empire', has also been popular (Sandbrook, 1985, p.92). However, such actions have ultimately proved insufficient to allay the innate ideological weakness of neopatrimonial rule. The nature of the system is that it accentuates inter-ethnic competition. National unity is perpetually undermined by the ongoing contest for patronage, and the creation of a mythological father figure to lead the disparate groups has often proved to be an ineffective counter to this underlying divisiveness. Furthermore, as will be discussed below, the high levels of consumption and wealth redistribution obstruct the process of capitalistic accumulation and investment, which often serves to retard economic growth in the long term. This is a critical issue, but for now, focusing still on the personalistic traits of neopatrimonial rule, the essential point to note is that the lack of national unity and economic prosperity in Sub-Saharan Africa can render leadership positions precarious and often illegitimate in the eyes of wider society, in spite of propagandists' efforts. Therefore, there is a flipside to the aforementioned loyalty-reward system that can be manifested under personal rule, and it relates to the 'sin' of disloyalty.

According to Jackson and Rosberg (1982, p.59), disloyalty to the ruler is often treated as the most heinous of all crimes in Africa. As described above, the vast riches that the position can offer, combined with the very weak legitimacy that many rulers possess, will predictably elicit contenders to the leadership position. Such contenders may often represent out-of-favour ethnic groups who feel neglected under extant clientelistic relations. Any perceived dissent against the incumbent may provoke violent coercive

measures against the rebellious population in question and imprisonment/execution of their leadership, as has often been observed. There are dozens of examples of state-sanctioned violence against particular ethnic groups. One obvious one would be the repressive actions undertaken by the Derg regime against the Tigrayan and Eritrean peoples in Ethiopia (Kaplan, 2003). Threats may also arise from within the cabinet of the ruling clique by power hungry elites, and this possibility has at times engendered paranoia among African dictators. For example, during their respective reigns, both Zaire's Mobutu and Ethiopia's Haile Selassie would frequently purge and reshuffle cabinet ministers without any explanation, in order to avert any possible opposition arising from within (Sandbrook, 1985, p.92), (Clapham, 1969, p.140-141).

Baker (1998) described some of the tactics that have been employed by Africa's autocratic leaders in order to avert their expulsion under 'democratisation', and many of these are characteristic of the suppression tactics that have been utilised by personalistic regimes since independence. Common methods include: buying off the opposition; denying them publicity by censoring the press; dividing dissenting ethnic groups by stirring up competition between them; mobilising the ruler's own ethnic group against their 'enemies'; using the military/police to intimidate the opposition with violence; and manipulating the country's laws/constitution to favour the incumbent. Such elaborate methods of subversion suggest that many regimes may actually dedicate the majority of their efforts to retaining power, ahead of even the day-to-day governance of their countries. This state of affairs prompted Jackson and Rosberg (1982, p.18) to coin the oft-quoted line: "In African countries governance is more a matter of seamanship and less one of navigation – that is, staying afloat rather than going somewhere". This key problem will be further explored below.

## **(ii) Rational-Legalism and Clientelism – Impossible Allies?**

As stated at the beginning of this section, and in spite of the characteristics outlined above, neopatrimonial government in Africa has not always been purely personal and

arbitrary. Postcolonial nationalist leaders inherited bureaucratic structures of varying quality from the colonial era<sup>10</sup>, which had effectively administered the territories more or less in accordance with Weberian organisational principles – albeit within the colonial patronage system (Chabal, 1994, p.172). Indeed, for any political entity to stake a plausible claim to sovereignty, at least some degree of administrative efficacy is requisite. Van De Walle (2001, p.127-128) noted this important aspect of Africa's postcolonial inheritance: "Even in the least institutionalised states, there are still rational-legal pockets attempting to assert themselves". Therefore, neopatrimonial Africa has comprised a blend of both personalised politics and rational-bureaucratic administration.

As will be discussed below, the efficacy with which postcolonial bureaucracies have functioned has varied greatly between states. However, in general the exigencies of neopatrimonial rule in the period immediately following independence were such as to heap an immediate burden upon most countries' administrations. Rather than being accorded a grace period in which to come to terms with their newly independent role, bureaucracies were completely overtaxed from the outset. Hence far from serving as a wellspring from which notions of institutionalised, rational-legal governance could permeate to the other arms of the state, many countries' administrations began to buckle under the strain of the postcolonial missions. The aforementioned efforts to centralise authority; the adoption of state-led economic development strategies; and the increasing role of patronage, all combined to heap an unmanageable workload upon these agencies. This was exacerbated by the increased use of nepotistic employment practices in the civil service (in keeping with the political exigencies of clientelistic rule) and also the replacement of many European administrators with untrained

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<sup>10</sup> According to Chabal (1994, p.171), the amount of money invested in the administration of a given territory by the UK and France depended upon factors such as geostrategic importance or endowment of natural resources. Hence, countries like Niger, Chad, Lesotho, Malawi etc were apportioned much less investment than countries like Ghana, Kenya, Rhodesia or Côte d'Ivoire, and so they inherited bureaucracies of a correspondingly lower quality.

Africans (Chabal, 1994, p.174). Therefore, neopatrimonial regimes have commonly been plagued by ineffective administration.

There were variations upon this general theme. For example, some countries such as Kenya, Senegal and Côte d'Ivoire opted to retain many European bureaucrats and pursue a more gradual process of 'africanization'. Consequently, they did not undergo such a rapid administrative decay, as experienced in Congo-Kinshasa, Guinea-Bissau or Mali (Chabal, 1994, p.175). However, there is a consensus in the literature that a general long-term trend of neopatrimonial governance is that rational-legal principles are compromised. According to Van De Walle (2001, p.50-51): "This official order is constantly subverted by a patrimonial logic, in which officeholders almost systematically appropriate public resources for their own uses". This viewpoint is corroborated by the thoughts of Chabal and Daloz (1999, p.14) on the nature of the African State:

It is *vacuous* in that it did not consolidate, as was once expected, on the foundations of the colonial legacy but instead rapidly disintegrated and fell prey to particularistic and factional struggles. It became an empty shell. As a result it failed to acquire either the legitimacy or the professional competence that are the hallmarks of the modern state.

It appears then that the nature of the neopatrimonial state is such that it has a high propensity to impair its own effective functioning. By prioritising political calculations ahead of Weberian organisational principles, administrative efficacy becomes continually compromised. Nevertheless, an important factor in this remains to be elucidated, which may partially account for the differences in administrative decay between countries like Kenya and Somalia. The question is: when, and under what circumstances, does rent-seeking deteriorate into unrestrained predation? This is a key issue that will be investigated in section (e), but firstly, by way of an antecedent to the issue, the nature of public sector corruption in Africa will presently be considered.

According to Olivier de Sardan (1999), many African countries possess “a moral economy of corruption”. What he meant by this was that within neopatrimonial regimes, corruption can become so commonplace that it must be construed as normative sociocultural activity. He asserted that this “cultural embeddedness” is a postcolonial phenomenon that does not reflect ‘traditional’ African values, and has primarily derived from the process of post-independence state formation (Olivier de Sardan, 1999, p.26). In many instances, it is in fact now inaccurate to use the term ‘corruption’ to describe certain kinds of transactions, as many have become a legitimised part of everyday life, e.g. bribing clerks or police officers for preferential treatment. He noted that the most damaging form that corruption can take in Africa, in terms of welfare losses, is at the upper ends of the patronage networks. The exposure of such high-level corrupt practices has not become normalised and still elicits condemnation from the majority of people (Olivier de Sardan, 1999, p.28). For example, the public response to the major corruption scandals in Kenya in 2005 and 2006 attest to this<sup>11</sup>. Olivier de Sardan then identified five key aspects of neopatrimonial rule that have contributed to the emergence of this culture of corruption, which are as follows: legal ambiguity – due to the resonance of ‘traditional’ law in certain areas and the import of European constitutional law in others; the monetisation of the traditional practice of gift giving in order to elicit good relations with officials; the importance of clan/kin-ship networks of mutual assistance; the notion amongst elites that taking money from the national treasury is a ‘right’; and the culture of wealth redistribution.

Goldsmith (1999, p.544) noted that only two African countries – Botswana and Mauritius – have successfully avoided getting embroiled in this web of corruption, by setting a precedent of administrative integrity. They have, thus, averted the onset of

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<sup>11</sup> See BBC News (3<sup>rd</sup> February 2006), ‘Sleaze hits Kenya's ‘clean’ rulers’, (<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/4677486.stm>).

bureaucratic decay, and enjoyed the economic benefits of competent administration. The rest, however, regardless of their original intentions, have generally fallen prey to the 'logics' of corruption. As Olivier de Sardan (1999, p.48) pointed out:

Everyone is sincerely in favour of respecting the public domain, and wants the bureaucracy to be at the service of the citizens, but everyone participates by means of everyday actions in the reproduction of the system he denounces.

It appears then that many Africans have come to possess a short-term, fatalistic mentality - to take what they can while it is still available. This is especially so for those political elites and bureaucrats who have opted to compromise the new rational-legal order by pursuing financial gain. It may therefore be the case the African state has failed to sufficiently justify itself in the eyes of wider society, in terms of both procuring legitimacy and evincing adequate governmental capabilities. This is a crucial point that will be further explored in the penultimate section of the chapter.

It should however be noted, in light of the above discussion of corruption, that to castigate postcolonial states for their corrupt practices would be unfair in many cases, because it would be to presume that more positive outcomes could have readily been achieved. Given the host of obstacles to unity in the post-independence period outlined above, it is far from clear how nationalist rulers could have assured the continued existence of many African states in a markedly different manner from that which they chose. As Sandbrook (1993, p.30) has asserted, neopatrimonialism is a "time-worn, albeit uncertain, formula for governance under hostile conditions", and this is certainly an apt description of the political environment in postcolonial Africa. In any event, the purpose here has been to elucidate political realities rather than impart prescriptions or value judgements. This is in keeping with the objectives of the previous chapter, which sought to avoid inadvertently incorporating any ideological notions of 'good governance' into the discussion. What has been presented should simply be construed

as an analysis rather than a critique of how postcolonial states have functioned in Africa.

The above discussion has illustrated how a hybrid of both personalised politics and some degree of rational-bureaucratic administration have emerged in response to the political priorities of postcolonial Africa, and elicited a form of governance that has been termed neopatrimonial. In order to more clearly delineate how such governments have in turn shaped the human ecology of constituent populations, it is necessary to now consider the ways in which these political structures have interacted with wider society. It will become clear that the primary modes of state intervention have been economic, which is in keeping with the exigencies of neopatrimonial rule, as shall be described below. More overtly political actions have also been extant, e.g. state sanctioned violence, but even in these cases it is difficult to disentangle the economic and political motivations at play. For example, ruling elites pursue resources to augment their power, but they also pursue power in order to acquire more resources<sup>12</sup>. Therefore, an examination of the nature of postcolonial African economies, and the economic policies undertaken by African governments, should reveal how the politics of the state have conditioned socioeconomic and sociopolitical environments. This undertaking is, thus, the objective of the next section.

### **Section (d) – The Postcolonial Economic Mission**

The preceding analysis can most straightforwardly be summarised by stating a single fundamental property of neopatrimonial governance, i.e. that the legitimation of rulership rests upon the redistribution of wealth. This could quite uncontrovertibly be construed as a broadly applicable principle, as even those regimes that have enjoyed widespread popularity have attained this only conditionally on their ability to bestow patronage upon their supporters (Chabal and Daloz, 1999, p.35-37). Therefore, power

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<sup>12</sup> This fact corresponds with the dialectical relationship between power and production described by Chabal (1994, p.99). He stated that the two are indissoluble, i.e. “production and power are the two axes of politics” (Chabal, 1999, p.5).

in Africa is dependent upon the ability to ensure a continued supply of wealth with which to service client networks. The historical experience has shown that this necessity has profoundly shaped the practice of politics in the postcolonial era, to the extent that the task of acquiring resources has commonly emerged as the primary occupation of government. As shall be illustrated below, this acquisitive mission has not translated into investment-oriented fiscal strategies, due to the high degree of redistribution that is required to maintain ruling coalitions. This in turn has had significant ramifications for the process of economic development in Africa.

Before launching into an analysis of economic policy in postcolonial states, it will be useful to firstly consider the nature of African economies around the time of independence. According to Chabal and Daloz (1999, p.113): “During the colonial period the continent was primarily a supplier of raw materials and agricultural products to imperial centres and beyond”. In short, African economies were outwardly oriented and largely undifferentiated beyond a handful of primary commodities. They also comprised very low levels of industrialisation, as their produce was generally exported as raw materials to be processed abroad. The export of such produce constituted one of two primary sources of income - the other being grants from colonial powers (Chabal and Daloz, 1999, p.112). This outward orientation was of course a derivative of imperial policy, which had deliberately constructed African economies in such a manner because it allowed for the realisation of colonial economic objectives - primarily the extraction of natural resources (Sandbrook, 1985, p.53-54). This system hence constituted the macroeconomic component of the African nationalists’ postcolonial inheritance. It therefore had to be made to conform to the clientelistic logic upon which the fragile new governments rested. But could this arrangement also accommodate productive investment and economic growth? Chabal and Daloz (1999, p.133) thought not:

The question is whether African governments pursued policies likely to maximise the use of their resources for the purpose of sustained development. The short answer is that they did not. With very few exceptions (like Botswana and, perhaps, Gabon) African governments simply exploited their economic assets for patrimonial (or prebendal) purposes, regardless of the consequences of such actions for the country's future economic development.

The specific forms of these 'anti-developmental' undertakings will be outlined later.

As noted above, postcolonial African states did not comprise an effective system of taxation, despite the fact that establishing such a system can be an effective way of legitimating government. According to Goldsmith (2000, p.17-18), if, over time, citizens come to observe local-level fiscal expenditure and capacity building projects, then they will more willingly acquiesce to taxation. However, the attainment of such reciprocity requires certain essential preconditions: Citizens must be sufficiently trusting of the government; modest and realistic in their aspirations of the process of capacity building in an underdeveloped state; patient in awaiting the rewards of their inputs; and they must bear at least some affinity to the national cause. Many of these prerequisites were lacking in postcolonial Africa. Nationalist elites had procured support by promising material rewards, and hence a process of incremental development set forth by a campaign of overt government extraction was unlikely to have been politically fruitful. Therefore, a precedent of responsible budgeting was effectively ceded from the outset. Instead, rulers seized for the most expedient means of appeasing key clients, which necessitated direct intervention in the economy.

Following independence, some African countries undertook a process of economic 'indigenisation', which involved the involuntary nationalisation of many foreign owned businesses. Governments were able to gain control over countries' key assets, ensuring that in many cases, regardless of the ideological orientation of individual regimes, the

African state would coordinate and command over the economy. This undertaking provided nationalists with both political capital, deriving from this assertion of African control over African economic affairs, and also direct access to commercial revenue (Tangri, 1999, p.12). The new 'parastatal' companies that emerged from the nationalisation process also provided rulers with a multitude of new patronage opportunities, as allies could be rewarded with lucrative positions in industry, just as they had previously in the cabinet or bureaucracy. However, as Tangri (1999, p.25-27) has explained, there was to be a heavy long-term price for these nepotistic practices, because rent seeking and incompetence came to plague many parastatals. Furthermore, the extent to which ruling elites controlled the economy ensured that only those entrepreneurs who were allied to government would be allowed to prosper in business, hence the private sector was effectively suffocated. This inhibited the emergence of free-market competition, and substantive commercial development was forfeited.

The 'indigenisation' programmes were not the only means by which African governments undermined economic efficiency in the pursuit of patronage sources. Elites also quickly discovered that revenue could be skimmed from the sale of primary commodities by the manipulation of export prices. By forcing domestic producers to sell their output to the government at an artificially deflated price, and then selling these commodities on at the higher world-market price, governments could extract a significant proportion of the profits, at the expense of producers' incomes. As Bates (1981, p.11-29) described, such measures became commonly implemented in agricultural markets (with the majority of mineral production already under direct state control) as governments took charge of the extant marketing boards, which were already functioning as intermediaries between rural producers and the final goods market. During colonial times these marketing boards had been used to ensure stability of agricultural prices - to peasants' benefit during times of excess supply, but they now became parastatal enterprises, used as a means of indirectly taxing peasant farmers in order to augment government revenues. Lockwood (2005, p.41) notes that in the 1970s

and 1980s agriculture was being taxed at approximately 23% in Africa, compared to only 2.5% in Asia. Therefore, as the following description by May (1985 cited in Powelson and Stock, 1990, p.2) clearly illustrates, peasants were forced to shoulder the burden of the neopatrimonial economic mission:

This group has been squeezed in the vise of state marketing boards, which purchase farm products at fixed, low prices. The difference between the government's purchase price and its selling price often represents its main source of income, along with foreign aid. In many cases, that money is used to equip armies, construct office buildings, conference centres and all manner of prestigious projects and pay the salaries of civil servants and employees of inefficient government-owned industries.

In contrast to the unfortunate plight of the rural majority, urban citizens have fared slightly better under these interventionist economic policies. This is most likely because regimes are vulnerable to urban dissent – given the potential for mass resistance in cities, whereas rural protest is likely to be more localised and uncoordinated, hence easier to quell (Bates, 1981, p.30). Therefore, interventionist efforts have been undertaken to depress domestic food prices. This has helped to ensure that cities have had access to a continuous supply of affordable food, but at the expense of rural producers' incomes. Tariffs have deliberately not been applied to agricultural goods, serving to facilitate the import of foreign produce and drive down domestic market prices. Maintaining a low-price equilibrium has in turn discouraged farmers from surreptitiously selling produce on the black market, rather than to official marketing boards, by reducing the available profit in such ventures. Hence according to Bates (1981, p.29) farmers have often only been able to recoup between a third and a half of the true value of their output. However, in order to ensure that distorting the price mechanism does not overly reduce incentives to grow crops, governments have commonly opted to 'subsidise' farmers by providing them with production inputs and credit. This has allowed regimes to co-opt peasants into a dependant position, whereby

over time farmers have become reliant upon these inputs in order to produce enough output to subsist in the low-price environment. In bestowing such subsidies rulers can pose as ‘protectors’ of the peasantry, when in fact they are duplicitously imposing a net tax on them (Powelson and Stock, 1990, p.7-8). Therefore, in sociopolitical terms, peasants have come to occupy a position at the very base of the patron-client hierarchy. This is a key point that will be explored further in later sections.

The acquisitive nature of the neopatrimonial economic mission has also manifested in various other interventionist policies worth mentioning. Governments have often implemented high tariffs on finished products in order to protect their grossly inefficient parastatal companies, and maintain a high domestic price for their outputs. Such efforts have been reinforced by the use of overvalued exchange rates. These ensure that foreigners wishing to invest in Africa are forced to pay above the ‘natural’ exchange rate for domestic currency, and also that privileged clients can enjoy subsidised consumption of luxury goods purchased abroad. However, the effect on ordinary African citizens is that, with the exception of food, many consumer goods are overpriced and unaffordable.

Perhaps of greater significance, in terms of net patronage procurement, have been efforts to obtain aid from the developed world. Throughout the Cold War many states opted to ally themselves with one of the two superpowers in exchange for cash, goods or services. By adapting their official rhetoric to the relevant ideology they could exact considerable funding, regardless of the fact that in reality both ‘socialist’ and ‘capitalist’ states in Africa operated under the same clientelistic logic (Reno, 1999, p.18-20). However, in the long run this left many states in a debt-ridden “aid-dependent” position (Lockwood, 2005, p.13-17). This became especially problematic when aid flows begin to wane - as they did following the end of the Cold War. The next section will hence investigate some of the consequences of this disruption in the practice of accruing patronage.

It is clearly beyond the scope of this study to provide a more thorough analysis of all of the individual components of postcolonial economic policy, given that the focus of this chapter is the nature of the African state. Nevertheless, substantive detail has been provided about the agricultural dimensions of fiscal policy, which is most relevant for this thesis. Given that Africa is in many ways “a continent of farmers” (Bates, 1981, p.1), it is in the realm of agriculture the state can most profoundly condition socioeconomic environments, by way of its pursuit of both political and economic objectives. For our purposes, perhaps the most salient aspect of this state-society interaction that need be emphasised is the transfer of surplus wealth from peasantry to government. It was argued in the last chapter that agriculturally-led economic growth rests critically upon the productive investment of peasants’ profits. However, the neopatrimonial economic mission appears to directly contradict this process. Much of the surplus wealth is captured by elites and then either consumed or redistributed to their clients. It is no surprise then that postcolonial African states have been labelled “anti-developmental” (Lockwood, 2005, p.44), as the very logic upon which they operate appears to be antithetical to investment-fuelled growth at the microeconomic level. As shall now be explained, what has emerged as a partial consequence of the diminishment of patronage sources within this anti-developmental environment has been increasing poverty levels, resource paucity and in some cases political crisis and/or state disintegration<sup>13</sup>.

## **Section (e) – The Well Dries Up: The Decline of Patronage Revenues**

### **(i) Underdevelopment in the 1970s and 1980s**

The 1970s saw a steady decline in African export revenue. Demand for primary commodities fell as the West was hit by a major recession, following the oil price rises

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<sup>13</sup> Of course international factors, such as unequal terms of trade, foreign debt etc, also contributed to the spiralling poverty of African states at this time, as shall be explained below. However, for the purposes of this thesis we have been, and will continue to, mainly focus upon the domestic political economy.

of 1973 and 1979 (Tangri, 1999, p.2). The price of primary commodities relative to finished goods substantially declined, and terms of trade between African suppliers and multinational purchasers altered drastically in favour of the latter. Therefore, both farmers and marketing boards found that the income they could recoup on a given quantity of produce progressively declined in the decades following independence. For example, the price index of agricultural commodities was 208 in 1960 and 90 in 2002 (with 1990 fixed at 100) (Sindzingre, 2004, p.8).

The above has been exacerbated by the fact that, in the decades following independence, the neopatrimonial states of Africa did not diversify their economies in the way that Asian 'Tiger' countries like Taiwan and South Korea did. According to Sandbrook (1993, p.15), by the early 1990s, about 90% of Africa's exports were primary commodities, 70% of which were unprocessed. Furthermore, most countries remained dependent upon the export of only one or two key products. Copper accounted for about 60% of Zaire's exports, uranium about 80% of Niger's and oil over 90% of Nigeria's (Sandbrook, 1993, p.15). This failure to diversify is most likely related to the short-term, extractive nature of the neopatrimonial economic mission, although Lockwood (2005, p.29) has pointed out that natural endowments may also play a part in explaining why Africa has not taken the 'Asian path'. The Asian Tigers had a comparative advantage in cheap labour, whereas Africa's pre-eminence lay in its relative abundance of land and minerals vis-à-vis labour. Therefore, African countries may simply harbour a greater propensity to export primary commodities. Whatever the case, this absence of economic diversity has proven to be a major handicap.

In addition to the decline in export revenue from the 1970s onwards, Africa's other primary source of patronage income also began to wane - this time in the late 1980s. According to Reno (1999, p.23): "The end of the Cold War cut off easy access to aid and loans, the lifeblood of the old patron-client politics". The disintegration of the Soviet Union and rapid dissipation of any substantive ideological rival to Western

capitalism significantly reduced the incentive for global powers to form political alliances with Africa's dictators. Soviet sources of patronage more or less disappeared and Western sources also somewhat diminished once 'conditionality' was introduced. This development will be discussed below, but for now the key point to note is that by the late 1980s the major sources of income for neopatrimonial regimes were now dissipating. This predicament necessitated the weathering of some financial hardship until new sources of revenue could be sought out. Predictably, much of this burden would fall upon ordinary Africans.

Infrastructural investment was one of the first victims of neopatrimonial budgeting. The damage caused by such neglect would only manifest gradually over time, e.g. in the now appalling condition of many of Africa's roads, and so in the short-term was politically uncontroversial. Potentially more inflammatory measures however included: the reduction of public services, e.g. health care and farming subsidies; an increase in taxes and fees, e.g. on school tuition; and a progressive decline in civil servants' wages (Sandbrook, 1993, p.15). The latter undertaking has been particularly unpopular, and has led to urban protest, as well as fuelling the spread of rent-seeking and administrative decay (Van De Walle, 1994, p.134-138). These outcomes have in turn contributed to the relative unattractiveness of Africa's domestic markets to foreign investors. By the 1990s, only in those countries that were rich in mineral deposits did foreign investment comprise more than 1% of GDP (Tangri, 1999, p.123). Furthermore, by the late 1990s Africa was receiving less than 5% of total global investment in developing countries (Tangri, 1999, p.118). Therefore, it appears that the fall in patronage revenue has precipitated a self-reinforcing cycle of economic decline in Africa. Revenue shortages necessitated cutbacks, which in turn contributed to additional income reductions. Furthermore, domestic socioeconomic conditions deterred not only private foreign investment, but also incited condemnation from Western IFIs and NGOs. Hence resource-starved neopatrimonial regimes became

forced to negotiate with Western donor organisations for aid and loans on highly unfavourable terms, in order to avert their impending disintegration.

## **(ii) The Proliferation of Policy Interventions and Aid Conditionality**

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, African states became highly indebted to foreign donors. However, the conditions associated with these loans became increasingly stringent as donors sought to arrest the downward economic spiral. This of course culminated in the Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) of the 1980s, whereby donors attempted to force rulers to undertake radical macroeconomic restructuring, such as privatisation, price and exchange rate liberalisation, decreased fiscal expenditure etc. The full content and economic rationale behind these programmes has been thoroughly documented elsewhere (Clapham, 1996), (Mkandawire and Soludo, 2003), and will hence be largely omitted from the following discussion. What will however be emphasised is the impact of aid ‘conditionality’ on domestic politics in Africa.

Based upon the pioneering works of scholars such as Bates (1981) on the political economy of postcolonial states, and in keeping with the ‘Washington Consensus’<sup>14</sup>, Western IFIs sought to teach Africa how to develop ‘properly’ (Clapham, 1996, p.809-810). However, as discussed in chapter one, the developmental prescriptions espoused by organisations like the World Bank have at times been unduly influenced by both ideological predilections and in-vogue economic theories. It has been a recurrent phenomenon that contextual political realities have been overlooked, and this has proved to be especially the case with regard to Africa (Lockwood, 2005, p.1-3). In a sense, it is really a moot point whether or not specific economic reform programmes would have proved conducive to development, as the nature of African politics negated any possibility that these programmes would ever have been fully implemented in good faith. Neopatrimonial regimes, above all else, seek to maintain power by accruing

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<sup>14</sup> i.e. the political and economic agenda associated with the USA and its Western capitalist allies.

economic resources for strategic redistributive purposes. In a situation of resource paucity, any 'liberal' reforms that might in some way undermine this mission, e.g. by facilitating the emergence of political rivals, will be vehemently resisted. Clapham (1996, p.812) spelled out the problem quite plainly:

The central problem with these policies [SAPs] was that they struck directly at the basis for economic and hence political control maintained by the African governing elites over their own societies. That was indeed precisely the point. The Bates analysis had identified the political interests of elites as the source of the mismanagement of African economies, and any rectification therefore required that economic management be taken out of their hands and placed in those of the 'market'... Governing elites could not, however, be expected to acquiesce readily in their own marginalisation.

As Clapham described, donors sought to elicit prudent economic management by forcing these crumbling regimes into relinquishing control of their economies. However, the African elite's response was a predictably cynical one. They generally sought to gain as much aid as possible from donors, while conceding as little as they could get away with. For example, extensive privatisation was often planned but then only partially carried out. Furthermore, key industries were generally retained by the state or divested to political cronies, to ensure that vital sources of patronage were maintained (Tangri, 1999, p.38-61). Van De Walle (2001) coined the phrase 'partial reform syndrome' to describe this phenomenon.

As it became apparent to donors that political calculations were impeding the process of structural adjustment, the general focus of their reform agenda shifted from a primary emphasis upon economic austerity to 'good governance'. The reformulated doctrine placed a renewed emphasis upon the role of the state in instigating development (Clapham 1996, p.814), and constituted a tempering of the radical monetarist economic doctrine that had dominated Western politics in the 1980s, which

encompassed notions of a 'minimum-state' and private sector-led growth. According to this new outlook, it is not so much the size of the state that is the primary concern, but rather the efficacy of its institutions, in terms of their capacity, transparency etc (Lockwood, 2005, p.65-66). Hence donors deciphered the failure of structural adjustment within this revised conceptual framework, and produced a response that sought to tackle Africa's problems in accordance with their new perspective. The essential ingredient of this modified doctrine was 'democratic governance'. However, as shall be discussed in the next section, democratisation programmes have thus far failed to effect structural political change, as they have encountered the same ingrained political barriers that derailed the economic reform agenda.

In light of the above, Lockwood (2005, p.60) notes that an "impasse" has been reached in donor strategising, as conditionality has proved inadequate but little else has emerged as a plausible replacement. He states that:

The donor-NGO debate on aid and conditionality is doomed to circular and rather sterile repetition ... because the full implications of the ineffectiveness of conditionality – specifically the very particular political nature of policy implementation and uses of aid in Africa – have not been fully accepted by donors and NGOs (Lockwood, 2005, p.61).

In many cases Africa's rulers continue to elicit financial support from Western donors, often having successfully rebutted pressure to carry out substantive political or economic reform. The aid/loans take the form of both direct government subsidy - perhaps at times conditional on the human rights record of the regime in question, and also indirect, local-level support, often associated with grass-roots development projects. In many cases NGOs have assumed roles that would normally be carried out by public institutions in the West. This is because in Africa governments chose to abandon much of the public sector as patronage revenues began to dry up, and this

retreat was facilitated by the fact that NGOs were very willing to move in and take over (De Waal, 1997, p.66-72). According to Van De Walle (2001, p.100), approximately two thirds of Africa's health and education services are now provided by donors/NGOs, effectively bypassing the state.

In such circumstances, it thus suits both donors and governments to remain silent about the nature of politics in Africa and the fact that current governmental structures may be resolutely anti-developmental. For neopatrimonial rulers, the façade is maintained because they must appear to be leading national development for reasons of political expediency. From the NGO perspective, they must be cautious in offering political commentary that could jeopardise their positions, because at times it is necessary to cooperate with unscrupulous regimes in order to carry out disaster relief or grass-roots humanitarian work. And as far as donor governments and IFIs are concerned, they may be apprehensive about criticising African regimes due to a fear of inciting accusations of 'neo-colonialism', which some opportunistic African leaders may be tempted to level. For example, the assertion by EU election monitors that Ethiopia's 2005 election was not 'free and fair', prompted accusations that the chief EU official had behaved like "a self-appointed colonial viceroy" from Ethiopian Prime Minister Meles Zenawi<sup>15</sup>. However, it may also be the case that it is not simply prudence but also political naiveté that has conditioned the stance taken by donor organisations towards Africa's rulers. They have persevered with, and continue to reformulate, development strategies that are patently unworkable - which would be illogical and wasteful if their apolitical stance was entirely due to sage restraint. Therefore, there appear to be agents at work within these organisations that fully ascribe to the infallibility of their neoliberal economic doctrines, in spite of the obvious political 'obstacles'. In the words of Lockwood (2005, p.50):

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<sup>15</sup> See BBC News (26<sup>th</sup> August 2005), 'EU criticises Ethiopian elections', (<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/4184328.stm>) and BBC News (1<sup>st</sup> September 2005), 'Ethiopian PM attacks EU monitor', (<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/4205370.stm>).

NGOs and donors have failed to engage fully with the one clear body of evidence that we have about conditionality, namely that it hasn't actually worked very well. NGOs have mostly ignored this evidence. Donors have acknowledged it, but then carried on acting as if it didn't exist.

The implications for policy makers are obviously profound, but as intimated, have not yet fully been grasped. This is a central problem that will be further discussed in our final chapter, when considering the specific case of donor-backed land tenure reform in Ethiopia.

Returning to the primary issue of patronage shortfalls, and, by way of a summary of the above, by the late 1990s the situation in many African states approximated to the following: Falling commodity prices and declining availability of foreign patronage had partly precipitated and partly worked in accordance with growing rent-seeking, corruption and inefficiency in parastatal companies to instigate a downward economic spiral. As governments were forced to reduce their expenditure, infrastructure, public services and public employees all suffered, although foreign donors have subsequently moved in to partially compensate for the loss of certain essential services. Some direct governmental aid continues to be procured, although often at the price of political and fiscal 'reform', or at least posturing. Therefore, the general pattern across Africa has been one of economic deterioration, although admittedly to substantially different degrees between countries. Given that the distribution of patronage is essentially the glue that holds neopatrimonial states together, the key question hence becomes – what does this mean for domestic politics? Can we expect an endless torrent of political crises on the continent, or is relative stability or even improvement possible? Are the neopatrimonial regimes on a set path to disintegration, or can the system continue to function in some cases? The next section will investigate the contemporary political consequences of this decline in patronage revenues.

## **Section (f) – Conceptualisations of State and Political Crisis in Contemporary Africa**

As a means to bridge the conceptual gap between the general characterisation of African politics offered above and the medley of polities that comprise the empirical reality, the following paragraphs will make use of some of the typologies offered in the literature. Various authors have attempted to better tailor the neopatrimonial model to fit with individual cases by delineating various sub-categories within that broader regime type. Such divergences between states can be straightforwardly explained by the differences in their antecedent conditions, as well as their varying experiences of political and economic transition since independence. Several of these typologies will be outlined and contrasted below, and from that will be derived three basic categories of neopatrimonialism that are particularly salient to this thesis. Briefly, this grouping will be based on the degree to which the policy-making process is apolitical and separated from the personal goals of elites, i.e. either high to medium, which is designated ‘bureaucratic neopatrimonialism’; low to medium, which is termed ‘oligarchic neopatrimonialism’, and minimally, which is termed ‘sultanistic neopatrimonialism’. Firstly though, the pre-eminent models from the literature will be considered in turn, and this will provide us with a greater insight into the nature of politics in contemporary Africa.

A useful starting point for embarking upon this inquiry is the work of Allen (1995), as it is slightly older than the other key sources, and posits a categorisation of postcolonial regimes that is fairly consistent with the other typologies. He was critical of the notion that there is a single ‘type’ of neopatrimonial state, and instead asserted that a few divergent variants on this theme can be identified retrospectively. The formative period for states, in his view, was in the immediate post-independence years (mainly the 1960s), during which time weak clientelistic regimes had as yet failed to deeply embed themselves. Some rulers opted for a ‘centralised-bureaucratic’ solution to their precarious situations, whereby presidential offices assumed greatly heightened power at

the expense of the other arms of the ruling party, as in, for example, Tanzania, Senegal, Cameroon and Côte d'Ivoire (Allen, 1995, p.305). In other cases however a strong and centralised executive did not emerge to relieve the tensions and instabilities of the clientelistic system, and it began to break down. What emerged has been termed 'spoils politics' by Allen, and encompassed a high degree of 'winner takes all' factional competition within the decaying shell of a state. Examples of such regimes would include Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Uganda, Liberia and Somalia, and they have often been characterised by some of the following disorders: high levels of corruption; economic looting; repression and political violence; perpetual economic crises; erosion of political institutions; heightened ethnic consciousness; and widespread withdrawal from state spheres by citizenries (Allen, 1995, p.307-309).

Allen's historical distinction is an important one for contemporary debate. For example, it can account for why the 1980s debt crisis has significantly differed in severity between countries. He explained that centralised-bureaucratic polities have generally fared better than spoils-politics states, with the exception of those countries that could rely on oil revenues (Allen, 1995, p.313). This is primarily due to the stronger political institutions and greater centralised control over revenues enjoyed by most states that accord with the former model. Furthermore, his typology predicts divergent paths for the two regime types following the financial crises. The former have generally proved to be more prone to 'democratic renewal' (Allen, 1995, p.312), whereas the latter have tended to suffer either popular uprisings or complete state collapse. These alternatives shall be investigated in turn below, in light of other key contemporary sources.

#### **(i) The 'Democratic' Response to Crisis**

Bratton and Van De Walle (1994) have analysed the prospects for democratic transitions in Africa. Their typological conceptualisation of regimes was significantly different to that of Allen, but where their analysis overlaps with his is in their assertion that their subcategory of rulership designated "competitive one-party regimes" offers

the best prospects for successful democratic transition. Their explanation for this claim is that such regimes comprise established political institutions, such as free elections and open debate, which could potentially serve as a foundation for genuine democracy. Given such a depiction, it could be contended that their competitive one-party subtype is reasonably proximate to Allen's conception of centralised-bureaucratic states, as, according to Allen, these are also distinguished by a comparatively high degree of institutionalisation (although generally more administratively than politically). Furthermore, the rationale behind the two approaches is broadly similar, as both believe the political consequences of economic crisis to be conditioned by extant political structures. In the words of Bratton and Van De Walle (1994, p.485):

The institutional characteristics of the preexisting political regime impart structure to the dynamics, and to a lesser extent the outcomes of political transitions. Regime type provides the context in which contingent factors play themselves out.

Both studies have incorporated a 'historiological' methodology, pioneered in this field by the seminal work of Bayart (1993), whereby emergent political structures are deciphered in relation to their historical antecedents. Hence both envisioned democratic transformation as a likely trajectory for neopatrimonial regimes comprising a significant degree of centralised, rational-legal governance.

Perhaps the main difference between the Allen and Bratton and Van De Walle studies is that the latter's approach to the issue is somewhat teleological. Their concern is where and under what circumstances democratic transition may be induced, and they are not particularly concerned with what else may emerge from Africa's economic crisis. This appears to imply that democratisation, as conventionally understood in Western terms, would be the 'correct' and desirable path for Africa. Therefore, noting that neopatrimonialism in general is not particularly conducive to democracy (Bratton and Van De Walle, 1994, p.487), the analysis that they offer in later studies, such as

Van De Walle (2001), envisions bleak prospects for ‘development’ (in comparison to other historiological approaches, such as Chabal and Daloz (1999), which will be discussed below). While perhaps being no less pessimistic, Allen’s inquiry is more concerned with precisely elucidating the spectrum of possible political outcomes in Africa. His approach is purely explanatory, without any discernible ideological predilections, and this may have resulted in him producing a more accurate and representative typology.

In formulating his system, Allen paid great attention to its historical consistency, and indeed he is critical of what he perceives to be implausible categorisations, believing them to lead research down “blind alleys” (Allen, 1995, p.302). For example, Allen is scathing of the fact that Jackson and Rosberg (1981, p.83-142) group Senegal and Sudan together. Likewise he would perhaps be sceptical about Bratton and Van De Walle’s suggestion that both Kenya and Sierra Leone are of the same ‘type’, and in fact the one in which democracy is most likely to emerge. In light of such observations, Allen’s typology appears the more compelling of the two. In fact, as shall be discussed below, the empirical data would indeed confirm that many of Africa’s more centralised and bureaucratic regimes have indeed opted for the ‘democratisation’ path in the face of economic hardship<sup>16</sup>. Some of Bratton and Van De Walle’s ‘competitive one-party’ regimes have also followed this course, e.g. Tanzania, but others, notably Sierra Leone, have suffered a more chaotic fate.

Having established that Africa’s more centralised-bureaucratic regimes proved more susceptible to democratisation in the 1990s, we will give some consideration to the outcome of this process – in order to shepherd our discussion through to the present day, before moving on to consider the alternative path to democratisation taken by the

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<sup>16</sup> See Baker (1998, p.116), for details of each African country’s foray into democracy. It can be observed in his study that elections have commonly, although not exclusively, occurred in states which Allen has termed ‘centralised-bureaucratic’. Furthermore, it is apparent that the frequency of coups and assassinations has been greater in ‘spoils’ regimes, such as Nigeria, Liberia and Somalia.

spoils-politics regimes. In order to do so we must firstly take stock of the impetus for democratic renewal in Africa. The sources of pressure for this reform have been both internal and external. As described in the preceding section, by the 1990s Western donors were increasingly attaching political conditions to aid and loans. The demise of the Soviet Union had reiterated the limits of authoritarian rule, and many Westerners attributed the victory of the NATO allies to the effectiveness of their liberal-democratic, capitalist systems of government. Therefore, donors have subsequently sought to export this model throughout the world, as a vehicle to secure peace and development. This is in contrast to prior developmental orthodoxies that had construed authoritarian governance as being potentially facilitative to the early stages of capitalist growth, e.g. as in East Asia (Clapham 1996, p.815). Multi-party elections had hence become the order of the day in much of Africa by the 1990s, as donors sought to force rulers to govern responsibly by making them accountable to their domestic populations. This was even the case in some spoils-politics states, such as Nigeria and Uganda, where ethnic divisions in politics are especially accentuated. However, this slight anomaly does not negate the usefulness of Allen's typology, as some predictive inaccuracy is to be expected.

The democratisation agenda struck even more directly at the patronage system than had economic liberalisation, as it impelled neopatrimonial regimes to risk losing control of the state. Hence in those instances where ruling cliques did acquiesce to genuinely free elections, internal pressure was the primary factor. This was generally the situation in those countries where the hardships associated with the dissipation of patronage, combined with the spread of democratic notions, had rendered governments highly susceptible to being ousted by disgruntled citizenries. In some cases, such as Malawi and Zambia, the electoral process resulted in the peaceful removal of the incumbent rulers. In others though, where regimes still retained a strong grip on power (as they did in many centralised-bureaucratic regimes), elites often practised "the politics of the mirror" (Chabal and Daloz, 1999, p.118). They tailored much of their rhetoric to flatter

Western patrons, and constructed visible but powerless 'democratic' institutions to aid in the façade, while in fact continuing to govern as before. And as described in section (b), subversive tactics, such as vote rigging and intimidation of opponents, have often been utilised to prevent fair and open competition from occurring. As a consequence of these tactics, according to Baker (1998, p.115), over 50% of Africa's autocratic regimes were able to weather the democratisation fad. Furthermore, of those regimes that were truly democratically elected in the 1990s, none have subsequently been able to unburden themselves of clientelistic necessities, despite the practice of regular elections. Most of Africa's polities continue to operate under the same old neopatrimonial logic, albeit now working on smaller budgets in many cases, and show no signs of fundamentally democratising.

#### **(ii) Economic and Political Crises in 'Spoils' States**

The path taken by Africa's spoils-politics regimes has often been markedly different from the above. In the face of economic decline, they were more likely to simply default on loan agreements, and, without the option of making credible reformist concessions, some states, such as Somalia and Zaire, effectively alienated themselves from the IFIs (Allen, 1995, p.313). As corruption, inefficiency, factionalism, and economic looting have spiralled out of control, civil conflict and violent repression have also intensified. On occasion, this has culminated in virtual state collapse and outright civil war, as has been witnessed in Liberia, Somalia, Sierra Leone, Rwanda, and to some degree Burundi, Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) (Allen, 1995, p.314). In some cases the situation has become so desperate that incumbent regimes have effectively abandoned their efforts to 'govern' the country and resorted to simply fighting to retain wealth and privilege for their client groups. Reno (1999) has coined the term 'warlord politics' to describe states that have been drawn down this self-destructive path, and applied it to countries like Nigeria, Sierra Leone and DRC. In other cases, such as Benin, Togo and Ghana, the response to state decay has been termed 'populist revolt' by Allen (1995, p.309), and has generally resulted in

some stabilisation and reform, once power has been wrested from the illegitimate incumbents. These possibilities constitute two broad types of response to crisis in a spoils state, according to Allen's schema, and will be considered in turn below with reference to other key sources.

**(a) Warlordism**

Despite the above descriptions of violence and disorder, states can be designated as 'warlord' without being in an outright state of civil war *per se*. If the position of the ruling clique is sufficiently dominant, then it may be that no sustained challenge can be mounted at a given time. However, in situations where the majority of people are alienated by a minority group of elites maintaining a position of exclusive control over the wealth, then it can reasonably be assumed that resistance to this status quo will eventually emerge. Therefore, in a warlord state the position of the incumbent is an especially precarious one, since it is maintained solely by military might. There are insufficient resources available to forge a grand coalition with key ethnic groups; hence rulers must pursue wealth to directly expend upon their own security. While redistribution to key big-men still occurs under such circumstances, it is primarily the direct military expenditure rather than the indirect clientelistic financing that ensures a grip on power is maintained. This especially heavy reliance on coercive means of governance is therefore a defining characteristic warlord states. As Reno (1999, p.8) has observed, a major consequence of this volatile situation is as follows:

Political power is pursued almost exclusively through control over markets and accumulation, and state institutions play little, if any, role in regulating political competition. Violence, however, is needed to control the distribution of wealth and the building of political alliances.

In essence, warlord states behave like "mafia" organisations (Reno, 1999, p.3). The priority of rulers is to accrue as much wealth as possible in order to maintain their

positions. Therefore they tend to ruthlessly pursue *any* lucrative opportunities, even ‘illegal’<sup>17</sup> activities, such as drug trafficking - a development which Bayart (1999) has termed the ‘criminalization’ of the state in Africa. In further contrast to the conventional patronage systems outlined above, wealth is not widely distributed or used as a means to legitimise rule, forge national coalitions etc. Warlord regimes are in fact entirely illegitimate (out with their narrow client groups), as they make no serious effort to govern countries or further national interests, but instead seek only to maintain their lucrative, self-serving positions. Any peace or security that citizens may enjoy within such states will be in many ways “coincidental” (Reno, 1999, p.2-3).

Warlord regimes are prone to an external focus due to their lack of domestic support, and at times may rely on mercenary armies to quell opposition forces (Reno, 1999, p.70-71). It is also common for regimes to exploit their sovereign status, in order to elicit foreign sources of revenue (Reno, 1999, p.21). This has been possible because Western powers have demonstrated strong vested interests in maintaining the territorial makeup of Africa. According to Englebert (2003, p.6), this is due to a fear that the consequences of redrawing a former colony’s borders might be a proliferation of secessionist demands across the continent, based on that precedent. They have therefore proved willing to sponsor highly irreputable ‘sovereign’ regimes, e.g. Habré’s Chad, and are extremely loathe to recognise more legitimate ‘non-sovereign’ states, e.g. Somaliland. Englebert (2003) has asserted that it is for this reason that successive regionally-oriented rebel groups have refrained from seceding from Zaire/DRC. They have opted to maintain the territorial integrity of the state, despite it’s inherent dividedness, because it is only in this ‘sovereign’ position that they might elicit foreign recognition and hence subsidisation. Bringing about the separation of the state would likely invoke hostility and condemnation, even though the long-term prospects for cohesive ‘national’ development are extremely bleak. A similar reasoning could perhaps be used to explain the somewhat surprising continuation of many of Africa’s

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<sup>17</sup> Of course this term does not really apply to an area where there is no effective legal system.

other multi-ethnic states, e.g. Sudan, Chad and Nigeria, where the prospects for united development appear similarly poor.

The above has depicted a very pessimistic set of circumstances for some African states. In light of such troubling realities, perhaps a few somewhat consolatory points are worth noting here. Firstly, as Reno (1999, p.4) himself makes clear, a descent into warlordism is by no means a certain fate for all of Africa's crumbling dictatorships. Secondly, even where state collapse does occur, the situation is not irreversible - as the example of Somaliland has clearly demonstrated<sup>18</sup>. Therefore, Allen (1995, p.309-310) suggested a second possible path for post-crisis, spoils-politics states, i.e. 'populist revolt'. Such a reaction may come as either an alternative to, or as a consequence of, a period warlordism. After all, in reality there are no definitive exemplars of these regime 'types' - merely a continuum of cases between anarchy and rational-legal governance. As neopatrimonial regimes drift towards the former scenario, they may well become increasingly 'warlord-like', but again this is a very simplified characterisation. Hence, for example, it may be difficult to identify precisely when a 'spoils-politics' regime in the midst of a crisis becomes a 'warlord' state *per se*, given that both of these notions are merely contrived representations of a host of distinctive real-world cases. Again though, the intention here is simply to provide some insight into the contemporary reality of African politics, and therefore a degree of ambiguity in the categorisation must simply be tolerated.

### **(b) Populist Revolt**

According to Bratton and Van De Walle (1994, p.460), the removal of an illegitimate regime is likely to originate in mass social protest:

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<sup>18</sup> Following the disintegration of the state of Somalia, the northern province (formerly British Somaliland) has declared itself to be an independent nation-state. It has established a political order that, thus far, has proved to be reasonably stable and representative, and has facilitated significant economic recovery in the region.

Shrinking economic opportunities and exclusionary patterns of reward are a recipe for social unrest. Mass popular protest is likely to break out, usually over the issue of declining living standards, and to escalate calls for the removal of an incumbent leader.

However, while this ‘populist’ option may be preferable to the onset of warlordism, in many cases it may simply be the lesser of two evils. In the short-term, the uprisings themselves can result in considerable loss of life, and in the long run the emergent leadership may prove to be comparable to or worse than that which preceded it. As shall be described in the next chapter, the ascent of the Ethiopian Derg regime is an unfortunate example of such an outcome. As Sandbrook (1985, p.76-80) has described, the sporadic, uncoordinated and at times spontaneous nature of populist revolt is unlikely to give birth to a stable and transformed political order: “Populism ... is a limited ideology. It fosters only protest against a corrupt, self-interested political elite, not concerted political action to control or shape institutions”.

The above difficulty is a consequence of the fact that neopatrimonial rule is generally repressive towards political opponents – starving them of resources and harassing them wherever possible. Under such conditions, the possibility of an organised, resource-empowered, national-level opposition movement emerging, and indeed one that is sufficiently capable of creating a reconceived and viable political order, is quite unlikely in most cases - especially in the more despotic states. Van De Walle (1999, p.150) cites Cameroon as an obvious example of this situation, as opposition movements exist, but, due to government-imposed constraints, they have been unable to penetrate mainstream politics to the extent of establishing a nation-wide support base. Furthermore, mass support for the opposition is often merely a derivative of the unpopularity of the incumbent, hence compounding the likelihood that rivals will be forced to persist with the established system of clientelism, having seized the reigns of power. Indeed, Chabal and Daloz (1999, p.37) made the important point that it is not always the *system* of rule per se that has provoked mass unrest, but rather the failure of

rulers to maintain patronage levels. The personalised nature of politics on the continent impels that specific rulers, rather than the 'nature' of the system, are held individually responsible for material conditions. Some of the sociological dynamics of these circumstances will be considered below, but for now the essential point to note is that, in the immediate term, the replacement of one personal ruler with what would seem to be simply another neopatrimonial strong-man has rarely been a major point of contention amongst African citizenries in the short term.

In spite of the above, it should however also be stressed that, in some cases, it has proved possible for relatively deep-seated reform to result from populist revolt. For example, in Ghana and Uganda, crumbling spoils regimes were transformed into (somewhat) democratising, centralised bureaucracies, via a populist uprising. In the former case, Rawling's popular-nationalist movement seized power in the midst of economic disintegration. Over time some stability returned (aided by IMF financing), and the new rulers eventually acquiesced to a degree of political liberalisation (Sandbrook, 1993, p.127-129). In the case of Uganda, backed by Tanzanian military support, the exiled, former president Obote's insurgents successfully toppled Idi Amin's brutal dictatorship in 1979, and were then themselves ousted by Museveni's rebel group in 1986. A comparatively more stable and humane regime has subsequently governed the country. However, the practice of rulership has continued to be profoundly conditioned by the exigencies of ethnic heterogeneity in both cases. Therefore, at the microeconomic level, developmental prospects remain constrained by clientelistic practices.

### **(iii) Politics as an Evolutionary Process**

Having briefly surveyed various categorisations of politics and political transition in post-economic crisis Africa, a final, more generalised perspective will now be considered, i.e. that of Chabal and Daloz (1999). The interpretation of contemporary politics that they offer does not so much stem from a subdivision of neopatrimonial

regimes as in the above, but rather from a more expansive consideration of the whole. Therefore, before we delineate our own unavoidably reductionistic typology of neopatrimonialism, it will be useful to consider a more all-encompassing perspective on the contemporary era, to better ensure that our simplification includes the most salient aspects of its politics. In fact, our mode of categorisation, i.e. the degree to which the policy-making process is apolitical and separated from the personal goals of elites, will be inspired by what is essentially the kernel of the Chabal and Daloz study, i.e. the limited extent to which African societies and their states - contrived from the Western model - have thus far proved capable of integrating. As will become apparent in later chapters, this notion is a central one for the thesis, and is therefore an appropriate basis upon which to carry out the requisite subdivision of the neopatrimonial model for the analysis of our contemporary case study. Firstly though, we will consider Chabal and Daloz's perspective on its own terms.

What Chabal and Daloz offer is essentially an evolutionary perspective on African politics and society. They do not entertain the notion of individual 'types' of states *per se*, but instead concentrate upon shared historical experiences. Their conception can therefore accommodate the possibility that the majority of African states are in fact a unique variant upon the neopatrimonial model. Clientelism, personalism, institutional decay, heightened ethnic consciousness, warlordism, and the political exploitation of violence are all construed as being manifestations of a more fundamental, overarching process, that has been uniquely conditioned in individual cases by contextual and historical specificities. Hence the frequency of such phenomena may well vary significantly in prevalence between states, yet by adopting Chabal and Daloz's mode of analysis, these divergent instances can all be deciphered within the same conceptual model. In order to delineate the quintessential 'African state' according to this paradigm, and systematise what are essentially complex webs of interconnecting forces playing out against distinctive ecologies, it is firstly necessary to reiterate the historical antecedents that have predominantly directed this course of events.

As demonstrated in previous sections, African countries have balked at the Western political template they inherited from colonialism, and quickly refashioned the system into a more workable neopatrimonial order. However, the contradictions of this arrangement have also at times proved irreconcilable, inciting further assaillment and social upheaval. What it is essential to recognise in these episodes is the intransigence of African society as a whole in the face of compelling efforts to bring about its transfiguration. It has stubbornly refused to be either subdued or ‘developed’ according to any agenda other than its own. At every stage of engagement between a given global or national force and African society, in time the latter has come to consume the former, and either digest or regurgitate it. This is not to say that individual societies have not been both dominated and reshaped by outside forces – they clearly have by episodes such as colonialism, but what Chabal and Daloz (1999, p.26-30) would argue is that, in sociological terms, in the long run it is the African ethos that has come to dominate, even if this has of itself been partially conditioned by historical experiences of outside incursion. Therefore, they assert that it is erroneous to conceptualise Africa’s ‘development’ as a linear trajectory towards Westernisation. Many of the products of global modernity, such as new technology or political ideologies, have in fact already been incorporated into Africa, but they have not had the predicted developmental effects. Rather than imparting revolutionary change, they have been absorbed by the prevailing social system, or ‘Africanized’ (Chabal and Daloz, 1999, p.50-56). Impositions may still be influential, especially in the short term, but will ultimately resonate only to the extent that the stalwart African societies will permit.

A distinctive aspect of this societal intransigence that Chabal and Daloz have observed has been that the state in Africa has been “captured by society” (Chabal and Daloz, 1999, p.26). This does not specifically mean civil society, since a meaningful civil society can only exist in opposition to a legitimate political order (Chabal, 1994, p.83-87), but rather wider society as a whole. The state is in fact treated as an apparatus

within which Africa's socially differentiated groups compete to acquire wealth and resources. It is not simply "weakly institutionalised", but rather structurally undifferentiated from wider society. It is the focal point of what Chabal (1994, p.217) has termed the "hegemonic drive" – the struggle for ascendancy by groups and actors who seek their own betterment. Of course, in most countries the state is quite evidently the dominant political actor. Nevertheless, its long-term hegemony is ultimately impaired by its inability to subjugate, or in fact even emancipate itself from African societies. States cannot attain such a position of authority because they do not comprise "deep political accountability" (Chabal, 1994, p.86) – i.e. that which is forged when the political order is at least partially derived from within the society that it seeks to govern. In Africa the origins of the state are purely external. It is an alien entity that societies have incapacitated and, to some extent, compelled to yield to their underlying imperatives. Disorder has been the consequence. It is a sociological reaction to a historical experience of imposed government, and hence Chabal and Daloz have construed contemporary violence and discord in Africa as being due to the series of oppressive incursions that it has undergone. Therefore, according to their perspective, the contemporary "crisis of modernity" (Chabal and Daloz, 1999, p.xviii) is occurring as a direct consequence of a continued onslaught of global forces, be they political, economic or cultural, upon an environment that is unable to passively accommodate such aberrant phenomena. Indeed, it is not in fact clear whether, in their present forms, state and society can be reconciled in Africa. However, the historiological perspective may perhaps suggest that they will continue to chafe, violate and ultimately reshape each other.

#### **(iv) A Simplified Typology**

As a means to incorporate some of Chabal and Daloz's insights into a basic typology of neopatrimonialism suitable for considering and contrasting real-world cases, in this section we will build upon one of their key ideas – i.e. that the contemporary state in Africa has been "captured by society". As explained above, Chabal and Daloz have

depicted the state as the locus of the “hegemonic drive”; an arena in which elites and special interest groups have competed in order to acquire wealth and power for self-serving ends, rather than to effect meaningful rational-legal governance. This is indeed a compelling notion, but nevertheless when one considers the empirical evidence on contemporary Africa, it is clear that the extent to which states are held hostage to personalistic imperatives differs quite substantively between countries, even if one could say that this is the over-arching principle of government on the continent. As described above, some states have been able to effect a much greater degree of emancipation from societies than others, and in such polities this has manifested in more technocratic, apolitical administration. Hence one could differentiate between African countries according to the extent to which bureaucratic agents have gained control over the policy-making process. For the purposes of this dissertation such a mode of analysis would be very useful, as the efficacy of microeconomic development projects is in good part contingent upon impartial and indeed robust policy-making, as was described in the previous chapter. Therefore, we will conclude our discussion of contemporary African politics as follows: Firstly, we will settle upon a definition of neopatrimonialism that adequately emphasises this pivotal issue of the extent to which the policy making process has been ‘captured’ by private interests. Secondly, and consequently, we will sketch out a basic typology of neopatrimonialism, similar to those discussed above, but which specifically characterises different regime types according to the degree to which policy-making has been emancipated from personal interests. We will then utilise that typology in the next chapter when examining the various regimes that have ruled over our case study country in the twentieth century. This will in turn facilitate our evaluation of the political and economic constraints upon engineering development via projects like land tenure reform in Ethiopia.

As noted in section (c), Van De Walle (1994, p.131) defined a neopatrimonial state as one in which a “patrimonial logic coexists with the development of bureaucratic administration”. Similarly, Chabal and Daloz (1999, p.9) stated that “the edifice [of

state] conforms to the Western template while the workings derive from patrimonial dynamics”. In light of the issues that have been discussed subsequent to the prior statement of these definitions, it is now more apparent that it is this synchronicity of both personalised and rational-legal modes of governances that is, above all else, characteristic of neopatrimonial politics. Hence, Chabal and Daloz (1999, p.9) augmented their definition of the term by adding that:

although there are important differences among Black African countries ... what is significant to emphasize is that, from this perspective, the character of the state is determined by the degree to which the existing political order is institutionalized.

In light of such depictions, we will adopt the following definition of the term for this dissertation: A neopatrimonial regime is one in which a rational-legal governmental edifice is, in practise, dominated by underlying patrimonial imperatives. That being established, we will next consider three subcategories within this broader regime type corresponding to variations in their constitution, which, as stated, comprises both bureaucratic and personalistic dynamics. We will, for each type, depict some of prevalent characteristics associated with that subcategory, which are again a derivative of these idiosyncratic combinations of personalism and rational-legalism at the root of the political edifice.

Our typology can be illustrated by way of the table below. As it shows, we conceive three basic categories of neopatrimonial regime, which correspond to the degree to which policy-making is separated from personalistic imperatives. These are: high to medium (bureaucratic neopatrimonialism), low to medium (oligarchic neopatrimonialism) and minimally (sultanistic neopatrimonialism). In reality, of course, there are no such neat distinctions - merely a continuum of different but related cases - but it is nevertheless contended here that the simplification has explanatory value for

our purposes. The table also outlines the predominant traits of each type of regime, and offers some examples from contemporary Africa that roughly correspond to that form.

<b>Basic Form of Regime</b>	<b>Distinctive Features of Policy-making</b>	<b>Ideal-type cases</b>
<p><b><i>Bureaucratic Neopatrimonialism</i></b> (high-medium separation)</p>	<p>State-bureaucratic monopolisation and semi-coercive centralisation of neopatrimonial domination, operating via secret police structures; populist/patriotic mobilisation and plebiscitarian elections</p>	<p><b>Ethiopia, Eritrea</b></p>
<p><b><i>Oligarchic Neopatrimonialism</i></b> (low-medium separation)</p>	<p>Formation of wide strata of oligarchic and/or regional rent seeking actors, acting together with/or in place of governmental institutions primarily via clientelistic networks of patronage</p>	<p><b>Nigeria, Cameroon, Zambia (most of Africa)</b></p>
<p><b><i>Sultanistic Neopatrimonialism</i></b> (minimal separation)</p>	<p>Extreme concentration of power, pure personal rulership, façade elections and clan models of voting</p>	<p><b>DRC, Zimbabwe</b></p>

In the first category - bureaucratic neopatrimonialism - states are conceived as having achieved a more distinctly centralised, hegemonic position in governance and administration (albeit using semi-coercive means) compared with the other two types. Therefore, the potentiality for implementing policy on the basis of purely rational-legal considerations is greatest within this category. However, that does not mean that such states are tending towards democratisation, and indeed populist spectacles, plebiscitary elections and other efforts to mobilise support for the ruling party are identified as a key means by which such regimes commonly seek to bolster their positions. In the case

of oligarchic neopatrimonialism, states comprise a less defined and monopolised administration, but rather primarily function as a forum in which rent-seeking factions compete for resources. More extensive patronage networks and less coercive structures tend to be utilised by such regimes to buttress their rule, in contrast to the former case. This would appear to be the predominant mode of neopatrimonialism that can be observed in contemporary Africa, although not, as the next chapter will demonstrate, in our chosen case study country, which better corresponds to the first category. Finally, sultanistic neopatrimonialism is characterised by an extreme concentration of personal power around rulers, as well as very overtly clan/ethnic patterns of voting. The possibility for enacting policymaking based on bureaucratic considerations would be lowest in this category. This form of regime is perhaps the closest of the three to traditional patrimonialism, as was experienced in, for example, Haile Selassie's Ethiopia, and can also be observed in contemporary Zimbabwe and DRC.

As with the typologies considered previously, the space limitations of this thesis do not permit for a more in depth analysis of the ways in which individual cases correspond to the model that they are associated with. Nevertheless, we will undertake a detailed examination of Ethiopian politics in the next chapter, based upon the available empirical evidence, in order to test the validity of the neopatrimonial model and its bureaucratic variant here conceived for that specific case. Thus completes our analysis of contemporary politics in Africa and its various representations in the literature.

### **Section (g) – Concluding Remarks**

The above depiction of African politics presents some serious problems for the interventionist approach to development described in chapter one. To recap, the analysis undertaken in the preceding chapter arrived at the following key conclusions: Firstly, it was observed from an examination of the empirical evidence that externally engineered development strategies have consistently failed in Africa. Secondly, it was demonstrated that the theory and evidence upon which much of that work has been

based is narrowly econometric in its approach, to the neglect of any substantive political analysis. And thirdly, it was shown that the focus of land reform has been on the rules governing tenure regimes, rather than on the more fundamental issue of the range of factors that determine both feelings of security and the micro-level investment of peasants' surplus wealth, of which politics is one important example.

The evidence presented above can perhaps account for these perplexing results. Dealing firstly with the latter point, it appears that the resource-hungry nature of the African state has severely constrained development. As the Bates analysis has highlighted, the postcolonial years have seen peasants "squeezed" by predatory economic policies, and rendered destitute and dependent. It is in fact those peasant farmers that have primarily shouldered the financial burden of neopatrimonialism. Even though some market liberalisation occurred following structural adjustment, states had already severely reduced public expenditure by that point. Hence the investment in things like infrastructure that would be required to facilitate expansive agricultural development following market liberalisation has been critically absent, and in fact those peasants that do still receive a base level of subsidisation often now do so at the grace of NGOs. Economic diversification has also been neglected in order to service the immediate financial needs of the state, and a heavy reliance on the export of a handful of primary commodities prevails. Therefore, these circumstances can also explain the first conclusion noted above regarding the failure of developmental interventions in Africa, as what has been described here is an innately anti-developmental environment. African economies have not worked in such a way as to facilitate productive investment or growth even at the microeconomic level, which is of course profoundly interrelated to the overarching macro political-economic structures. This is a fact that most development practitioners appear to have overlooked.

Following on from the above, and in regard to the second key conclusion that was noted, it appears that Western actors have been averse to espousing political criticisms

of African governments. They have instead opted to skirt over the issue and talk about things like ‘governance’ – i.e. “government minus politics”, according to De Waal (2003, cited Lockwood, 2005, p.62). Moreover, given that very ambitious development strategies continue to be formulated, it also appears that some donor organisations have an unmerited degree of faith in the efficacy of their neoliberal methods in Africa, and have failed to consider the full extent to which systematic political constraints may undermine their efforts. The empirical evidence presented in the previous chapter and the political analysis offered above has illustrated why current strategies are unlikely to surmount the barriers that they face.

Africa is a continent that has long been meddled with. This meddling reached a crescendo during the colonial period, and what we have witnessed in postcolonial times, with regard to African politics, has been in part a reaction to this experience of incursion and domination. Neopatrimonialism emerged as newly formed states attempted to come to terms with themselves, but from the outset the priority of governments was always one of ‘seamanship’, as Jackson and Rosberg (1982) rightly noted, i.e. to simply keep the ship from sinking. Plotting a feasible course to development has consistently taken a backseat to the exigencies of short-term political survival. That task became increasingly difficult as African treasuries began to run out of resources, and many regimes have subsequently collapsed. Whether or not a salvage operation is possible as yet remains to be seen.

A broader historiological perspective may suggest that, in time, states will eventually be able to reconcile themselves with their constituent societies. However, a key point to note here is that such an outcome would perhaps most likely be achieved as a product of indigenous adaptation and internal reconciliation, rather than via externally fabricated reform – which may simply perpetuate the period of irresolution, by introducing further insoluble alien constructs. Given this likelihood, the long-term prospects for the democratisation agenda of the 1990s do not look promising. In

principle the notion of democracy, i.e. that indigenous peoples are granted an equal voice in selecting their political representatives, is an appealing one. However, when it becomes apparent that, in practical terms, this constitutes an attempt to create a neoliberal, capitalist political system based on the Western template, to which ordinary Africans must acquaint and adapt themselves, then it becomes difficult to avoid sceptical conclusions. The Chabal and Daloz analysis has clearly illustrated how immalleable African societies can be. Therefore, it would seem to be the case that a more workable political order would be one that would emerge from within African societies, rather than one imposed from without that would attempt to compel its constituent peoples to bend to accommodate it.

What of the prospects for bottom up development within such sociopolitical environments? Grassroots projects that truly seek to build upon indigenous methods (an in-vogue notion in contemporary development<sup>19</sup>) may conceivably have some positive impact at the microeconomic level. However, it is unclear whether this could actually bring about profound change in broader economic conditions, given the unresolved governmental quandary. A practical solution to the problem is not obvious. Grassroots support may contribute to the empowerment of civil society, but alternatively it may serve to buttress reckless and illegitimate regimes that would otherwise have collapsed, by absolving them of their governmental responsibilities. As De Waal (1997, p.181) pointed out: “Intervention is the antithesis of politically progressive local accountability which is the essence of protection against famine”. Most commentators agree that there is a humanitarian imperative to provide emergency aid, such as famine relief, but insidious rulers can exploit even this. For example, during the 1984 Ethiopian famine the Derg regime commandeered much of the food aid for the army in order to sustain their military campaign in the north, which was primarily causing the famine. They also prevented NGOs from delivering food aid to the worst hit regions, since these areas were occupied by the northern rebels (Kaplan, 2003, p.32-39). Such reprehensible

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<sup>19</sup> As discussed in chapter 1, see Home and Lim (2000, p. 154-155), and World Bank (2003, p.62-69)

incidents serve to illustrate that in some cases the prevailing political conditions may be such that even humanitarian interventions can do more damage than good. It is unsurprising then that the prospects for longer term, externally engineered microeconomic development in Africa are poorer still. Unconstructive as this conclusion may seem, it is simply the harsh political reality to which land or any other reform strategies must be attuned. If genuine progress is the goal, then a difficult truth is nonetheless a truth that must still be faced.

## **Chapter 3 A Political History of Ethiopia: The Rise of a Centralised Authoritarian State and the Genesis of Neopatrimonial Rule**

### **Section (a) – Introduction**

Thus far we have examined two very different aspects of the broad, multifaceted and contentious process of development in Africa. In chapter one the efficacy of engineering greater micro-level investment via land tenure reform was considered, and it was argued that politics is a key constraint on the process. In light of the consistent omission of this component from much of the literature on development, chapter two sought to factor a political dimension into this analysis, by providing a basic delineation of African politics. Having achieved these two things, the requisite theory has been amassed such that we can now undertake an evaluation of a specific case in which land tenure is perceived as either a vehicle for or constraint on development. Ethiopia has been chosen for this task because it has experienced such a high a degree of rural population growth, land fragmentation and environmental degradation that land tenure has become a focal point for prognosis on the country's developmental prospects. However, before we can proceed to an analysis of Ethiopia's tenure regime, it will firstly be necessary to depict the salient features of the political economy within which that system has evolved. This will be the objective of the following two chapters, with the political dimensions the focus of this one and the economic aspects the focus of the next.

Such an undertaking is in fact equally requisite before we can undertake an analysis of the current political situation in Ethiopia, despite having previously argued that neopatrimonial rule is the predominant mode of governance in Africa. This is because the Ethiopian case is somewhat unusual. In the preceding chapter it was demonstrated that the political inheritance with which postcolonial indigenous elites were endowed (in terms of the state apparatus; ethnically aligned societies; externally directed,

undifferentiated economies etc) posed an enormous challenge to the maintenance of their governments. The ‘solution’ to this dilemma that virtually all leaders embraced was neopatrimonial rule. However, the history of Ethiopia is markedly different to the rest of the continent, and, of particular relevance here, in the fact that it did *not* undergo an experience of colonisation similar to that of other African countries. A centralised state had arisen prior to the Italian invasion of 1936, and the brevity of this occupation was such that it did not fundamentally alter the nature of that extant political structure. Therefore, if it is to be contended that Ethiopia shares many of the same characteristics as other African states, as it is here, then further explanation must surely be provided as to why neopatrimonialism has also emerged in this unique case. The chapter will seek to fill in this blank.

In examining the literature on the history of modern Ethiopia what becomes apparent is that volatile, underlying, societal forces have profoundly conditioned the evolution of the polity. These forces have arisen as a product of the historical interaction between the global geopolitical environment and the Ethiopian state; and in turn between the central state and its constituent societies, i.e. the powerful core and the subdued periphery (Donham, 1974). These state-society tensions have been of a profound magnitude for reasons that will be outlined, and have served to imbue the polity with a kind of perpetual fault line running through its foundation. This innate tension has not only affected the evolution of political structures, but has, since the delineation of the country’s nineteenth century borders, comprised the primary bone with which all successive regimes have had to contend. Therefore, this chapter will seek to undertake the following: to depict the nature and historical evolution of these underlying societal forces; to outline their effect on Ethiopian politics; and to demonstrate how subsequent regimes have utilised aspects of neopatrimonial governance in order to maintain power under these especially hostile conditions. In this latter regard, particular attention will be paid to both Haile Selassie’s Government, which was in effect the genesis of neopatrimonial rule in the country, and also to the current EPRDF regime, in order

justify the later utilisation of neopatrimonial concepts in an analysis of land tenure and developmental problems in contemporary debate. This will then be augmented by chapter four, which will demonstrate that the socioeconomic consequences of this state-society tension have been equally momentous, and will outline how these have in turn impacted upon the institution of land tenure.

## **Section (b) – State and Power in Pre-Modern Ethiopia**

### **(i) Historical Abyssinia**

In the northern, predominantly Christian highlands of Ethiopia, formerly known as Abyssinia<sup>20</sup>, hierarchical state structures have existed since the time of the famous Axumite Empire, which historical records indicate had emerged as a fully-fledged regional power by the end of the first century A.D. (Marcus, 2002, p.5). Following a century or so of Zagwé rule<sup>21</sup> after the immediate decline of Axum in around the twelfth century A.D, ruling dynasties associated with the ‘Solomonic’ line<sup>22</sup> have maintained sovereignty right up to and including the reign of Haile Selassie (1930-1974). Under this system, both the Orthodox Church and provincial lords traditionally maintained a high degree of autonomy from the emperor, and regional affinities and identities have been strongly pronounced. This was to such a degree that, until the mid-fifteenth century, a custom endured whereby the country had no settled capital, and instead the emperor would periodically travel from region to region with his army, to collect taxes and ensure that his subjects remained under his authority (Pankhurst,

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<sup>20</sup> The word ‘Abyssinia’ will be used throughout the thesis to denote the collective of mainly Tigrayan and Amhara peoples that constituted the pre-Menilek Ethiopian state in the northern highlands.

<sup>21</sup> The Zagwé were a distinctive ethno-linguistic group from a more southerly region of the Ethiopian highlands. However, they maintained the Empire’s Christian traditions, most famously under Lalibela (see Pankhurst (2001, p.45-52)).

<sup>22</sup> This refers to an alleged biblical genealogy, thought to predate the Axumite period by a millennia, although conceived retroactively to incorporate the Axumite rulers. It was first installed by the grandson of the Shewan Yekuno Amlak, who seized power from the Zagwé rulers, and sought to legitimise the new ruling dynasty by way of a narrative that traced its ancestry back to the legendary Menilek I, son of King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba. This narrative became enshrined in the famous Kibre Negest, a religious and national epic that still remains a pivotal defining element of Abyssinian identity, as conventionally understood (Pankhurst, 2001, p.54).

2001, p.66-69). Centrifugalism was further exacerbated by the absence of primogeniture or hereditary succession in Abyssinian culture. Instead, the tradition was one of 'idil' (Messay, 1999, p185.), i.e. God's will that the social standing of an individual reflect his destiny, manifest in his merits - which had more to do with his leadership and military prowess than lineage. Therefore, following the death of a monarch, the throne tended to be seized by the most powerful provincial overlord, often by way of inter-regional military conflict.

In the other parts of the territory now recognised as Ethiopia, there is far less of a tradition of statehood or enduring political structures. The eastern lowlands are home to Somali and Afar peoples, who have traditionally lived in loosely institutionalised clan formations. The south and west of the country are populated by dozens of different ethnolinguistic groups, of which the Oromo are by far the most numerous - now constituting approximately thirty percent of Ethiopia's population (Tesfaye, 2002, p.101). Egalitarian and representative institutions have traditionally governed Oromo societies. However, by the early nineteenth century more hierarchical, state-like entities had emerged in the Gibe region, which borders Abyssinia (Hassen, 1994, p.93). The history of interaction between the two peoples is complex, and has comprised conflict, cooperation and even integration between different subgroups at different periods in time, to the extent that some scholars have claimed that the two peoples were "destined to merge" (Messay, 1999, p.22), or even that the malleability of Oromo societies was such that they were ideally suited for 'incorporation' into the Abyssinian state (Levine, 2000, p.161). In contrast though, Oromo nationalist commentators have tended to emphasise the extent to which the more powerful Abyssinians subdued the budding Oromo states, before they had the opportunity to fully come to fruition (Hassen, 1994, p.200), (Jalata, 1993, p.52-55).

From the fifteenth to the eighteenth century, the Abyssinian state became increasingly embroiled in conflicts with various Muslim and Oromo peoples to the south, which

placed a heavy burden on the decentralised political structure. According to Marcus (2002, p.28-29), by the sixteenth century,

whenever there was a crisis, or, indeed, royal instability, death, or succession, the state began to contract. Even in the heartland, political squabbling often eroded the fragile unities of religion, language, tradition, economics and mythology. Most of Ethiopia's people continued to think locally, and, for them, the state was at best a shadowy entity that manifested itself only in its demand for taxes.

Nevertheless, it must be emphasised that it was not the case that the constituent societies of Abyssinia shared no sense of collective identity whatsoever. As Messay (1999, p.87) has pointed out, Abyssinian history has no doubt comprised an ebb and flow of power between the centre and the provinces at different periods in time, with each effectively acting as a kind of check and balance on the other. And despite their evident heterogeneity, Abyssinians have always possessed somewhat of a 'national' identity as well as a local one, underpinned by their cultural, linguistic and religious commonalities (Messay, 1999, p.97-110). Such is the extent of the regional diversity in the country, it is difficult to fathom how it could possibly have sustained as a unified polity, were this not the case. Therefore, neither unionism nor provincialism is anomalous in the Ethiopian context.

By the late eighteenth century, known as the 'era of princes', Abyssinia had degenerated into a loose conglomerate of quasi-states, warring and quarrelling with each other. This is the point at which many of those processes that have created the contemporary Ethiopian state were set in motion. Beginning with the efforts of Kassa Hailu (later Emperor Tewodros II) in the mid nineteenth century, and later consolidated under Emperor Yohannes of Tigray, the central, imperial state began to reassert itself over the provinces and peripheral areas of Abyssinia; a process that was facilitated by the acquisition of modern European firearms (Holcomb and Ibssa, 1990, p.76-100).

However, these efforts to augment central power were certainly not a historical anomaly. In fact they were simply the reiteration of an age-old pattern. What was new, and in fact pivotal in instigating this epochal change in centripetal exertion was its increased interaction with the global environment, and specifically the extent to which these European weapons were now available. This gave the emperors an unprecedented edge over their regional adversaries, who generally lacked the wealth or legitimacy to procure dealings with the Europeans (with the exception of Menilek of Shewa). This was therefore what accorded the central state with a newfound and insurmountable advantage over the provinces, and it was this circumstance above all else that marked the profound change in Ethiopia's relations of power.

In spite of the above, it did take some time before the centre could fully realise the potential of these new weapons, and indeed it would take a change of Monarch before the process would be completed. By the late nineteenth century, Yohannes's grip on power was weakening, after years of ongoing warfare against external invaders from the north, notably the Egyptians and later the Italians (Pankhurst, 2001, p.164-174). Meanwhile, the Shewan regional overlord Menilek had achieved a consolidated position of wealth and power in southern Abyssinia, by bringing adjacent resource-rich areas under either tributary relations or by conquering them outright. His acquisition of Italian weapons in exchange for commodities was particularly helpful in this objective. Therefore, when Emperor Yohannes died in 1889, Menilek was able to outmanoeuvre his regional rivals and gain the imperial throne (Bahru, 2001, p.59). Thereupon, he set about a southward expansion, which resulted in the near complete incorporation of the Oromo and many other disparate southern peoples into what now constitutes Ethiopia.

## **(ii) The Southern Marches**

The charge of 'colonialism' has often been levelled against the Abyssinians for their occupation of the southern territories (Holcomb and Ibssa, 1990), (Jalata, 1993). However, in comparison to the European model of colonialism as practised in Africa,

there were only limited parallels. As noted above, economic factors played a key role in motivating Menilek's southward expansion. The region was rich in valuable agricultural products such as coffee and also mineral deposits, as well as being home to several key trade caravan routes - control over which would offer highly lucrative opportunities for taxation (Markakis, 1998, p.10). Furthermore, as will be discussed in the next chapter, the nature of the northern system of production was such that it placed a severe burden on both land and peasantry, and was grossly insufficient to support the ambitions of Menilek's imperial state, even minimally – in terms of resisting the encroaching European powers and maintaining Ethiopian sovereignty. This has led Donham (2002, p.24) to make the following observation:

This subsidy of the core by the periphery, a part of an ancient expansionary pattern, is perhaps *the* secret of modern Ethiopian history. It has often been mentioned that the poorest peasant from the north considered himself superior to any southerner. This cultural expression was not just the result of primordial sentiments; it was underpinned by the material inequalities created in the new Ethiopia.

However, other scholars have disputed the notion that, in terms of the majority of ordinary people living within Ethiopia, the southerners were subsidising the northerners. Tibebe (1995, p.177) has noted that in the core northern regions of Gojjam, Gondor, and Wello, development indices have historically been much lower than in the south. In the context of genuine European-style colonialism, it would seem anomalous that living standards in the home nation would be lower than in the conquered territory. Therefore it may have been less the case of one 'nation' materially oppressing another, than one of a predatory ruling order which, having bled its own people dry, sought plunder elsewhere in order to quench its thirst for resources.

The colonial issue is however further complicated by cultural and ideological factors. Tibebe (1995, p.179) has noted that Menilek's Ethiopia was a 'theocratic' state. It

appears that even Menilek himself ascribed to such notions, believing that he was ordained by God to restore Ethiopia to her former glory, and fulfil her destiny, as foretold in the *Kibre Negest*<sup>23</sup> (national epic). Therefore, he may have perceived the southern lands not simply as the booty of conquest, but as part of Ethiopia's historical territory. As a consequence of this attitude, his ruling elite and imperial army (many of whom became regional overlords in the south) and to some degree even ordinary, exploited northern peasants ascribed to a form of cultural chauvinism over the southern 'Galla'<sup>24</sup> peoples (Tibebu, 1995, p.178-180). However, this discriminatory attitude did not rest upon racial or national biases, but rather cultural and religious ones. It was quite possible for southerners to achieve advancement under the new political order (as indeed many Oromo did), provided that they ascribed to the core tenets of its cultural complex, i.e. Orthodox Christianity and the Amharic language. Clearly those best placed to excel under this system were those individuals who had been raised in the traditional 'Amhara' regions, but this does not alter the fact that the system was genuinely meritocratic, once the prerequisite of cultural conformity had been met. As Tibebu (1995, p.177) has pointed out, characterisations of 'Amhara colonialism' have at times derived from a simplistic headcount of the 'ethnic' constitution of the ruling clique. But the fact is that a plethora of different peoples have consistently achieved senior positions at different periods in history, and this is clear evidence that ethnic/racial discrimination was not a significant component of the new Ethiopia. Even Haile Selassie's patrimonial regime, which relied heavily on members of his Shewan kin-group for political reasons, was at no stage ethnically homogenous or racially discriminatory (Clapham, 1969, p.77).

In short, what the Southerners experienced was the imposition of a hierarchical, theocratic, Amharic-speaking political order, which in many cases went against the

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<sup>23</sup> See footnote 5 for description of the *Kibre Negest*. The relevance of Menilek's name should also be noted here as it was a deliberate reference to that of the original, mythical Menilek, son of Solomon, who, according to the national epic, brought the ark of the covenant to Ethiopia from Israel, effectively transferring God's allegiance to the Ethiopians, and bestowing upon them a lofty destiny.

<sup>24</sup> 'Galla' roughly translates as 'backward pagan'.

grain of their more egalitarian values and/or religious beliefs. Furthermore, they witnessed the expropriation of much of their mineral wealth by their new rulers, although it should be noted that the Oromo Gibe states were also hierarchical and economically exploitative (Hassen, 1994, p.92-93). Whether or not this can be construed as 'colonialism' depends on one's precise definition of the term, for example, whether it necessarily includes racial discrimination and the usurpation of wealth for the privilege of a home nation, both of which are contentious accusations in this specific case. But what is most significant for our discussion is the fact that the southward expansion of the Abyssinian state had now incorporated peoples that had no affinity whatsoever with their new rulers or a sense of collective 'national' identity associated with the northern polity. Therefore, for approximately half of the citizens of this newly forged Ethiopia, the state had no deep political accountability. This exacerbated the degree of tension between the central core and periphery, by greatly heightening their divergent underlying propensities of the latter.

## **Section (c) – Absolutism and the Birth of a Neopatrimonial Order**

### **(i) The Intrusion of Global Capitalism**

Under Menilek II, Ethiopia underwent no less than an epochal change. Aside from the territorial expansion, Menilek's ruling elite instigated a process of modernisation that would blossom under Haile Selassie, and in so doing fundamentally transform the country's political economy. As well as European weapons, Menilek ushered in all the trappings of a modern state, such as railway lines, electricity, telephones, manufactured goods and financial institutions, which necessitated rapid commercialisation – no small feat for a production system that almost entirely rested upon subsistence agriculture. Therefore, cash cropping and the export of primary commodities, mainly from the southwest, became the order of the day, and as commercialisation took hold, its transformative processes served to reinforce each other, and also the heighten the ambitions of those in power for further westernisation (Holcomb and Ibssa, 1990,

p.235-239, 255-258). Both Menilek and Selassie effectively embraced the modernisation process that was forced upon the rest of Africa, and in so doing were able to avoid the concomitant relationship of domination that befell their neighbours. But, as with the rest, the economic order that was being transplanted was of an entirely foreign origin. The vast majority of Ethiopians were, and to this day remain, rooted in a traditional economic and sociocultural complex that evolved from within, and hence those in power would become increasingly alienated from the rest of their countrymen. A dual economy was born that comprised a commercialised urban core, centred mainly around Addis Ababa, and a pre-capitalist rural periphery, but with the former component entirely dependent upon the products of the latter (Bahru, 2001, p.200).

The economic aspects of the aforementioned contest between core and periphery will primarily be a consideration for the next chapter, but it is necessary to introduce the issue at this stage since the political and economic components are not, in reality, so easily separable. It is clear that, in the case of Ethiopia, the springboard for its jolt to modernity came from its external environment, and specifically the impending European powers - which were perceived as both a grave threat and a golden opportunity. Italy's territorial ambitions in the north were abundantly clear, and Ethiopia was also increasingly falling under the geopolitical radar of both Britain and France, as their involvement in neighbouring countries increased (Pankhurst, 2001, p.212-214). However, Abyssinia had had a history of fairly equitable interactions with Europe, perhaps mainly due to their common religion. Furthermore, the successful repulsion of the Italian army at Adwa in 1896, according to Bahru (1991, p.84), served to cement the Kibre Negest ideology that Ethiopia was destined to become a respected world power in its own right. Therefore, both Menilek and Selassie were confident and assertive in their dealings with the West, admiring of, but also unyielding to it. Their embrace of westernisation was hence not so much undertaken as a desperate necessity to avoid colonisation, but rather was opportunistically factored into to their grandiose plans (Bahru, 2001, p.201-203). This perhaps explains why the Ethiopian state so

wholeheartedly seized what was essentially thrust upon its neighbours. And it was Selassie; more so than Menilek, that was able to exploit these new circumstances in order to profoundly alter the distribution of power between the centre and the regions.

With Tewodros and Yohannes, the process by which the imperial centre reasserted its control over Ethiopia's rebellious provinces and achieved an increased measure of political unity was familiar and clearly discernable, as it was mainly adhering to a time-honoured script - albeit now with improved weaponry (Gilkes, 1975, p.9-11). However, once the innumerable arms of the global capitalist order had begun to fully perforate the Ethiopian polity, then that which had initially been a 'traditional' process, in which power was ebbing back to the centre following a period of severe decentralisation, was irrevocably and multifarious altered. The terms of the political exchange would now be conducted according to an entirely new set of criteria, which, by virtue of their 'monopoly capitalist' origin<sup>25</sup>, would prove to be greatly beneficial to the modernising centre at the expense of the regions, which were still rooted in a pre-modern economy. The extent of this economic differentiation went far and beyond an increased supply of weapons, and comprised an entire spectrum of economic opportunities with which the emperor could both directly and indirectly enhance his position of dominance. Thus Haile Selassie shepherded Ethiopia into a new political and economic era. And as shall be discussed, it was one in which the state would assume an unprecedented position of superiority over the country's beleaguered periphery.

## **(ii) Haile Selassie and the Rise of Absolutism**

As Clapham (1969) and Kapuscinski (1978) have demonstrated, Haile Selassie was an astute and conniving politician. He pragmatically adapted himself to the political environment in order to best further his own ends, and therefore attempted to selectively utilise the more lucrative aspects of modernisation in order to realise his

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<sup>25</sup> The term is taken from Holcomb and Ibssa (1990, p.32-33) to describe the nature of the international political economy at around the time of the scramble for Africa, when the imperial powers were seeking sources of cheap industrial inputs.

Machiavellian ambitions. It was with this self-interested goal in mind that he set about engineering the demise of the traditional rural overlords. He inherited an imperial state that was in a relatively strong political position, but was dissatisfied with the amount of administrative and military power maintained by provincial rulers as a check on his own. He also identified some aspects of the traditional system as antithetical to the kind of modern state that he was seeking to create. As Gebru (1996, p.42) noted:

The absence of a permanent standing army, specialized personnel, and a regulated fiscal system belied the existence of a truly centralised nation state. Haile Selassie instituted these essential instruments of authority, erecting a state whose capacity to control and mobilize public resources and to skim surpluses was infinitely greater than that of its predecessors.

The legislative and ideological frameworks through which Selassie would operate were laid down in the constitution of 1931. It essentially apportioned him 'divine right' to rule with absolute power (Clapham, 1969, p.34-36). In the years that followed, he was able to gradually reel in political power from the regions via the use of both economic and military coercion. The southern nobles, who were more dependent on the emperor than their northern counterparts due to their relatively recent rise to prosperity, may have actually benefited from these new circumstances. This is because the majority of Selassie's capitalist ventures (in association with various foreign partners) were to be located in the southwest, which meant that there were substantial opportunities for personal enrichment for those fiefs prepared to acquiesce to absolute imperial power. In contrast though, the comparative resource paucity of the northern Abyssinian heartland, combined with the vehemence with which northern peasant farmers clung to their customary land tenure system<sup>26</sup>, meant that the region was not particularly suited to capitalistic ventures. There was little that Selassie could offer northern notables in

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<sup>26</sup> As will be detailed in the next chapter, the rist system of land tenure ensures that all citizens are endowed with a plot of land to farm, which cannot be expropriated even by sale.

exchange for the forfeiture of their administrative and tax raising powers, and hence many were able to maintain their autonomy during the early decades of Selassie's reign. Therefore, as Gebru (1996) has described, Selassie relied increasingly upon military might to control the alienated north, and this prompted rural rebellions in Tigray (1943), Gojjam (1968) and most famously Eritrea from the 1960s onwards, following Selassie's annexation and incremental political subjugation of the former Italian colony. As Clapham (2002, p.12) has noted, this has brought about the paradoxical situation that the majority of the armed uprisings against Selassie's centralised state have come not from the more recently conquered southern or peripheral regions but rather from the Abyssinian core itself.

The destabilising effects of Selassie's absolutism may also have comprised less overt, although equally, if not more, severe dimensions, aside from the aforementioned rebellions. In fact Messay (1999) has argued that the root of Ethiopia's contemporary problems lie in this period of political centralisation. This is for the reason that, in undertaking this absolutist drive for power, it is almost certainly the case that Selassie exposed the country to an invasive assault upon its social fabric. For Messay, the traditional religious, cultural, political and socioeconomic institutions that were extant in late nineteenth century Abyssinia played an essential role in maintaining a sense of shared Ethiopian (Abyssinian) identity. However, as shall be explained below, he has argued that Selassie's modernising, absolutist drive undermined aspects of this social fabric, and this in turn served to erode the basis of the polity itself from within. An analysis of some of the ways in which this may have occurred will be an important and ongoing feature of the thesis. However, such is the complexity of the envisioned process, and its connection to other aspects of Ethiopia's evolving political economy, that all of its dimensions cannot be considered here. Rather, we will confine ourselves to an examination of its socioeconomic components in chapter four, and below will focus upon a significant sociopolitical and cultural aspect of the process - that is, the impact of modernisation upon the institution of social mobility.

Messay (1999, p.159-169) and others, such as Levine (2000, p.122-126) and Donham (2002, p.7), have described how customary Abyssinian social structures have historically been highly fluid ones, in which an enterprising individual could potentially increase his wealth, power and social standing without being constrained by his class or family background. Such institutions are intimately connected to the society's religious beliefs, socioeconomic practices and expressions of common culture - in essence the entire social ecology. However, the notion of social mobility rests critically upon a system of diffused power, and is hence antithetical to a political order that comprises either a vanguard hereditary elite or an absolutist monarchy. Therefore, in installing such barriers to mobility and destroying this component of the traditional system, Selassie's actions may have undermined a central aspect of Ethiopian life and society, as they were collectively understood. Such a profound transformation in a key pillar of social identity may have contributed towards an erosion of social cohesiveness in the country, which would eventually (in conjunction with other broader and evolving phenomena, such as political economy) precipitate a high degree of societal dislocation in Ethiopia. For Messay (1999, p.169), this was most starkly manifested in the despotism and ruinous economic policies of the Derg regime. Such dislocation may also have taken the form of a broader sense of antagonism against the illegitimate ruling order, at times erupting into active resistance against certain concrete instances of its assault on the traditional<sup>27</sup>. The relevance of such prospective outcomes for the modern political context will be explored later in the chapter. Finally, it could be noted that the above depiction is highly reminiscent of the perspective of Chabal and Daloz (1999) that was advanced in the previous chapter. They conceived Africa more broadly as undergoing a crisis of modernity due to its inability to (as yet) reconcile the alien constructs that have been thrust upon it its indigenous social and cultural formations. However, in the unique case of Ethiopia, the process was in good part instigated from

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<sup>27</sup> Indeed, this is precisely the prognosis of Sorenson (1993) in his seminal book 'Imagining Ethiopia', in which he asserts that a "loss of identity" is at root of much of the political instability in the horn of Africa.

within by Menilek and Selassie (albeit, also as a response to changes in the global political economy, as will be explained in the next chapter) rather than from without via the incurring colonial powers.

### **(iii) The Genesis of Neopatrimonial Governance**

In light of the above, it is worth considering the nature and functioning of Selassie's Government more closely, given that it has ultimately comprised the foundation upon which the subsequent two regimes have been built. This will illustrate the extent to which the traditional facets of the polity have been replaced, or more accurately amalgamated with some of the trappings of a modern Western-type state. Fortunately, this exposition need not be too lengthy, because the previous chapter has furnished us with many of the political concepts necessary for understanding twentieth century African governments. These concepts are derivative of the neopatrimonial model, and as previously stated the reason for their wide applicability is that a fairly standardised type of state was implemented throughout Africa by the European colonial powers. However, in the unique Ethiopian case, the model was voluntarily emulated rather than imposed - quite deliberately and explicitly at times, for example, via the use of European governmental advisors (Clapham, 1969, p.103-107). Visible attributes associated with the European model of state were adopted in Ethiopia, such as a parliament, constitution and national industries, but infused with more 'traditional' (i.e. less democratic) methods of rule, which in this specific case comprised Selassie's absolutist ambitions and Machiavellian methods. The following quote from Gebru (1996, p.45-46) on Selassie's rule is particularly reminiscent of the depiction of the neopatrimonial African state offered in the previous chapter (although Gebru described the process as absolutism rather than neopatrimonialism):

Absolutism was an imperfect amalgam of new and old politics; it was an order in which a new set of central institutions, political relationships, and sources of power were simply grafted onto the pre-existing social structure. By fusing aspects of a

rational and modern administration with a feudal residuum, the centralizing monarchy both multiplied and complicated the internal inconsistencies and contradictions of the ideological foundation on which it rested so precariously.

This description accords very closely with our definition of neopatrimonialism from the previous chapter, i.e. that a neopatrimonial regime is one in which a rational-legal governmental edifice is, in practise, dominated by underlying patrimonial imperatives, and indeed, as will be demonstrated below, Selassie's was an almost stereotypical instance of a personalistic, pseudo-bureaucratic regime.

As previously noted, the administrative and legislative faculties of Selassie's centralising state were outlined in the 1931 constitution, which also accorded the emperor with the right to have the final word on any issue he chose (Gilkes, 1975, p.63). He maintained complete power of appointment over any government post, and would frequently reshuffle and purge the various state agencies to ensure that potential rivals were kept divided and in competition with each other, and that different factions could be manipulated in order to best serve his ends (Clapham, 1969, p.140-141). He also went to great lengths to ensure that any movement within the political system was attributed to him and him only: "The Emperor supervised even the lowliest assignment, because the source of power was not the state or any institution, but most personally His Benevolent Highness" (Kapuscinski, 1978, p.31). Nevertheless, the very existence of a 'constitutional' system in Ethiopia aided Selassie in presenting a veneer of modern government to the wider world.

What was also striking about Selassie's Government was its clientelistic nature. In order to progress up the political hierarchy, it was essential for ambitious palace underlings to create client networks to which they would serve as patrons, redistributing much of the wealth that their positions allowed them to accrue. Selassie himself was of course the chief patron, and he would personally bestow any sums of

money greater than \$10 in a ceremonial manner, as well as handing out coppers to beggars and peasants - further symbolising his godlike status in the country (Kapuscinski, 1978, p.43-45, 61). There was also a regional/ethnic dimension to his clientelism, which is very apparent when one considers the make-up of his senior ministers. As previously noted, Menilek had established the seat of imperial power in Shewa, centred on his newly constructed capital city of Addis Ababa. Selassie was a product of the Shewan aristocracy and, unsurprisingly, other Shewan aristocrats held an average of 62% of all senior government posts in his ruling elite (85 separate positions) between 1942 and 1966 – an astonishing figure, considering the highly diverse ethnic make-up of the country (Clapham, 1969, p.75). A core of such individuals was essential for the continuity of the system, because their loyalty could most safely be counted upon - minimally for the Shewan-centric theocratic state, and in some instances for Selassie himself. Therefore, it is apparent that the rest of the senior cabinet were also primarily selected for reasons of political appeasement. Southern minority peoples featured very little, but major groups like the Somali and the Sidamo generally occupied 1 or 2 positions. The Wellega Oromo featured disproportionately highly, occupying a total of 6 senior positions (which was especially striking given that no other Oromo groups held any positions at all), and this was likely due to the fact that the Wellega were a neighbour and strategic ally of the imperial Shewan dynasty. Eritreans held 19 positions, by far the second largest majority - although it should be noted that many possessed above average levels of education for Ethiopia, due to their experiences under Italian rule. Tigrayans held 7 positions, again likely for reasons of appeasement, given the obstinate and at times rebellious nature of the northern province. Gojjamis and Gondaris, who have subsequently been subsumed under the general label of 'Amhara oppressors' along with the Shewans by some commentators (Jalata, 1991, p.177), (Kaplan, 2003, p.17), held a paltry 8 seats between them (Clapham, 1969, p.75-77).

As further evidence of Selassie's neopatrimonial rule, a few other points could be noted. He controlled the fledgling state media, ensuring that it always portrayed him favourably and created a personally cult around him - generally as a father figure. This was aggrandized by the lavish ceremonies that were periodically held in his honour, such as on his birthday and the anniversary of his coronation (Bahru, 2001, p.202). In permitting such extravagance, it was of course the case that Selassie had complete control over the state coffers too. According to Kapuscinski (1978, p.157-160), when the Derg began to wrest away Selassie's power, they quickly realised that no distinction had ever been made between the country's budget and his private wealth. He had amassed an extensive business empire, as had key members of his ruling elite, but with Selassie himself owning by far the largest indigenous proportion of the Ethiopia's major industries (Bahru, 2001, p.235). Few indigenous entrepreneurs had flourished under his tenure, and this was compounded by the fact that he relied heavily upon foreign businesses to provide certain services in exchange for the country's natural resources. He also relied upon the use of foreign advisors within his civil service; a dependency that he eventually sought to overcome by subsidising many talented young Ethiopians to study in the West. This was assisted by Selassie's strategic alliance with the US, which provided aid (often military) as well as technical assistance and scholarships to American universities, in exchange for political and strategic support in foreign affairs (Markakis and Ayele, 1986, p.34). Ironically though, it was from amongst the class of Western-educated, privileged, urbanite youngsters that much of the dissent against Selassie would eventually emerge in later years.

In conclusion to the above then, it is here contended that Haile Selassie was in effect the originator of neopatrimonialism in Ethiopia. Furthermore, such was the extent of his personal power and patrimonial methods; we could reasonably classify his regime as an instance of sultanistic neopatrimonialism, according to the typology outlined in the previous chapter - i.e. an extreme concentration of personal power around the ruler, and a minimal degree of independent bureaucratic policymaking. He ruled over the

country throughout a period of transition, during which time he attempted to harness the incurring forces of modernisation in order to buttress his centralising absolutist regime. His efforts gave rise to form of rule that comprised distinctly neopatrimonial characteristics - an elemental form of rational bureaucracy superimposed upon a very traditional, imperial hierarchy. He fully embraced the traditional ideology of an Ethiopian King of Kings to publicly define himself as a celestial figure. This was not out of sentimentality though, or an archaic mindset, but rather shrewd political manoeuvring. He had great intelligence and a deftness for intrigue, and he skilfully exploited the personalistic aspects of traditional Ethiopian patriarchy in order justify his retention and in fact furtherance of absolutism in a modernizing environment. However as he aged, Selassie was unable to keep a handle on those underlying social forces upon which he had ridden to power, and they would ultimate effect his downfall in 1974. Nevertheless, as will be explained in later sections, the neopatrimonial template of governance that he had established would ultimately persist in mutated forms throughout the regimes of his successors.

#### **Section (d) – Revolution and Military Rule**

The revolution of 1974 was a complex and incremental process that has been thoroughly documented elsewhere (Ottaway, 1978), (Markakis and Nega, 1986), and is far and beyond the scope of this work. In essence though, as Selassie's tenure in power lengthened, there was a growing feeling of disillusionment amongst the majority of Ethiopians over the extent to which they were alienated from power and economic opportunity. This discontent gathered momentum in the late 1960s – early 1970s, culminating in a creeping coup that saw the imperial regime incrementally dismembered. Factors such as: the world oil price rise of 1973; the heightened expectations of the urban, westernised youth; the civil war in Eritrea; and the failure of Selassie's Government to deal with the Ethiopian famine of 1973-74, combined with more general grievances about the imperial regime's inability to generate widespread improvements in living standards to instigate a wave of anti-government protests in the

streets of Addis Ababa (Bahru, 2001, p.229-236). The death-blow came when a sizeable but faceless group of dissident, low-ranking army officers known as the *Derg* (committee) began to impart their agenda on the Government and manoeuvre themselves into a position where they became spokespersons for the majority of the armed forces. They were eventually able to remove Selassie and install themselves in the seat of power (Pankhurst, 2001, p.267-269).

Student movements had played a prominent role in the anti-government protests, and many had sought to establish themselves in power, most notably via the two main rival Marxist paramilitary organisations – the Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Party (EPRP) and the All-Ethiopian Socialist Movement (MEISON, in Amharic). However, the groups lacked the organisational discipline and outright brute force of the military, which was really the only group capable of enforcing its authority on the country (Markakis and Nega, 1986, p.181). Many students ultimately met a grim fate under their new military rulers. Nevertheless, they were successful in bringing in-vogue notions of class exploitation and socialism to the fore, which clearly made a mark on both the rhetoric and policy of the Derg. Such was the potency of the imported socialist ideals, that, as Ottaway (1978, p.118) has noted, by 1974:

the central issue was not whether socialism was possible or desirable; neither was it the question of what type of socialist system the country should have ... Rather the argument focused on whether the country could move immediately to socialism.

What emerged from the Ethiopian revolution was a strongman regime, which comprised an odd mix of traditional military ideas about hierarchy, discipline, loyalty to the state, and pan-Ethiopian unity, combined with scientific socialism, as both an ideology of appeasement for the ordinary people, and a blueprint for economic development (Ottaway 1978, p.114-120). Looking back on the Derg era as a whole, its policies on land reform and agricultural development were perhaps the most significant

aspects of its tenure, and have occupied a great deal of the literature on the time period. However, an analysis of these socioeconomic factors will be postponed until the next chapter, and for now the discussion will continue to concentrate mainly on the political dimensions and broader sociological impact of the regime.

As Clapham (1988) has described, there was both “transformation and continuity” between the Selassie and Mengistu regimes. Again though, a full assessment of the extent to which the Derg Government fits with the neopatrimonial model would be beyond the scope of this work. Therefore, our focus will be confined to just a few salient features of Mengistu’s tenure in power that at least minimally show how certain key aspects of Selassie’s polity endured and evolved through the revolutionary period, such that they could be absorbed into a neopatrimonial system by the EPRDF (as will be delineated below). Furthermore, the abridged historical narrative will be continued in this section, in so far as it is necessary to understand the transformation of those underlying sociopolitical forces that continue to impact upon the contemporary polity.

In straightforward terms, the Derg seized control of a country that was coming apart at the seams. Guerrilla movements were engaged in active conflict against the state in the Somali, Oromo and Eritrean regions, and, following the Derg’s expulsion and/or execution of the former ruling elites, militant groups also became active in the northern core regions (Marcus, 2002, p.195-201). Their power struggle with student movements further intensified the atmosphere of violence in the mid 1970s - that is until the young Marxist groups were brutally repressed under the infamous ‘Red Terror’ campaign unleashed upon them by the military rulers, which saw the murder of thousands of militant students and other young Ethiopians (Pankhurst, 2001, p.275). What the Derg had ‘inherited’ was a society that was baulking at the highly centralised political structures that Selassie had installed upon it. The nature of this crisis was completely unfathomable to these conservative military men, and they could only but resort to familiar, authoritarian means to try and restore order and unity. This in fact constituted

the primary objective of their 17-year stint in power, i.e. to bring the country under complete control. From their installation of peasant associations to mobilise, monitor and coerce ordinary people, to their campaigns of resettlement and villagisation, this objective of subjugation always prevailed over all others - even productivity growth during a period of economic meltdown. As Donham (2002, p.20) has noted, for the Derg: “‘development’ was virtually synonymous with control”. Their inability to effect this outcome in Eritrea and eventually Tigray, despite massive Soviet military assistance, did not deter them from relentlessly pursuing repressive ‘solutions’, until very late into the 1980s, when they indicated a willingness to at least acknowledge national/regional grievances. However, by that point they had exercised such brutality on the country that they lacked legitimacy, and the only viable long-term solution was their expulsion.

The role of the Derg leader Mengistu Haile Mariam is worth mentioning here. As Bahru (2001, p.248-256) has described, Mengistu achieved the premier role within the Derg by exercising an incredible degree of ruthlessness - executing potential rivals when they posed a threat, in order to first procure, and then ardently defend, his position of absolute power. His tyrannical disposition and murderous political methods may well have permeated into the policies of the regime and the actions of Derg cadres, as they also showed little restraint in the face of dissent. Dawit (1990, p.61-68) has asserted that Mengistu could not tolerate any disagreement whatsoever from his cabinet colleagues. His egotism was such that he believed his own interpretations of socialist economic theories to be definitive, and therefore that it was sufficient for him to simply dictate radical development and social engineering projects to his subordinates, without granting them the right to first carry out objective feasibility studies. The resettlement campaign of 1984, which resulted in the death of approximately 25% of those who were relocated, would suggest that this method was not conducive to good economic policy (Kaplan, 2003, p.117). Mengistu’s despotic style and unwillingness to concede to the expertise of his colleagues extended even into military matters, epitomised by the

disastrous 'Red Star' campaign of 1982 to end separatist resistance in the north (Marcus, 2002, p.202-203). Mengistu had personally intervened in the strategic planning process in order to revise the rationale behind the operation - changing it from one aimed at making concessions in order to move towards a cessation of hostilities, to one aimed at the total destruction of the Eritrean guerrillas (Dawit, 1990, p.66-67). However, despite the huge quantity of resources ploughed into the campaign, the Eritrean fronts were able to weather the storm and ultimately instigate a counter offensive that sent the Derg forces into permanent retreat.

In light of the above, it should be quite apparent that under the Derg clientelism was in good part replaced by outright brute force, made possible by the extent of the Soviet military backing. The general trappings of a modern state were maintained, most evidently in the new constitution of 1987, which ordained the birth of the new 'People's Democratic Republic of Ethiopia'. However, as Ottaway (1978, p.11) has noted, Selassie's extensive network of personal ties, which had previously underlain the façade of statehood, were destroyed. A hierarchy based primarily on economic relationships was replaced by one resting upon coerced compliance and fear, rendering the Derg an even less politically accountable entity than Selassie had maintained. For example, the Derg sought to eliminate potential reactionary rural opposition by way of its 1975 land reform. They attempted to replace the former rural fiefs with more loyal agents of the state via their newly created peasant's associations, who would both espouse the merits of Marxist Leninism and maintain coercive control over the peasant masses. However their efforts served to simply induce another social class into taking up arms against the state, as many former rural notables joined the Ethiopian Democratic Union (EDU), which launched an anti-Derg insurgency from the Tigrayan region in the mid 1970s (Young, 2006, p.100-105). Such was the extent of the Derg's alienation from society, that many ordinary Ethiopians were also prompted to join rebel fronts in an attempt to bring down the tyrannical regime. As Donham (2002, p.3) has observed: "The Derg took over the old imperial and Orthodox Christian project of

incorporating and controlling the peripheries ... and turned it to its logical and self-defeating end”. It comprised the most extreme form of absolutism that Ethiopia has yet encountered, and therefore magnified the centrifugal forces emanating from Ethiopian society to an insuppressible degree. As the following section will illustrate, this peripheral dissent became mainly channelled along ethnonationalist lines. Liberation movements proliferated throughout the countryside, demanding the devolution of central power to the oppressed ‘nationalities’. In combination with the Eritrean liberation fronts, it would prove to be the Tigray People’s Liberation Front (TPLF) that would ultimately bring about the demise of the Derg. It is the realisation of this process that constitutes the focus of the next section.

## **Section (e) – The Rise of Ethnic Politics**

### **(i) Ethnonationalism and the Fall of the Derg**

Most Ethiopianist commentators have been in broad agreement that the rise of ethnonationalism in the Horn of Africa has had much more to do with contemporary political circumstances than long-simmering primordial tensions – a more simplistic view that has commonly found expression in the propaganda and rhetoric of the various liberation fronts (Young, 2006, p.80-87). Alemseged (1998) has explored the issue of politics, ethnicity and identity creation in the Horn, using the example of the Eritrean and Tigrayan peoples in the trans-Mereb region, who are ‘ethnically’ the same but now ‘nationally’ differentiated. He found their conceptions of identity to have been highly malleable, particularly in response to traumatic circumstances, in this case, most notably, the Derg’s genocidal-like military campaign in the north. Therefore, many younger Eritreans now perceive themselves as distinctive peoples from their southern Tigrayan brethren. He concludes his book with the words: “with the past as a relevant background ... what ultimately matters is the desire under which political roof to live” (Alemseged, 1998, p.231). The entirety of Sorenson’s seminal work ‘Imagining Ethiopia’ (1993) is, in a sense, a corroboration of this perspective. He examined some

of the competing historical narratives that have forged and reshaped identity in the horn, and found that they are closely correlated to conflicting political agendas that have been enacted in the region. Similarly, Young (1996, p.541) found that: “Ethnicity is a product of competition between elites for state power, and state centralisation encourages alienated elites to raise ethnic demands”. As will next be explained, this definition provides a particularly apt characterisation of the experience of some of the young urbanite Ethiopians who would later found the various ethnonationalist liberation fronts.

As Donham (2002, p.34-37) has described, some of the educated youths residing in Addis Ababa in the 1960s and 1970s became disillusioned by the lack of opportunity for progression under Selassie’s Government, particularly for non-Amharacized individuals. This may have motivated them to focus more pronouncedly on their ethnolinguistic/regional roots, and forge renewed ties with rural kin-groups and partisans. In particular, as Gebru (1990, p.150-152) has noted, both the TPLF and Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) leaderships were primarily composed of dissident young urbanites. They were distanced from the peasantry by class and education, but still felt a connection to it due to common language, bonds of kinship etc. Therefore, following in the footsteps of their Eritrean counterparts, the TPLF, OLF and other such groups have instrumentally utilised historical interpretations and ethnic categorisations in order to instil a suitable ideology for peasant mobilisation, with the ultimate aim of effecting fundamental political transformation. The true nature of their political aspirations would of course be beyond the comprehension of much of their rank and file membership. Therefore, Messay (1999, p.313-314), for example, has strongly emphasised the degree to which ethnonationalism is a consequence of political conflict amongst the intelligentsia:

Although revived in the name of suppressed cultures, ethnonationalist movements are not essentially peasant movements or rebellions. Their leadership as well as their

ideology are derived from the urban elite. They express the demands of the elite, its striving for power, but in the guise of a traditionalist culture and peasant identity.

Markakis, who has written extensively on the subject of nationality and ethnicity in the Horn, has offered a particularly broad perspective on the above process, emphasising that elite ambitions and interpretations also coalesce with grassroots material grievances felt amongst the peasantry. He argued that the heightened social inequalities that have resulted from the uneven development of the modernisation and centralisation processes, combined with the miserable plight of subsistence farmers and, in particular, pastoralists under this system, has been an essential prerequisite to the ethnonationalist upsurge (Markakis, 1987, p.272-275). It has been both an embrace of tradition, as a shield from the woes of modern African society, and a means to fight back against the oppression and reassert one's own status. Hence the phenomenon may ultimately be grounded in the postcolonial, or at least in this case the absolutising, experience of governance, and the politics of the 'hegemonic drive'. Ethnicity – a hybrid of old and new values and identities - was simply the form in which this protest against the illegitimacy of the ruling order became manifested. Therefore, in failing to address the so-called 'national question', which is ultimately a further evolution of the power struggle between centre and periphery, the Derg regime proved itself to be irreconcilable with its constituent society, and was swiftly ousted as a result.

In short, it has been the Ethiopian experience of centralised government that has ultimately evoked the raging counter reaction from wider society, which reached a crescendo in the final years of the Derg's rule. Such was the extent of this rejection of the state that it emanated from both core and peripheral areas, and in fact, in the case of ethnonationalism, originated from the urban centre. The phenomenon is reminiscent of the societal dislocation/loss of identity to which Messay (1999) was referring, as discussed above. But more generally, as Chabal and Daloz (1999) have described, it is in fact the recurring story of twentieth century African politics. A ruling order of

primarily foreign origin came to hold absolute power over its ‘constituent society’, despite not having emerged from within it. It then enacted transformation in socioeconomic dynamics upon its befuddled peoples, resulting in societal dislocation and volatility. Despite its unique history of self-government, Ethiopia has undoubtedly been a participant in this process, and its peripheral societies have balked at the imposition of illegitimate modes of governance imposed upon them. Violence and disorder have been the result of this process, as wider society and the state have chafed with each other in a failed attempt to harmonize. Hence despite its lack of colonial history, there are nevertheless reasonable grounds upon which to contend that the Ethiopian case has been qualitatively similar to the rest of Africa, and that conditions there have been equally conducive to the emergence of a form of neopatrimonialism. Thus in order to round off our sketch of the antecedents of contemporary politics, we will conclude our historical narrative with the events that saw the rise of the current TPLF-led regime.

#### **(ii) The EPRDF Takes the Reins**

By the late 1980s, the Eritrean People’s Liberation Front (EPLF) had gained ascendancy over the other insurgent groups within Eritrea, and had effectively ousted the Derg from the entire territory, bar the few major cities. Likewise, the TPLF had driven the EPRP, EDU and eventually Derg forces from most of Tigray, with the principal city of Mekelle falling in early 1989 (Marcus, 2002, p.229). The success of the liberation fronts was undoubtedly related to their effectiveness in legitimising themselves in the eyes of the peasantry. As Young (2006, p.172-196) has described, the activities of the groups were not simply confined to warfare. They instituted elaborate governmental structures upon the territories they occupied, comprising administrative, educational and distributional faculties. They ruled in a hierarchical and paternalistic manner, and competently orchestrated a war economy that made efficient use of the limited resources available. Therefore, by the late 1980s they had effectively transformed themselves from guerrilla insurgents into a de facto government in

waiting, complete with a conventional army capable of defeating the Derg forces and taking the entire Ethiopian territory. With their leadership set on liberating the entire country rather than just Tigray,<sup>28</sup> what remained was for the TPLF to transform itself from an ethnoregional movement into a multinational and pan-Ethiopian one, i.e. one that was sufficiently representative, in terms of its ethnic diversity, to pose as a credible national government. They therefore created an umbrella organisation called the Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), which at that time comprised the TPLF, the Ethiopian Peoples Democratic Movement (EPDM), which was a group of former EPRP troops who were fighting against the Derg in the Amhara regions, and the Oromo Peoples Democratic Movement (OPDO), which was a contingent of Oromo former Derg soldiers captured by the TPLF and EPDM, and was meant to represent the Oromo people in the new coalition (Bahru, 2001, p.265). The fabrication of this latter member party became necessary because the TPLF was unable to maintain an alliance with the OLF, who were at that time mounting a major offensive against the Derg from Oromia, and comprised far greater accountability amongst the Oromo peoples. On 21<sup>st</sup> May 1991, with the Derg army on the brink of collapse, Mengistu fled to Zimbabwe, and a week later the EPRDF troops entered Addis Ababa and quickly secured the city (Young, 2006, p.169). The Derg era was officially at an end.

The UK and US, who were attempting to broker a peace deal at the point when Addis Ababa and Asmara fell, supported EPRDF and EPLF efforts to assume control of Ethiopia and a newly independent Eritrea respectively<sup>29</sup>, and the National Peace and Reconciliation Conference was held in Addis Ababa under the auspices of the new rulers (Aalen, 2002a, p.6-7). From this the EPRDF would emerge as the de facto head

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<sup>28</sup> This was a decision pushed through by a faction of senior TPLF members, such as now Prime Minister Meles Zenawi, who argued that Tigray would be best served as a part of an ethnically restructured Ethiopia rather than a independent state (see Marcus (2002, p.230)). Therefore, they continued to drive the Derg forces southward in 1990-1991, despite having already ejected them from Tigray.

<sup>29</sup> Western acquiescence was in part due to the fact that both fronts had officially renounced Marxist-Leninism and adopted Neoliberal rhetoric by 1990 (see Kinfu (1994, p.14-18)).

of the Transitional Government of Ethiopia (TGE), and, from 1994, the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE), once the new 'ethnofederal' constitution had been drafted and implemented. Currently, the EPRDF still holds the reins of power, and indeed was 're-elected' for another 5-year stint in May 2005.

### **Section (f) – Contemporary Politics in Ethiopia**

As Tesfaye (2002, p.18) has observed, perhaps *the* major quandary in post-Derg Ethiopian politics was how to strike an adequate balance of power between the central state and wider society. Following the demise of two absolutist centralising regimes, the desire for a more democratic system was prevalent going into the 1991 Addis conference. Furthermore, given that ethnonationalism had proliferated in response to the Derg's extreme unionism, a solution was sought that would address issues of ethnic and national inequality. The climate was one in which grievances regarding prior hardships were voiced more in terms of group than individual political rights. For example, despite having opted out of the EPRDF coalition, as the major liberation movement emanating from the Oromo region the OLF was a key participant in the 1991 peace and reconciliation conference. Their leading intellectuals, such as Leenco Lata (1999, p.221-227), as well as other prominent Oromo thinkers, such as Mohammed Hassen (1996, p.200), have predominantly sought to emphasise the collective rights of ethnic groups within the post-Derg Ethiopia, which is indicative of these newly ethnicised interpretations of the country. The same perspective was undoubtedly shared by the TPLF. Therefore, the TGE's proposed solution to the problem of refashioning the distribution of power between state and society was to grant a higher degree of autonomy to the country's different ethnic groups. This involved redrawing regional boundaries to correspond to the localities of the different ethnic peoples/societies, and installing new democratic ethnonational governments, from local up to regional levels, that would possess sufficient autonomy to govern their own peoples in keeping with indigenous values and traditions (Tesfaye, 2002, p.8-13, 130-139). This refashioned political structure was envisioned as an 'ethnofederal'

system, in which the constituent ethno-regions would share a federal level government to rule on major national issues like defence, while still (theoretically) enjoying autonomy “including the right to secession” from the Ethiopian state (Fasil, 1997, p.229). But as will be discussed below, the political reality of subsequent years has failed to remotely accord with this idealised blueprint.

### **(i) Ethnofederalism - Devolution of Power to the Periphery?**

To begin with, the ethno-regional boundary demarcation process, necessitated by the reform of the polity along ethnofederal lines, comprised a high degree of simplification. This was for logistical reasons, as, for example, in the southwest there are over 50 different distinctive ethnolinguistic groups<sup>30</sup>, some, such as the Hor, numbering only a few thousand people (Tadesse, 2002, p37). Therefore, in terms of representation and political power, larger and more homogenous groups have at times fared disproportionately better than minority groups under the new system. For example, the Shakicho and Bongo groups were amalgamated into a single zone called Kaffa-Sheka, but with the administrative capital located amongst the Bongo due to their numerical dominance, much to the anger of the shakicho (Vaughan, 2006, p.195). This perceived subordination to rival groups has at times served to exacerbate local-level conflicts - most notably resulting in violence between the Nuer and Anywaa in the Gambela region (Kurimoto, 2002, p.235-238). Furthermore, for some ethnic minorities in a given locale there was no representation at all, because they did not comprise a substantial or homogenous enough population to justify their own local councillor, even at the lowest ‘kebele’ level of government. This was especially the case for the sizeable number of Amhara speaking individuals who lived out with the newly designated ‘Amhara region’<sup>31</sup>, but saw themselves as primarily Ethiopian. Disenfranchisement now seems

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<sup>30</sup> According to data from the Ethiopian Central Statistics Agency (2006), (<http://www.ethioembassy.org.uk/Facts%20About%20Ethiopia/Facts%20About%20Ethiopia%20Homepage.htm>)

<sup>31</sup> For example, according to Vaughan (2006, p.194), there are around 50 000 Amharas living in the aforementioned Kaffa-Sheka zone, making up approximately 7% of the total population of that area.

to be a prevalent feeling amongst Amhara-Ethiopians, and many have deeply resented the perceived divisiveness of the new ethnofederal system (Tesfaye, 2002, p.95-100).

Some commentators, such as Lata (1999, p.xi-xvi) and Vestel (1999, p.46-48) have suggested that the ethnofederal model has ultimately been used by the TPLF to impart a kind of 'divide and rule' programme on the country. By this they mean that the TPLF has manipulated the system from their position of dominance in the EPRDF; allowing them to permanently hold power, and ensure that the Tigrayan minority, who comprise only around 9% of the country's population, will never again be marginalized by a chauvinistic regime. This is made possible by the fact that, while equitably *represented* under the new system, other ethnic groups are not actually in a position to affect much of the Government's agenda, because in reality it operates as a one-party-state. Furthermore, by alienating unionist opposition and insisting that parties have an ethnic base, it could be the case that the TPLF has sought to ensure that potential supra-ethnic opposition will remain divided and possibly even in a position of mutual antagonism over narrow material interests. Vestel has levelled some of the more severe charges of this nature:

If the outnumbered Tigrayans who directed the EPRDF/TGE could keep other ethnic groups divided and roiled against each other in ethnoxenophobias or content to manage affairs only in their limited bailiwicks, then larger matters could be subsumed by the one governing party. (Vestel, 1999, p.46)

He concludes his book with the chilling words:

Ethiopia, having completed its transition from one Marxist-Leninist regime to another, limps on, wearing the thick boot of authoritarianism at the end of one leg, and the iron of ethnic hatred on the other. (Vestel, 1999, p.207)

In order to assess the validity of such claims, some of the evidence concerning the concrete functioning of this ethnofederal system will next be considered.

The ideal starting point for this analysis would be to consider the role of the TPLF within the EPRDF. However, as TPLF biographer John Young (1998, p.202) has noted, the EPRDF is a highly secretive organisation. It does not operate in a transparent manner and there is little written information available about its internal functioning. What is known is that the TPLF/EPRDF leadership were a product of the 1960s – 1970s Marxist student movement in Addis Ababa, and that during the civil war the party elites opted for an organisational structure based on the Albanian model of Marxist-Leninism. In 1985 a secretive organisation was created called the Marxist Leninist League of Tigray (MLLT), which was established by moderates in the front's leadership with the purpose of facilitating the eventual reformation of Ethiopia along ethnonational Marxist lines (Marcus, 2002, p.229). Officially of course, the front abandoned Marxist Leninism and embraced a form of social democracy as its ideology in 1991, when it ousted the Derg from power. However, Young remains convinced that the EPRDF is nevertheless still a centralised, authoritarian and paternalistic organisation:

In spite of the Government's endorsement of capitalism, pluralism and a realigned foreign policy, the EPRDF remains a Leninist-structured and controlled party. And it is this party which not only oversees the public bureaucracy but also has a formative influence over regional parties (Young, 1998, p.196).

This view is shared by Abbink, who argued that the regime has retained some aspects of its Marxist-Leninist past and shed others, in order to best accommodate itself to the new exigencies of government: "The regime has become entrenched to the extent that power, ideology and material interests have coagulated into a structure that inhibits democratisation" (Abbink, 2006, p.197).

In his book, Vestel claims to have obtained two secret TPLF/EPRDF memoranda that were intended for party cadres, and spelled out the true intentions behind the organisation's official ideology of 'revolutionary democracy'. The primary political objective for the front was stipulated to be the maintenance of a permanent hegemonic position in Ethiopia. The documents apparently specified the need to: manipulate the electoral process; control the media, civic organisations and NGOs; suppress and divide the opposition; maintain control of the economy; and simulate a façade of democracy for the wider world (Vestel, 1999, p.62-81, 103-109). As shall be discussed below, compelling evidence can be found to support many of these allegations.

In light of such apparent hegemonic aspirations, it is clear why various commentators have argued that the country's ethnofederal political structure functions in actuality as a dictatorial, clientelistic system. For example, Aalen (2002a, p.61-62) has examined the efficacy of the institutionalised checks on the EPRDF's power set out by the country's constitution. She found that they did not provide a suitable foundation for a truly democratic system of checks and balances. In comparison to other federal systems, the Prime Minister (i.e. the head of the ruling party) has an excessive amount of power, whereas the upper house is extremely weak – to the extent that it does not have the ability to block legislation made by the executive. Furthermore, there is no independent constitutional court, and it is the Prime Minister's prerogative to appoint members of the judiciary. In practical terms this simply means that: "constitutional interpretation is controlled by the party in power" (Aalen, 2002a, p.62). She also drew attention to the fact that the constitution allows for the same party organisations to operate at both federal and regional levels in Ethiopia. This potentially allows for the ruling party's elite to exercise control over both local and national matters, at the expense of provincial autonomy. This led Aalen to conclude that:

practically, the EPRDF is controlling all the regional state governments in the Ethiopian federation, either directly through the member parties or indirectly through affiliate parties. These largely centralised party structures appear to contradict with the devolved power structures of a federal system. (Aalen, 2002a, p.81-82)

Meheret (2002) also investigated the process of political decentralisation in Ethiopia, and concurred that the devolution was more of an administrative one than a genuine redistribution of power. In particular he drew attention to the vertical rather than horizontal linkages from the centre down to local government levels, which were augmented by party political connections. He therefore deemed the political structure to be “monolithic and authoritarian” (Meheret, 2002, p.137-138). Likewise, Chanie (2007) has characterised the post-1991 relationship between the central state and periphery as one of patron and client. He states: “once clientelism comes into play, this downward accountability is limited by upward accountability: the sub-national governments’ responsiveness and loyalty are to the central party” (Chanie, 2007, p.361). This view is corroborated by Vaughan and Tronvoll (2003, p.44), who found that incentives within the political system are such that officials are above all else concerned with pleasing their patrons, rather than serving the public. This has the further consequence that innovation from within to improve the efficiency of public administration is smothered. During a field interview, one indigenous analyst<sup>32</sup> outlined the problem:

The Government delegates responsibility but not authority in a very hierarchical manner, so the system does not encourage either creativity or risk taking. People fear the responsibility of failure, and instead prefer not to make decisions. This pervades all sectors of governance. (Interview with indigenous analyst, February-March 2007).

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<sup>32</sup> As was described in the methodology section, certain comments by interviewees have been made anonymous by mutual consent.

However, while this system of clientelism renders public officials vulnerable to the whims of their superiors, it conversely accords them with a great deal of power in their dealings with the general public – provided they don't undermine party interests. For example, officials can make access to the state's resources and services at the local level conditional upon political support - a capability that is especially useful around elections times. For example, McCann (2002) has described how local government officials in rural Gojjam have exploited peasants' dependency on government fertilizer handouts to coerce them into voting for the Amhara National Democratic Movement (ANDM)<sup>33</sup> candidates. The distribution of agricultural inputs is in fact a key means by which the ruling party have attempted to retain the support of the peasantry via their local agents, and it is likely that the Government has deliberately maintained a monopoly position in the green input sector for precisely such political reasons. This coercion may also extend to punishing 'disloyalty' amongst the voters by restricting input distribution following support for opposition parties, as experienced in Hadiya, Southern Region, after the 2000 election (Tronvoll, 2002, p.176).

Incidents such as the above starkly illustrate the degree to which Ethiopia's political system rests upon the distribution of resources. This is in good part due to the financial dependency of regional governments on the central state - a key issue which Tesfaye (2002) drew attention to in his study of Ethiopia's ethnofederal system. He stated that over 90% of national revenue is first channelled to the central government, ensuring that: "despite the sovereign status of internal autonomy granted to regions, regional power was curtailed by financial dependence on the centre" (Tesfaye, 2002, p.116-123). Likewise, Chanie's data suggests that an average of 82.8% of regional budgets comes in the form of a direct allocation from the centre, due to the Federal Government's unwillingness to relinquish control of key sources of tax revenue (Chanie, 2007, p.368, 375). By denying the ethno-regions any significant degree of

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<sup>33</sup> The EPDM, i.e. the second main party in the EPRDF coalition next to the TPLF, renamed itself the ANDM prior to the ethnofederal administrative restructuring process, in order to assume the role of a specifically Amhara rather than Ethiopian party.

independent revenue collecting power, the EPRDF has in effect rendered them weak and dependent clients. Their ability to challenge the ruling party on any issue is checked by the perpetual threat that their funding could be cut, and in fact grievances may often be channelled into more intra-regional disputes over the division of the budget allocation. For example, Chanie (2007, p.364-365) has described how ethnic elites in Benshangul-Gumuz region have engaged in ongoing conflicts over control of state allocations. Similarly, Haggmann has detailed the factional conflict among politicised clan/kinship groups within the Somali Regional Government, and characterised the mentality amongst office holders as follows: “The state figures primarily as a honey pot of resources to be absorbed, appropriated and shared by politicians and appointees” (Haggmann, 2005, p.10). In both of these cases, and indeed in all regions, the ruling party has maintained the right to purge and rotate regional cabinets with impunity whenever it chooses. Chanie (2007, p.266) offers the following incident as evidence of this fact:

Loyalty and obedience to the central leadership have been critical assets of regional leaders. A dyadic clientelism was evidenced when a top leader from the ANDM supported the prime minister during the 2001 TPLF crisis, and was promoted to deputy prime minister of the country. Other regional leaders, especially from Oromia and Southern region, who were not loyal during the crisis, were ousted from power and one of them was imprisoned for alleged corruption.

In light of happenings such as the above, Haggmann has argued that governance in the Somali region constitutes a clear instance of neopatrimonialism. He also highlighted things like: the blurring of personal relationships with professional ones within the political system; and the existence of extensive patron-client pyramids with the EPRDF at the peak, as compelling evidence that neopatrimonialism provides the most apt characterisation of Somali regional politics (Haggmann, 2005, p.9-11). Chanie looked at Ethiopia as a whole and argued that it comprises a system of clientelism, without

mentioning neopatrimonialism (of which clientelism is of course a key component). Few other political commentators have gone as far as to offer any such conceptualisation of the polity, although Abbink (2006, p.178) argued that the neopatrimonial paradigm can offer a great deal of insight into the workings of Ethiopian politics. Thus far, the discussion of the ethnofederal system in Ethiopia has provided evidence to support the case for clientelism within a de facto one-party state. The next section will assess various other key aspects of the polity in order to assess how well it accords with the broader neopatrimonial model.

## **(ii) Neopatrimonialism in Contemporary Ethiopia**

It would seem to be the case that, if Ethiopian politics have to a large extent manifested aspects of neopatrimonialism, then what has emerged has been a more modern, less overtly personalised variant of the phenomenon than that which has been associated with traditional case studies, such as Mobutu's Zaire, or even Selassie's Ethiopia. There is no personality cult around the president, and he clearly does not possess the degree of unrestrained individual power that these past dictators have enjoyed. As Medhane and Young (2003) have described, great efforts have been made within the TPLF to ensure its functioning as a collective and internally accountable unit. Nevertheless, there is evidence to suggest that Prime Minister Meles Zenawi has been able to strengthen his position vis-à-vis political rivals and other constraining figures with the TPLF during his tenure in power, and especially after the party weathered its internal crisis of 2001 (Medhane and Young, 2003, p.390-398). Furthermore, although a key condition of neopatrimonialism is an underlying dominance of personalised policymaking, neopatrimonial theorists have nevertheless noted the possibility of ruling juntas within such states (Le Vine, 1980, p.611), (Bratton and Van De Walle, 1994, p.479-480). Therefore, the dominance of the state by a close-knit group like the TPLF, as has clearly been the case in post-1991 Ethiopia, does not preclude the possibility that the polity is a variant of the neopatrimonial model. In light of this fact, we will next assess the available evidence to support the charge of neopatrimonialism.

A common feature of neopatrimonial states is that much of the economy is directed towards the short-term generation of revenue for the redistributive and other self-preserving needs of the Government, at the expense of longer-term development. In particular, an emphasis on the production of primary products for export, and the presence of a moribund industrial sector comprising a high proportion of parastatal companies, have been prominent components of such economies. The former aspect will be more thoroughly addressed in the next chapter, due to its close correlation with issues of land tenure and agricultural development. But for now suffice to say that the export of unprocessed agricultural produce is indeed the bedrock of the country's economy, and that export tax revenue is a principal and closely guarded source of federal government income (EEA, 2005, p.100-101). As for the latter component, there is also strong evidence to suggest that party interests permeate Ethiopia's embryonic industrial sector. According to Vaughan and Tronvoll (2003, p.75): "the genuine private sector has been dwarfed" in Ethiopia, by both party owned businesses and also the business empire of Saudi-Ethiopian businessman Sheikh Mohammed Alamoudi. Chanie (2007, p.363) estimates that the TPLF possesses around 50 businesses or 'parapartals', worth around \$447 million<sup>34</sup>. He also estimates that the other EPRDF coalition partners have the following assets: ANDM – 5 businesses, worth \$44.7 million; OPDO – 7 businesses, worth \$19.5 million; and SEPDM – 1 business, worth \$16.8 million. Clearly the TPLF occupies a position of overwhelming economic superiority within the party, owning enterprises that produce things like: cement, textiles, livestock and leather, transportation, construction work, pharmaceuticals etc. Chanie is pointed about the nature of these companies, and also draws attention to a critical aspect of their functioning beyond simply that of enriching the ruling party elites:

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<sup>34</sup> The figure was calculated by converting the original data from Euros or Birr into dollars, as were the subsequent figures quoted in this section.

These party-owned organisations headed by prominent party members are patronage mechanisms. As their manufacturing premises are located in Tigray region, they generate gainful employment and improve the life of some members of the ethnic group (Chanie, 2007, p.379).

The latter point made in the above quote would seem to be reminiscent of another of the key features of neopatrimonialism delineated previously, i.e. that the affinities of many elites and civilians are primarily directed towards a subgroup within the state, commonly according to their ethnicity. If this were indeed the case here, it would suggest that the TPLF's ethnonationalist agenda has resulted in some degree of ethnic bias in the distribution of state resources. Chanie (2007, p.378) has asserted that, covertly, this is precisely what has occurred:

The TPLF is cautious that favouring Tigray openly would potentially lead to ethnic war...Nonetheless, traditional clientelism between the TPLF and its constituency is maintained through different and unofficial patronage networks, including parapatals, off-budget funds and non-transparent central government infrastructure allocations to regions.

Young (1997, p.85-86) has described some of the ways in which the TPLF have sought to engineer development in Tigray via their umbrella organisation EFFORT (Endowment Fund for the Rehabilitation of Tigray), which have included: the establishment of parapatals in key Tigrayan cities like Adigrat, Axum and Mekelle, the distribution of non-military equipment captured from the Derg, and the provision of easier access to loans from the state-owned Commercial Bank of Ethiopia. Two other key party affiliated organisations – the Relief Society of Tigray (REST) and the Tigray Development Association (TDA) have also become increasingly influential in certain key commercial sectors, such as transportation, and have been accorded tax relief to strengthen their position vis-à-vis independent businesses (Young, 1996, p.86).

Moreover, according to Chanie (2007, p.380), another key means by which resources are discreetly funnelled towards Tigray is the biased and non-transparent allocation of donor funding and projects. He cites a European Union (2001) estimate that Tigray received around \$51.6 million in aid between 1997 and 2000, compared to Benshangul-Gumuz region, which received only \$8.9 million. Data on such dealings is unsurprisingly scarce, however, some EEA sources would seem to be indirectly suggestive of a Tigrayan economic advantage under the EPRDF regime. One study showed that Tigray received more than double the level of non-farm income of any other region in 2001, which must presumably be due to: “the availability of more off-farm employment in the region and/or the availability of more food aid” (EEA, 2002, p.54). Another study showed that mean consumption per adult had markedly fallen in virtually all of Ethiopia’s major cities between 1994 and 2000, with the glaring exception of Mekelle, the only Tigrayan city listed, where it had increased by over 40% (EEA, 2005, p.117).

Young (1997) has examined this issue of development in Tigray from a grassroots perspective, and in so doing uncovered a further key aspect of the process that is in effect a necessary compliment to the above. The EPRDF government clearly suffers from a lack of nationwide support. In light of this fact, maintaining the backing of the TPLF’s home region would seem to be especially important in order to preserve some degree of legitimacy. However, incidents like the TPLF leadership crisis of 2001 have served to erode the strength of the bond between party and peasantry in Tigray, and many ordinary Tigrayans are now fearful that TPLF elites have become corrupted by the luxuries of their national leadership positions and new urban environment, to the detriment of their dutifulness to Tigray (Young, 1997, p.94-96). Their expectations are to receive priority treatment from “their sons”, as a reward for the hardships they endured under the Derg, and the crucial support that many peasants gave to TPLF fighters. Therefore, there is a high degree of pressure exerted upon ruling elites from their key client-base to deliver material improvements in exchange for continued

support. In the words of Young (1997, p.99): “feudal values and pressures to enjoy the fruits of hard-fought endeavours remain present and pressing in Tigray”. Likewise, Vaughan and Tronvoll (2003, p.24) have observed that:

Tigray suffers primarily from the inadequate emancipation of party and state structures from society, which has resulted in the prevalence of deeply personalised politics based on close-knit patronage systems around a small group of key individuals and families.

The Tigrayan case described here has also served to illustrate another important aspect of Ethiopian politics that is consistent with a neopatrimonial interpretation. It has exposed a mentality amongst ordinary Tigrayans that the state is some kind of booty of conquest, or table to be eaten from. Such a perception of the state as a “honey-pot” was previously noted in the cases of Benshangul-Gumuz and Somali regions, and is of course reminiscent of Bayart’s (1993) ‘Politics of the belly’ characterisation of Africa. We have now witnessed this kind of thinking in a key core region as well. According to Abbink (2006, p.178): “An old Ethiopian saying is: ‘he who does not “eat” while in power, will regret it when he is out’. This still holds”. The data on corruption in Ethiopia would seem to be consistent with this situation, as the country scored 2.4 out of 10 in Transparency International’s Corruptions Perceptions Index (CPI)<sup>35</sup>, i.e. 138th out of 179 countries in the world (Denmark was top with 9.4 out of 10), and 33<sup>rd</sup> out of 52 in Africa (Botswana was top with 5.4 out of 10). Such a high level of rentseeking may indicate that a collective/‘national’ good mentality - often considered to be a key component of a developmental state - is greatly lacking in contemporary Ethiopia. Furthermore, it suggests that, given the country’s resource constraints, there may be a perception amongst ordinary people that, as members of sub-national ethnic groups, they need to vie with each other for an adequate individual share of the budget. Such thinking can give rise to a zero-sum mentality, as Abbink has also described, which can

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<sup>35</sup> See Transparency International’s ‘Corruption Perceptions Index 2007’, ([http://www.transparency.org/policy\\_research/surveys\\_indices/cpi/2007](http://www.transparency.org/policy_research/surveys_indices/cpi/2007)).

result in winner-take-all power struggles - as witnessed during the 2005 general election (Abbink, 2006, p.183-186, 197). In that instance the opposition Coalition for Unity and Democracy (CUD) represented a pan-Ethiopian ideology. Nevertheless, given that the central fault line in Ethiopia runs between central state and peripheral societies, and also the fact that ethnonationalism has fostered somewhat of a redefinition of peoples' identities according to their ethnicity, then a descent into inter-ethnic resource competition would seem to be a serious risk in this case. Virtually all cases of neopatrimonialism in Africa, especially in countries like Cameroon and Nigeria, have experienced ethnic conflict of this kind (Fonchingong, 2004), (Mbuagbo and Akoko, 2004).

Perhaps the most important dimension of neopatrimonial governance, and indeed that upon which our earlier definition rested, is that it constitutes something of a hybrid relationship between personalised politics and rational-legal modes of administration, but with the former dominating, and at times denigrating, the latter. According to this model, Ethiopia should exhibit many of the formal trappings associated with modern rational-bureaucratic states, such as a constitution, democratic elections, formal separation of party and state etc, while nevertheless maintaining a rigid personalised hierarchy beneath this surface. There is considerable evidence to suggest that this is precisely the case, and indeed a number of these components, such as the constitutional inadequacies in regard to the distribution of power, have been discussed above. Some further aspects of this synchronism between personalism and rational bureaucracy will be considered below as means to round off our examination of neopatrimonialism in contemporary Ethiopia.

Parliamentary elections have been a pronounced aspect of the country's political scene since 1991. Undoubtedly they have become increasingly free and fair throughout the

EPRDF's tenure (from a very undemocratic beginning<sup>36</sup>), but not to the extent that the opposition has had a real possibility of winning. Furthermore, it is likely that the degree of electoral freedom has varied markedly between different parts of the country, with Addis Ababa (where all the seats were won by opposition parties in 2005) serving as somewhat of a spectacle for the wider world. The opposition have dismissed the Government's apparent liberalisation in the capital as: "a stage play...for the foreign community while keeping firm control of the rural areas" (Pausewang et al., 2002, p.44). This view is corroborated by Young (1998, p.201-202), who also suggested that, because that the national government operates day-to-day in a city in which it is extensively unpopular, it may have adopted somewhat of a 'siege mentality'. This is, again, a consequence of the extant societal fault lines with which the EPRDF must contend, in its attempts to maintain the current concentration of central power. Moreover, it is a clear indication that the formal trappings of Western-style governance and democracy in Ethiopia exist only on the surface.

In spite of the above, and the fact that neopatrimonialism constitutes only a simulated rational-legal democracy covering a personalised system of rule, it is nevertheless the case that within such systems, pockets of rational bureaucracy may still attempt to assert themselves. Some dedicated and responsible civil servants will inevitably try to utilise the institutions of state more in the manner to which they are purported to function, in order to improve the country's administrative efficiency. This phenomenon can also be observed in Ethiopia, to the extent that a high degree of rational-legal administration exists in some sectors, despite the overall dominance of personalised politics. Haggmann gives the example of the so called 'young Turks' in the Somali region – a small class of young, educated Somalis, seeking to improve the region's governance from within (Haggmann, 2005, p.17-18). Similar technocratic endeavours were observed within government ministries in Addis Ababa and Amhara state during

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<sup>36</sup> In 2000 opposition MPs only 'won' 12 seats in parliament whereas, according to official figures, that number increased to 174 out of 547 in 2005. See BBC News (10<sup>th</sup> August 2005), 'Ethiopia poll reveals rural-urban divide', (<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/4576325.stm>).

fieldwork, as will be described in chapter five. However, even though a reasonable degree of competence can be observed in some areas of the country's administration, especially in Addis Ababa, this does not contradict the fact that, as a whole, the Government ultimately functions according to a neopatrimonial logic. This is consistent with the neopatrimonial literature, as range of different degrees of administrative development and decay has been observed throughout Africa (Allen, 1995). Moreover, as shall be discussed below, it accords with the bureaucratic variant of neopatrimonialism outlined in our typology in chapter two.

A final aspect of governance in Ethiopia that must here be considered, and indeed one that has been to some extent underemphasized in other applications of the neopatrimonial model, according to some Ethiopian commentators, e.g. Abbink (2006, p.197) and Haggmann (2005, p.24), is that of authoritarianism. According to Haggmann, the Ethiopian model functions with "big sticks and small carrots". In other words, military might, perhaps more so than the distribution of patronage, can explain the persistence of the current regime. For example, in a study of regional elections in Ethiopia, McCann (2002, p.74-76) described how opposition members were harshly suppressed in Debre Berhan in the lead up to the 2000 election, culminating in the incarceration of party leader Dr Asrat Woldeyes. The ANDM (EPRDF) candidate eventually won the election virtually unopposed, despite the fact that Debre Berhan is considered to be an "Amhara heartland" region, greatly opposed to the ruling Tigrayan elite. In the same study, Schaefer (2002), Pausewang (2002) and Tronvoll (2002) found evidence of similar repressive tactics in the Oromo, Gedeo, and Hadiya regions respectively, which included: violence against civilians by government militias; attempts to tamper with the voting process; and the withholding of certain essential subsidies in response to opposition success. Several other commentators have also condemned the EPRDF for a range of alleged human rights abuses. Joseph (1998, p.57) drew attention to the numerous Human Rights Watch reports that have accused the ruling party of routinely detaining suspected members of illegal insurgent groups such

as the OLF, or even journalists who are disparaging of the Government, and subjecting them to torture and long-term incarceration without trial. Lata (1999, p.15-22) has catalogued a host of incidents recorded by organisations such as Amnesty International of alleged human rights abuses by the ruling party cadres. These include: the arrest of 107 independent journalists between December 1994 and February 1995; 1683 extra-judicial killings, 527 disappearances and “scores of thousands” of detentions in Oromia, between late 1993 and mid 1997. The Internet is replete with reports of concentration camp-like compounds in various parts of the country, and of arbitrary beatings by federal police in rural areas<sup>37</sup>. However, such claims are difficult to verify, and as the EPRDF itself has rightly pointed out, since ousting the Derg in 1991 there have been consistent attempts to depict it in the worst possible light by some Ethiopians in the Diaspora, some of whom were connected to the former regime, and run opposition websites and newspapers (Henze, 1998, p.46). Nevertheless, the current Government has undoubtedly proved willing to resort to violent repression on occasions when it has felt its hegemony threatened. Harbeson’s (1998, p.66) characterisation of: “an essentially bureaucratic-authoritarian regime dependent upon the EPRDF’s superior military muscle”, would seem to be apt in this case.

In light of the above, there would seem to be reasonable grounds to conclude that many of the neopatrimonial concepts outlined in the previous chapter are applicable to contemporary Ethiopia. It is clearly the case that patrimonial/personalistic imperatives, albeit those of a ruling junta group, underlie and indeed dominate the edifice of a modern, rational-bureaucratic state. Moreover, the category of ‘bureaucratic neopatrimonialism’ from our typology would seem to offer a particularly apt depiction of the polity. To reiterate its most salient features, a bureaucratic neopatrimonial regime comprises: a higher degree of apolitical, bureaucratic governance than other neopatrimonial states; the monopolisation of administration by the ruling party; the use

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<sup>37</sup> See, for example: Blair (2005), ‘Protesters killed and 40,000 jailed as Blair's friend quells ‘insurrection’, (<http://www.ethiogermany.de/protesters1.htm>).

of semi-coercive methods to maintain political power, such as the oppression of political opponents via things like secret police units; and the use of populist mobilisation tactics, such as plebiscitary elections. In light of the detailed discussion offered above, it is apparent that this model provides an apposite, albeit simplified, representation of contemporary Ethiopia. That being established, the discussion of Ethiopia's politics can now give way for a return to the issue of land tenure and socioeconomic development, this time specifically in the Ethiopian context. Before that though, the key conclusions of this chapter will briefly be reiterated, in order that its essential role as a nexus between the two preceding theoretical chapters and the specific case of Ethiopia can most clearly be illuminated.

### **Section (g) – Concluding Remarks**

The above exposition has principally outlined two essential features of Ethiopian politics. Firstly, it has drawn upon the historical literature to trace out the evolution of political dynamics between central state and its peripheral societies, in particular from the late nineteenth century onwards. It was contended that an insight into this historical process is essential in order to fully understand the root source of most contemporary political and economic problems within the country – i.e. the tug-of-war between core and periphery. This is because both the extant mode of governance and the prevailing socioeconomic underdevelopment have in good part been its consequence. However, this is a story that is thus far only half told. In order to fully grasp the nature of these evolving state-society dynamics, it is necessary to consider in more detail the socioeconomic transformations that occurred throughout the historical period outlined above. This will be undertaken in the next chapter in conjunction with an examination of changes in the land tenure regime. As will be discussed, a concurrent delineation of these two phenomena is possible, and indeed helpful, because the tenure system was, and continues to be, at the very core of the evolving productive complex upon which the Ethiopian polity has been founded. It will become clear over the course of the next chapter why this is the case, and why in fact it could not feasibly be otherwise.

The other essential aspect of Ethiopian political history that this chapter has attempted to convey is that of the mode of governance that has emerged in recent decades, as a derivative of the above evolution in political economy. It was argued that this could be broadly characterised as neopatrimonial, in accordance with much of the rest of Africa, and particular care was taken to assess how well the model applies to the current regime. This was in order that the above analysis could be utilised as a part of a political economy framework, through which an evaluation of a contemporary developmental problem, i.e. land tenure reform, could be undertaken in the final chapter. By considering the role of political constraints vis-à-vis socioeconomic phenomenon such as land tenure, it will be easier to avoid formulating skewed developmental prognoses of the type outlined in chapter one. For example, one of the consequences of neopatrimonial governance noted above has been that EPRDF party cadres have at times attempted to foster dependency and clientelism among rural farmers. Another that will be described in the next two chapters pertains to the entire system of nationalised landholding itself, in terms of how its functioning may facilitate underlying political objectives to the detriment of productivity growth. In order to provide an explanation of land tenure that can account for such phenomena, an in depth political analysis such as the above is requisite. However, before we can fully elucidate these links between politics, land tenure and development, we must firstly examine the latter two components from a more detailed historical perspective. It is to that task that we will now turn.

## **Chapter 4 Land Tenure and Socioeconomic Decline in Ethiopia since the Late Nineteenth Century**

### **Section (a) – Introduction**

This chapter will outline the socioeconomic changes that have occurred in Ethiopia from the end of the pre-modern period to the contemporary era, with particular focus upon the land tenure system. In essence, it will constitute an account of the changing economic circumstances to which indigenous agents and institutions have had to adapt and redefine themselves since around the late nineteenth century. The choice of date accords with the point at which Emperor Menilek began to usher in global economic forces via arms trade with the West, and it will be argued that this period of macroeconomic transition also sparked profound changes in the country's rural socioeconomic structures. In so detailing the nature of this micro-level transformation, and examining how it has impacted upon Ethiopia's economic growth in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, our understanding of the embedded forces with which contemporary developmental efforts must contend will be greatly enhanced. Overall then, the chapter will supply the remaining components required for the formation of a suitably rounded analytic framework within which the complex issue of land tenure reform within the Ethiopian political economy can be deciphered.

In order to achieve the above objective, the chapter will proceed as follows: The earlier sections will provide a historical characterisation as noted previously, examining the salient features of Ethiopia's micro-economy and land tenure institutions as they have evolved in the pre-modern period. It will be argued that the impact of global political and economic forces was such as to undermine the very basis of the state itself, in terms of both its economic viability and political accountability. This prompted all of the post-Menilek regimes to undertake strategies geared towards unleashing rapid productivity growth, as a means to meet the revenue requirements of the expanded, resource hungry state. An analysis of each these development strategies will then be

conducted, with particular emphasis upon the EPRDF's ADLI strategy, and it will be found that neopatrimonial imperatives have fatally undermined the implementation of its directives. A progressive deterioration of economic conditions, and at the micro level a greater retreat into subsistence farming by peasants, has been their ultimate consequence. Land tenure itself has been imprisoned within the declining political economy, and, as will be further explained in the next chapter, immobilised as a developmental tool. The latter sections will then attempt to reconcile this depiction with some of the more important perspectives on land tenure extant in the contemporary prescriptive literature. In so doing, what will become apparent is that there are many incompatibilities between the political-economy viewpoint detailed here and much of the recent research undertaken in the field. It will be argued that the divergence is primarily due to the fact that this prescriptive literature has neglected to consider the profound effect of broader political phenomena on land tenure. The prognosis that has been put forward there does not sufficiently cohere with the historical or political realities of the country for this reason, and therefore does not by itself constitute a safe ground from which applied work on land reform can be derived. Several contemporary studies will be critiqued in our analysis, and a limited amount of material will be filtered through as a final addition to our schema. We will then be in a sufficiently informed position to turn our attention to a practical problem – specifically the recent debate on land tenure reform in Ethiopia, which will be the subject of the final chapter.

## **Section (b) – Economic Structures in Pre-Modern Abyssinia**

### **(i) The Political Ecology**

The starting point for our analysis is to consider the traditional Abyssinian political ecology, as it was within this context that key socioeconomic institutions like the land tenure regime evolved. In his seminal work, 'An Agricultural History of Ethiopia', McCann (1995) has argued that Ethiopia's property right systems have been derived primarily from the ox-plough agricultural complex that has prevailed in the highland

region, which is itself a product of human ingenuity in the face a given natural endowment. He begins his study by surveying the data on the country's climatic and environmental conditions over the last millennia. Some of the most important factors he identifies are: the rich fertile soils of the highland region; the lack of vegetative cover in the north since at least the sixteenth century; and the pattern of bimodal rainfall (McCann, 1995, p.34-37). This latter factor has most critically determined cultivation practices, as the limited and irregular rainfalls have brought about sporadic droughts and engendered an overriding focus on food security by farmers. This in turn has spawned socioeconomic institutions that are relatively short-term in their orientation, e.g. annual cropping strategies; fluidity in land distribution, residency, and property rights; and low levels of immovable capital investment in land (McCann, 1995, p.71). Therefore, McCann's analysis suggests that livelihood strategies have evolved in such a manner due to their efficacy in meeting subsistence requirements. Furthermore, the fluidity and short-term orientation of property right systems has been a somewhat necessary and logical derivative of this.

Despite the aptness of ox-plough agriculture and its attendant property right regime for the Ethiopian ecology, McCann's study has also drawn attention to some problems that have accompanied it. He described how human agency has undoubtedly contributed to deforestation and soil loss in the highlands (McCann, 1995, p.33). He also noted that the ox-plough complex has an innate "imperative to expand" (McCann, 1995, p.93), and has likely precipitated a degree of population expansion and migration onto fragile lands. Therefore, it would be fair to conclude that both natural environment and constituent societies have served to shape each other. This process has occurred continuously, although with varying degrees of intensity, throughout the country's history. Indeed, much has been written about environmental degradation in Ethiopia, and its relationship with constituent societies and politics. However, as will be described below, the literature is replete with errors - often due to an excessive emphasis on the effects of either sociological factors or environmental factors (or

both!). In order to clear the ground for our later discussion of economic transformation within this political ecology, the following paragraphs will address a few of the common misconceptions that have been advanced.

One major fallacy concerns the extent to which human agents have precipitated the environmental change via their political and economic activities. In the words of Girma (1992, p.71): “In an agrarian society like Ethiopia’s the nature of land uses are expressions of the prevailing social, political and economic structures”. This is readily apparent, but note that, as McCann has demonstrated, in the broader historical sense, these institutional phenomena have been conditioned within a given ecology. Under such circumstances, the direction of causality between the natural environment and the relations of production goes both ways. Therefore, in pursuing this line of argument there is a danger of overstating the impact of human agency, as is evident in the following example: Gore (2001, p.107), in his famous study, and also Girma (1992, p.58) have cited the commonly quoted statistic that, prior to 1900, 40% of Ethiopia’s land was forested, compared to the 1% left today. Backward cultivation practices and ineffective property right regimes are held accountable for this. However, Clapham (1988, p.xi-xii) has long since debunked this alarmist estimation, stressing that the reality is: the highlands have been largely devoid of forests since at least 1600; dung has been burned as a wood substitute for many hundreds of years in Ethiopia; and even in the distant past, its forest cover was never more than 15% (McCann, 1995, p.36-37). Therefore, it is entirely wrong to contend that Ethiopia’s political economy has instigated the degree of deforestation that has previously been claimed.

A second popular misconception about the Ethiopian ecology concerns the overall potential, in terms of agricultural output, of Ethiopia’s total land mass. For example, Girma (1992, p.64) cited World Bank data that estimated two-thirds of Ethiopia’s land to be ‘agricultural’, with half of that proportion being sufficiently fertile for cultivation. The statistic that Ethiopia’s land could sustain a population of 310 million, if land was

effectively utilised, is also quoted. However, more recent data suggests that only 20-22% of the country's land is suitable for cultivation (Tesfaye, 2003, p.28), and that, with a current population of 75 million, there is now little free land available to support any further expansion (Dessaiegn, 2004, p.15). Therefore, the idealised image of Ethiopia as Africa's breadbasket is also misleading.

A common thread can be identified running through the above misconceptions, and that is the implicit assumption that the Ethiopian environment has been spoiled by the destructive activities of its human populations. It is a covertly teleological viewpoint that assumes a specific development trajectory would have occurred had the 'correct' agronomic, socioeconomic and political intuitions been in place. Famine, drought, soil loss, and ultimately the failure of Ethiopian agriculture to serve as a backbone for economic growth, can all be attributed to man's recklessness, and Ethiopia's poverty can in good part be blamed on the failure of its peoples' to enact conservation and sustainable development. The evidence however does not support this view. As McCann's work has depicted, the Ethiopian ecology is a harsh environment within which to pursue a livelihood, and low rainfall and periodic crop failure appear to be inherent characteristics of the system. While human agency has contributed towards some aspects of its deterioration, as the following example will illustrate, an excessive focus on man's impact on the environment can in turn lead to an overemphasis on conservation projects, with disastrous socioeconomic consequences. Yeraswork (2000, p.152-160) has described how the invasive implementation of top-down conservation schemes during the Derg's tenure actually disrupted functioning indigenous environmental protection mechanisms by usurping local level authority. During the 1980s, the Ministry of Agriculture expropriated control and regulation of fallowing procedures on marginal communal land from some local parishes, in order to enact stricter conservation and reforestation measures. However, the dogmatic means by which this process was carried out, and the severity of its impact upon peasant livelihoods, alienated local populations, to the extent that it failed to engender any

lasting support. Therefore, when the regime collapsed, there was an outpouring of resentment against the harsh regulatory measures, and this resulted in the destruction of many official conservation areas by disillusioned peasants, as well as the extensive plundering of fragile communal lands - which had previously been adequately protected by the church. It was a stark instance of conservation enacted too severely, and with too little attention paid to other important determinants of the political ecology.

Further discussion of the issue of environmental decline and conservation in Ethiopia will lead us too far astray from our primary focus. To reiterate the main point stated at the outset: both the political ecology and its constituent societies have served to shape each other throughout the course of Ethiopia's history. The former has dictated the kinds of livelihood strategies that have been possible, and although these have contributed to a degree of natural resource depletion, e.g. via deforestation, crude environmentalist explanations of the country's agricultural deficiencies can be highly misleading. Such perspectives have excessively emphasised the role of human agency in precipitating decline, or indeed, as in the above example, underestimated the positive contribution made by indigenous societies towards maintaining the environment. Therefore, having established something of the ecological context, we can now turn our attention to the key socioeconomic institution that evolved within that environment – i.e. the pre-modern land tenure system. This will be the focus of the next subsection.

## **(ii) The Rist-Gult System of Land Tenure**

The system of land tenure that prevailed in the pre-modern Abyssinian highlands was highly complex and comprised many local-level variants. Unfortunately though, there is somewhat of a paucity of research on the subject, both historically and more recently. Much of the contemporary literature still draws heavily on Hoben's 1973 study, which is considered seminal. It uses anthropological data in order to draw out the recurrent features of the tenure system, which is known as 'rist-gult', and to construct a detailed

overview of land tenure in the Amhara speaking regions. Therefore this subsection on pre-modern land tenure regimes will also make use of that resource.

In simple terms, 'rist' denotes a bundle of usufruct property rights over land, and 'gult' refers to something akin to fief rights over the produce of a specific area of land, without any claim to the land itself. Dealing firstly with the rist component of this complex, Hoben (1973, p.14) depicted rist as a "cognatic/ambilinal descent system". In theory this meant that individuals could claim rights to parcels of land based on their genealogical connection to a given locale, via mother, father or spouse, which could ultimately be traced to the original settlers of the area. Therefore, within this framework, a person's 'rist' referred to both land currently in their possession and land to which they would be theoretically entitled based upon their lineage (Teshale, 1995, p.73). However, an obvious problem is apparent in this method of division, which is that if individuals could claim land through all of their genealogical decent lines, then surely it must have been the case that virtually all land, both in and out of current possession, was subject to a vast number of potential claimants. Again, in theory this is the case, and indeed Hoben (1973, p.13-14) highlighted this very contradiction at the heart of rist, asserting that it gave rise to a culture of suspicion, intrigue, conflict and litigation. However, descent into a state of perpetual conflict was averted by the role of community elders in mediating rist claims. They would tend to prioritise factors such as material need and status in the community, as well as favouring those individuals who were local and whose parents/grandparents had worked the plot of land in question. Therefore, Hoben (1973, p.21) has observed that individuals exhibited a high degree of "progressive genealogical amnesia", which imbued the system with a sufficiently stable sociological base. Indeed, as shall be discussed below, it was a system that, despite the endemic litigation and dispute, engendered vehement support from its constituents.

Gebru (1996, p.64-65) described the rist system as being: "equitable but not equalitarian; it was ubiquitous and stable, but not uniform in its social content and

applicability”. It was highly discriminatory against Muslims and artisans, often denying them land entirely, and to a lesser degree prejudiced against younger individuals and women. It also allowed for a high degree of political and socioeconomic differentiation within communities, to the extent that Levine has branded Amhara society as “hierarchic individualism” (Levine, 2000, p.126). Messay (1999, p.154) warned against pushing this point too far, noting that communitarian institutions were also clearly extant in traditional Abyssinia. However, he concurred that there was quite evidently a relationship between political power, status and land holding. As described in the previous chapter, Messay asserted that a fundamental aspect of this system was the degree of social mobility it comprised. Enterprising individuals could progress up the social hierarchy and accumulate more rist land or even gult rights regardless of their material background (Messay, 1999, p.132). This prevented the entrenchment of a hereditary class system or the sustained dominance of ‘blue-blood’ families, and is one of the key features of the system that has led commentators such as Hoben (1973, p.8-10) and Messay (1999, p.125-142) to argue that, despite the existence of tributary/fief rights, it was not a *feudal* structure per se – as suggested in earlier work, such as Gilkes (1975) and Cohen and Weintraub (1975). Rist was something unique and indeed fundamental to the historical Abyssinian political economy, and in order to further demonstrate how this was so, we will now consider the gult component of this rist-gult complex.

As noted above, ‘gult’ refers to an entitlement to claim some of the produce from peasants working a specific area of land. This would generally take the form of a portion of the crop as payment in kind, but gult rights could also include stipulations relating to compulsory labour service by peasants on the gult lord’s land etc. (Teshale, 1995, p.83-89). The state also claimed tribute in this form from peasants, and hence the possession of gult rights amounted to a kind of tax exemption. It allowed gult holders to withhold and consume the expropriated produce, as a kind of ‘salary’ in lieu of services rendered to the state. The most extensive gult rights would generally be

awarded to the church, who possessed considerable tax-exempt areas known as 'samon' lands, and to powerful regional notables, who would in return be expected to raise armies that would fight for the emperor. According to Levine (2000, p.125), this structure was in essence a kind of vertically integrated, patron-client hierarchy, in which gult rights constituted the means by which patrons could garner support. It was an arrangement in which the state, church and regions could share in the distribution of agricultural surplus and each maintain a high degree of autonomy and an independent base of power. What then was the role of peasants within this structure?

Opinion has been somewhat divided on the experience of rist-gult from the peasants' perspective. Most developmentalist paradigms and also much of the Ethiopianist historical literature have tended to highlight the degree to which the system was exploitative and inefficient, e.g. Holcomb and Ibssa (1990, p.119-121), Teshale (1995, p.71-73) and Girma (1992) - as described above. The position of the state and nobility is portrayed as parasitic; condemning peasants to a life of poverty and toil to fuel the luxury consumption and militaristic aims of a few, and thus thwarting any possibility for productive investment or technological progress. However, whilst life as a nineteenth century Ethiopian peasant was clearly one of hardship, the idea of the state and nobility as purely parasitical entities is somewhat of a simplistic and misleading conception. As shall be explained below, there was a significant difference between how the rist-gult system functioned prior to Menilek and Selassie's modernisation drives, and afterwards. Cosmetically, the rules of land tenure remained more or less unchanged, but as shall be described, broader socioeconomic changes instigated by transformation at the macro level profoundly altered the context within which these rules operated, and hence their overall effect. Therefore, a more nuanced depiction of rist-gult will now be provided in order to reconcile the above notion of an exploitative hierarchy with the country's changing political economy.

A key concept that can expand upon our understanding of rist-gult is that of political accountability, which was discussed in chapter two and found to be absent in much of neopatrimonial Africa. In pre-Menilek Ethiopia the situation was somewhat different. Such was the fluidity of social status in traditional Abyssinia that a position of authority and privilege was very difficult to maintain over the long term without some degree of genuine legitimacy. In order to delineate more precisely why this was so, it may be helpful to consider the array of possible illegitimate modes by which gult-lords could have attempted to govern within the system. Firstly, physical coercion was not a feasible means of ensuring loyalty over time, as soldiers had to be recruited from within local communities. Indeed, Clapham (1969, p.6) has described how entire regiments would unhesitatingly abandon a fallen commander. And as the previous chapter described, gult-lords could not rely on the imperial army for support, as state power was historically weak vis-à-vis the regions. Neither could they rely excessively on the church to instil a religious ideology that exalted individual gult-lords. Although it did reinforce notions of hierarchy and submission to superiors, this was nevertheless a meritocratic abeyance that was conditional upon the earthly validation of a noble's sanctified role – manifested in qualities like strength, prowess, benevolence and other attributes associated with a popular leader (Messay, 1999, p.71-74). Nobles who deviated from this model could not expect ecclesiastical support. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the land tenure system prevented regional rulers from using economic threats, such as eviction, as a means of ensuring loyalty. This was because, unlike a feudal regime, the rist tenure system vested land rights and hence control over the means of production with the peasantry. In other words, provincial power within this authoritarian and seemingly exploitative hierarchy did not rest exclusively with the class of nobles. Whilst they may have effectively skimmed from the fruits of production, they did not 'own' the productive processes, and hence their political power was constrained by this lack of control. Therefore, whilst peasants were not in a position to exercise their collective power en masse, they were sufficiently emancipated to act as a check on their rulers (evident in the fact that gult rights were not hereditary)

and elicit a degree of reciprocity in exchange for their toil. In the traditional economy, this primarily comprised redistributive expenditure within this system of primitive clientelism.

The most evident form of surplus redistribution in the traditional rist-gult economy was via the plethora of banquets that provincial big-men were expected to supply (Hoben, 1973, p.187). The Coptic Christian calendar is replete with ceremonies marked by such feasting, and gult lords would be expected to recycle much of their expropriated foodstuffs for the constituent communities that initially provided this surplus. Teshale (1995, p.94-99) has described these lavish occasions in some detail. He noted that while a glut of fine cuisine was provided for all, hierarchical considerations nevertheless came into play during such occasions - as nobles consumed the best food and drink, while the leftovers were saved for beggars and the landless. In addition to such occasions, Pausewang (1983, p.41) has described other more subtle ways in which the traditional economy effected redistribution. For example, he notes that work carried out by peasants for nobles, e.g. in constructing their estates or as wage labourers/soldiers, constituted a means by which surplus was reinvested in communities. The trade of locally made tools, clothing etc. at the thriving markets was another. Hence due to the more or less closed nature of village economies in the traditional system, and the limited degree of foreign trade, Pausewang (1983, p.71) has argued that the overwhelming majority of the wealth created by peasants' labours remained within their communities in one way or another. In his view the surplus 'drain' carried out by gult-lords in many ways greased the wheels of the local economy.

In keeping with this line of thought, Messay (1999, p.145-148) adopted a very long-term historical perspective in his analysis, in order to make a profoundly significant point about the pre-modern Abyssinian system of production. Historians have described how the Axumite empire, which ruled the Ethiopian region from one to twelve A.D, was essentially a mercantile empire resting on a base of overseas trade (Pankhurst,

2001, p.22-41), (Marcus, 2002, p.1-12). However, the spread of Islam from Arabia saw Axum progressively lose its coastal ports, and the Christian empire was forced to retreat inwards, encircled by hostile Muslim enemies. Hence according to Messay, the emergent Abyssinian polity found its best prospects for survival to lie in a retreat into self-sufficiency, via the cessation of foreign trade and the reconstruction of an economic complex resting on the appropriation of surplus from agriculture. In so doing, a Christian orthodox state was able to endure, albeit as a somewhat precarious alignment of semi-autonomous regions, but nevertheless one that was effective in recruiting vast armies to repel Muslim invasions. He compared this situation to the now defunct Christian kingdom of Nubia, whose rulers maintained trade links with Islamic polities. In his view, the Kingdom's economic dependence on rival powers led to the erosion of the Christian state via the bottom-up penetration of Islamic values and economic power (Messay, 1999, p.146-147). Therefore, according to this view, self-sufficiency was 'the only game in town' that would allow Abyssinia to sustain as a unified, independent, orthodox Christian entity. However, its survival was at the price of heavy dependency on highland agriculture and an intensive exploitation of that ecology, in order that sufficient surplus could be raised to maintain the overarching polity.

In aligning the above perspective with the material considered previously, an even deeper insight into the role of the tenure regime within the Ethiopia political economy becomes apparent. In effect, the rist-gult system regulated the distribution of resources in such a way as to make the state itself a viable entity. It ensured that an adequate level of surplus and labour were made available to the ruling classes such as to render the existence of overarching political institutions possible – in particular, the capability to raise armies that could repel invaders. And, critically, it elicited sufficient political accountability from amongst its peoples such as to ensure national unity endured, and internal conflict did not cause the monarchical structure to breakdown or fragment. Within this complex system, socioeconomic institutions such as rist-gult functioned as

legitimizing interfaces between ordinary people and their overlords. And one of the key aspects of rist-gult in the traditional economy that rendered it legitimate was the fact that it accorded peasants with some degree of economic power, manifested in the clientelistic redistribution of agricultural surplus and recycling of locally created wealth, such as to render their burden more tolerable.

In light of the above, how is it that the notion of gult-lords as exploitative parasites has come about? That transformation will be the subject of the next section. Before it was possible to proceed to a direct analysis of the grounds for that characterisation, which as stated previously has constituted the historical bedrock of most contemporary studies of land tenure, it was essential to undertake the preceding analysis of rist-gult in the pre-Menilek period. To fail to understand its transition from that epoch into the modern one, during which time the legitimating basis of rist-gult entirely eroded, is to fail to understand the true nature of the socioeconomic problems, such as land tenure, that face the contemporary Ethiopian state. This is because, as will be further demonstrated below, these are fundamentally problems of political accountability.

In summary, the above historical exposition has served to elucidate the integral role of rist-gult land tenure in Pre-Menilek Ethiopia. It has shown that the tenure regime was neither backward nor irrational, but in fact a central component of a complex political and economic superstructure, and more fundamentally a rational adaptation to a given ecological endowment. It has also highlighted why the pre-modern polity was a somewhat precarious structure, due to its narrow dependency on skimming agricultural surplus. This fragility became most evident in the socioeconomic disintegration that resulted from the incursion of new, international economic forces during Menilek's reign. The previous chapter described how the delicate balance of power between state and regions was contorted by the onset of globalising and modernising forces. Likewise, and in fact as an alternative aspect of this same process, the socioeconomic substratum of the traditional Abyssinian polity, i.e. farming communities and their

local-level trade networks, underwent a similar economic disenfranchisement under modernisation. And indeed, this metamorphosis was part of a broader process that included Menilek's southward expansions and ultimately the genesis of the Ethiopian state in its contemporary form. Therefore, the evolving socioeconomic environment under Menilek and Selassie, and its effect on the functioning of land tenure institutions will be the subject of the next section.

### **Section (c) – New Market Imperatives and the Ethiopian State**

Abyssinia's re-engagement with the world economy instigated a transformation that comprised many complex and interrelated dimensions. In particular, three key processes can be identified as primary levers of socioeconomic transition, which are: (i) the southward expansion of Menilek's state, and the imposition of a highly unequal and exploitative land tenure system, (ii) the penetration of market forces into the northern rural economy, and (iii) the emergence of a developmental ethos and the country's first efforts to promote economic growth. The first of these two occurred to some degree contemporaneously and in conjunction with each other, but for ease of analysis will be examined independently. Taken together, these will ultimately explain how the country's reformed socioeconomic base profoundly altered the functioning and indeed viability of the land tenure system, despite the appearance of continuity in the northern highlands. This in turn altered the viability of the polity itself. As will be described below, the latter process was hence a reaction to these first two – in the sense that it constituted a later attempt to redress some aspects of the deterioration that had resulted from the prior dislocation of the socioeconomic base from its political superstructure.

The previous chapter described the onset of political centralisation under Menilek and Selassie. It was found that the rise of the modern Ethiopian state, initially made possible by the availability of Western arms, required a volume of material subsidy that the traditional economy could not provide. This point should be especially apparent in light of the above, as the rist-gult complex sustained a polity in which the resources at

the state's disposal were relatively low, and largely controlled by the regions. It was hence a political and economic arrangement that was sufficient to meet the requirements of state survival in pre-modern East Africa - most notably because of its ability to raise and sustain a large, labour-intensive, low-technology army. However, with the advancement of Western colonial powers into bordering regions, Menilek rightly perceived a new kind of threat to Abyssinia's survival as an independent polity, and indeed one that seemed to require rapid societal transformation in order to be overcome. For Western, and most notably Italian territorial ambitions in the region to be contained, and for Abyssinia to pose as a credible sovereign entity in the eyes of the West, both Menilek and Selassie respectively saw centralisation and modernisation as a necessity. And of course, it no doubt also accorded with their individual imperialistic ambitions, as described previously. Such factors are ultimately at the root of Abyssinia's epochal transition, both in prompting and facilitating the southward expansion that created the modern Ethiopian state, and in fatally undermining the traditional northern highland system of production. The socioeconomic consequences of these two outcomes will now be examined in turn.

#### **(i) Territorial Expansion and the Southern Tenure System**

As noted above, Menilek's southward expansion had material objectives at root (although combined with theocratic and prophetic overtones that cannot necessarily be discounted). Specifically, these comprised a desire to: pre-empt Western advancement; access southern raw materials; acquire new productive lands to meet the needs of the rising northern agricultural population; and to bring lucrative southern trade routes under the jurisdiction of the Abyssinian state for taxation (Bahru, 2001, p.58-63). Therefore, once Menilek's armies had subdued the south, a large proportion of the land was awarded to his soldiers in order to meet the needs of control, extraction and agrarian resettlement. This form of land grant has been termed 'maderia'. It was similar to gult in the sense that Abyssinian soldier-settlers were granted the right to claim tribute from the southern peasants inhabiting the land, but with the pivotal distinction

that it was not underpinned by a rist regime. The southerners were not considered legitimate 'owners' of their land, and instead the ultimate jurisdiction for the land was maintained by the state (Gilkes, 1975, p.111). This process of conquest and subjugation required the cooptation of some indigenous personnel, and therefore the position of 'balabat' was created within the new arrangement. This designation accorded indigenous collaborators tributary privileges similar to maderia in exchange for carrying out administrative duties for their new Abyssinian overlords (Holcomb and Ibssa, 1990, p.120). As with the north, there was high degree of local diversity in the precise nature of the emergent southern tenure arrangements, but broadly speaking all the land was claimed by the Abyssinian crown and then divvied up for tribute amongst northern soldiers, gentry, and officials, and southern balabats - who retained about one third of the total (Gebru, 1996, p.68).

The implementation of the above system of landholding in the South had profound and multifarious consequences for the new state and its constituent peoples. The soldier-settlers, or 'neftejna' as they were known – literally meaning 'gun-owner' (Holcomb and Ibssa, 1990, p.108), were placed in a position of dependent privilege to the emperor. Many enjoyed greater riches and influence within the new imperial bureaucracy than those gult lords who remained in the north. However, as described in the previous chapter, this was at the expense of regional autonomy, as it allowed the central government to cement a position of absolutism. The state itself had significantly enhanced its legal impunity by way of both this new system of clientelism, and the expropriation of political and economic power from southern peasants. Moreover, a suitable resources base had been acquired to bankroll the creation of modern state institutions, ensuring that provincial forces could no longer conceivably challenge the central hegemon. This redistribution of power came most evidently at the expense of southern peasants, who were effectively consigned to a position of enserfment. They possessed no legal claim to their lands in the eyes of the state, and were more heavily burdened with tributary requirements than their northern counterparts (Bahru, 2001,

p.192). They became an underclass of tenant cultivators, and as the forces of modernisation gathered pace in Ethiopia, the extent of their exploitation progressively increased. In particular, Selassie's implementation of commercial cash-cropping and the commoditization of land would comprise perhaps the greatest burden. However, before this latter phase of modernisation can be discussed, it is firstly necessary to consider the socioeconomic changes in the north, which occurred in parallel to the southward expansion.

### **(ii) The Decline of Economic Autonomy in the North**

Pausewang (1983) has provided an in-depth analysis of the socioeconomic effects of Ethiopia's modernisation on northern peasants. He described how the rise of the modernising state instigated what was no less than an epochal change on rural Abyssinia, but one whose outward manifestations were deceptively low key (Pausewang, 1983, p.41-44). This latter point is critical, as it explains why contemporary writers, such as Dessalegn (1984), have glazed over that crucial earlier period in order to focus more on the latter, more visible, stages of the centralisation process. Pausewang's key contribution was in accentuating how this point of first impact of the new global economic forces comprised the most profound change in Abyssinia's precarious agrarian economy; shaping the direction of subsequent developments. Much of the following analysis will seek to build upon these insights.

As discussed in the previous chapter, the rise of an outwardly oriented, modernising central state in Abyssinia altered the balance of power between the centre and the regions. One of the socioeconomic consequences of this shift was that it considerably disenfranchised northern gult lords in their capacity to effect provincial self-determination. In light of the new circumstances, some opted to compromise with the state by agreeing to take on senior positions within the new civil service, and struck deals that saw the relocation of many regional notables to urban areas - primarily Addis Ababa (Teshale, 1995, p.119-123). The price they paid for these lucrative new

positions was that (at least implicitly) they allowed the Government an increased administrative role within the regions. However, in many cases, these newly urbanised nobles were allowed to retain their regional gult rights. What this meant was that surplus was extracted from peasants as in the past, but rather than being reinvested locally, as described above, this expropriated wealth was now invested in urban economies – often on imported luxury consumer goods, which were becoming increasingly available (Gebru, 1996, p.21). Therefore, rural areas were denied the recycled surplus previously invested in local products and labour. In time, as gult-lords became distanced from their communities and more embedded in urban consumer lifestyles, their propensity and means to host the traditional feasting ceremonies also waned, and rural peoples were denied a further source of redistributed surplus. This was compounded in some regions by the imposition of government tributary requirements, in addition to those gult commitments already in place (Gebru, 1996, p.20-22). Therefore, gult evolved into a purely extractive and indeed parasitical practice, as peasants became forced to relinquish the fruits of their labour without receiving any compensation.

As Pausewang (1983, p.67-71) described, the above was not the only sense in which modernisation usurped the social welfare enhancing aspects of rist-gult. Traditionally, the exchange values of the main rural consumer goods (i.e. food, clothing, tools etc) were calculated in relation to each other at the local level. However, the incursion of foreign goods like textiles and also currency itself into these formerly closed economies fatally undermined the terms of trade under which village-level producers had to operate. For example, artisans lost the custom of gult-lords to the cities, signifying a crucial loss of income. This meant that, in order to raise sufficient funds to purchase the requisite imported materials for their work, i.e. threads, metals etc. (which were now valued in cash, not kind) they were forced to try and deal more in cash prices with peasant customers. Furthermore, they were increasingly forced to compete with long-distance traders, who proliferated in rural areas at this time hoping to profit from the

new rural-urban conduits. These traders were more adept at dealing in cash exchange, and better able to access varied goods and raw materials. In light of these new market place arrangements, peasants themselves faced increased pressure to adopt cash as their medium of exchange. This was further impressed upon them by the demands of the new centralising state, which attempted successfully to phase out taxation-in-kind in many regions (Bahru, 2001, p.192-193). In practical terms, this removed peasants' economic power, as it put them at the whim of price setting forces that emanated from outside their communities. In time, and as the position of local artisans became usurped by long distance traders, peasants were increasingly forced to shoulder the transport costs involved in dealing with their new associates. This further reduced the purchasing power of their labour output - in terms of the exchange value of their crops (Pausewang, 1983, p.67-71). And as shall be described below, the peasants' burden was even further increased when the state began to manipulate produce prices to skim revenue from exported goods. Most became extremely destitute, and were unable to engage in prior levels of expenditure. This impoverishment forced them into a far greater degree of self-sufficiency than in the past (Pausewang, 1983, p.83-84). In stark contrast to the earlier days of the closed but thriving village economy, they engaged with cash markets only when absolutely necessary, and instead were forced to eek out their livelihoods in relative isolation, without enjoying many of the gains that can be achieved via trade. Having lost their economic power, they were rapidly marginalized into a position of unassailable poverty. To date these conditions remain largely unchanged.

Such was the complexity of the above process, that peasants at that time were unable to comprehend the true nature and magnitude of their changing circumstances. They were painfully aware of their increasing burden but could not readily identify its source. Therefore, their dissent tended to be directed towards individual 'offenders' - i.e. those perceived to have profited disproportionately from the new arrangements. Pausewang (1983, p.62-64) has suggested that the high degree of litigation that has been observed

in twentieth century rist regimes is in part a consequence of this misperception<sup>38</sup>. Hostility to the incursion of central state institutions was also no doubt related to this. Gebru has described how mass discontent was at times channelled into peasant revolts, such as in Gojjam in 1968. There, an uprising was sparked by government efforts to augment the state's administrative role in the region by measuring peasant lands for tax purposes. Regional nobles were able to manipulate peasants into fighting to maintain the 'traditional' order, which of course included nobles' gult rights (Gebru, 1996, p.180-183), and many lives were lost as the state attempted to reassert its authority. What such revolts served to demonstrate was that because the root source of peasant' grievances was systemic and intangible, nobles were able to utilise prevailing conditions of hardship and disillusionment for their own purposes, and indeed the chaotic, disparate and confused nature of the peasant revolts described by Gebru betrays this fact. And of course more recent commentators have also been misled by circumstantial evidence, as shall next be described.

The complex processes outlined above can provide a more realistic explanation for the increasing hardship experienced by peasants from the late nineteenth century onwards, than do accounts that have simply taken the rist-gult system in its latter, exploitative stage as the starting point for their prognoses. For example, authors such as Dessalegn (1984, p.30-33) and Girma (1992, p.1) have chastised the tenure regime for being backward, exploitative and irrational, but in so doing failed to account for how it came to be so. As was demonstrated above, the land tenure system in the Ethiopian Highlands was at one stage an integrated and indeed essential component of the political economy. It was simply the case that the visible attributes of the system remained relatively inert until the revolution, because there was an institutional lag in adapting to the new socioeconomic conditions. But in failing to properly explain the tenure regime's decline into an archaic remnant, there is a serious danger of simply

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<sup>38</sup> The litigation is also no doubt related to increased land scarcity under conditions of rising population growth.

proceeding under the assumption that Pre-Modern Abyssinia comprised a primitive, irrational and ruinous system of production. This is dangerous because it can actually serve to invert one's perception of the impact of the modernisation and centralisation processes - from being a new source of hardship at the micro-level, to a great salvation from a festering indigenously created quagmire. In reality, the changes that precipitated Ethiopia's rural economic deterioration and the obsolescence of its socioeconomic institutions were a consequence of Abyssinia's return from economic isolation and reintegration with international trading networks, rather than a malady for which this reengagement would be sought as a potential cure. It was a new set of circumstances to which the emergent Ethiopian state struggled to adapt, precisely because its isolationist Abyssinian predecessor had comprised a socioeconomic base that was, if not antithetical, then clearly ill-equipped for such relationships. It had retreated into self-sufficiency for survival, but now the global environment was demanding something quite contrary in order for the unified Christian hierarchy to persist. Menilek and Selassie failed to see this contradiction, and, in hastily trying to imitate the West, they unwittingly unleashed a process of socioeconomic transformation that served to undermine the entire political structure. They ushered in political and economic circumstances to which Ethiopia has as yet failed to adapt.

The above analysis should not however be construed as an attempt to glorify the traditional order, or suggest there is any merit in trying to turn back the clock. Rather, the intention was simply to fairly depict the changing socio-economy, and in so doing explain how the land tenure system has operated throughout. The traditional rist-gult system was a workable order, in the sense that societal forces kept each other in check without any one becoming overwhelming. And it comprised sufficient political accountability to maintain the polity as a cohesive whole. This is no longer the case in Ethiopia. The acquisition of foreign arms and subsequent military expansions skewed the entire balance of power in favour of the top. The new outwardly-focused economic relations provided an unprecedented, albeit temporary and unreliable, resource base

with which overlords could enhance their positions of power. Emperors could hence become more domineering vis-à-vis the regions, and Gult lords could afford to neglect their prior redistributive obligations to the peasantry by becoming clients of the new resource empowered state. In the words of Pausewang (1983, p.84):

Access to and control over the market and its resources had in fact already displaced access to and control over land and its resources as the ultimate source of power in Ethiopian society.

In light of this fact, gult lords, and indeed the entire Abyssinian political edifice could, for the first time, break free of its dependency on the peasantry, and hence of its narrow redistributive role. The inverted hierarchy that had ensured the majority of surplus be invested locally, and hence that the central state be contained as a limited, pre-modern entity, was toppled, and the social contract underpinning it was implicitly torn to shreds. This allowed for the emergence of a more powerful modern state, but one that its constituent society lacked the material foundation to support. Adopting the trappings of a Western state is an expensive business, and in Menilek or Selassie's Ethiopia, the socioeconomic base required to subsidise such an elaborate political entity was simply not extant. Indeed, the primary objective of all governments since Menilek has been to somehow try and prevent a complete unravelling of the centralised hegemon, in the face of widespread societal rejection. In terms of economic policy, this has given rise to what Eshetu Chloe (2004, p.25) has termed "running to keep in the same place". With this in mind, the following section will examine some of the efforts to address the problem of meeting the material needs of the centralised state via policies to bring about economic development under the post-Menilek regimes. It will also consider how this in turn affected the socioeconomic base and institutions like land tenure.

## **Section (d) – The Growth Dilemma – Macro and Micro-economic Policy in the Twentieth Century**

### **(i) The Selassie Era**

Menilek's conquests had successfully secured access to southern raw materials. However, economic imperatives within Selassie's modernising order eventually necessitated the undertaking of more elaborated efforts to generate revenue. This primarily comprised the implementation of large-scale commercial farming in the south, and the emergence of various industrial enterprises. Dealing firstly with this former component, the highly unequal division of the post-conquest south was outlined above. As Gebru (1996, p.69) has described, until the post-war period, the Government was content merely to collect tribute from southern tenant farmers. Some pieces of land known as 'qelad' were measured and sold off to northern settlers as private property, but this remained on a small scale in the early years. However, as Bahru (2001, p.191) has noted, the imposed tenure institutions of maderia land and state land were easily convertible to private property en masse, as they comprised no guaranteed usufruct rights for peasants in the way that rist did in the north. Large-scale commercial farms were introduced in the 1950s, and many of the northern settlers were able to accrue vast estates (Ottaway, 1978, p.17). The state retained ownership of some areas, often in conjunction with foreign investors, and in others accorded southern nobles with control in exchange for a share of the profits (Holcomb and Ibssa, 1990, p.132-136). This concretised the position of the majority of southerners as tenant workers. Furthermore, as monetarisation gathered pace, the central government attempted to rationalise the revenue collection process in order to bolster its income. Many of the traditional duties associated with gult were abolished and the primary obligation of tenants simply became the payment of rent and tax (Bahru 2001, p.192-3). This came at the expense of some of the alternative modes of tribute previously enjoyed by regional overlords. However, Selassie's extractive endeavours met with limited success overall - especially in the north. Capturing agricultural surplus proved insufficient to sustain the resource-

hungry state. Indeed, given that traditionally agriculture had only supported a limited state, and that new economic conditions had heightened rural poverty, it is unlikely that it comprised much residual surplus for the state to tap. Hence from the 1960s onwards a greater emphasis was placed on industrialisation as a means for governmental subsidy.

The renowned Ethiopian economist Eshetu Chloe has conducted the most thorough review of industrialisation and economic growth under Selassie's Government to date. Aside from the somewhat haphazard nature of the policy-making process, along with dubiousness of much of its output in terms of economic viability, Eshetu ultimately found that structural constraints were responsible for undermining industrial development. Indeed they were so severe that the whole project itself may have been in vain. He states that: "the entire manufacturing sector had to operate within the straightjacket of a stagnant economy" (Eshetu, 2004, p.50). Citing the 'iron law' of industrial development – i.e. that it must be underpinned by a substantive surplus, usually generated from agriculture - Eshetu described how Ethiopia attempted to industrialise without this essential prerequisite. To compensate for the deficit, the majority of government investment had to be consumed by the tiny industrial sector throughout Selassie's and indeed latterly the Derg's respective tenures. Hence a supposedly revenue-generating endeavour actually put further strain on the state's resources, necessitating that external sources of subsidy, e.g. US patronage (Teshale, 1995, p.112), be more heavily relied upon to maintain government expenditure levels.

Realistically of course, as Eshetu (2004, p.135-136) in fact noted, agriculture was the only plausible prop upon which industrial development could have rested. However, this would have required that agriculture itself be permitted leeway and investment to recover from its beggared state and rejuvenate itself. Furthermore, given the ecological limitations on Ethiopian agriculture mentioned above, and the spiralling levels of population growth, the viability of agrarian-led development for Ethiopia could itself be questioned - indeed, Eshetu was sceptical of the potential for that (Eshetu, 2004,

p.172-173). However, that debate is somewhat academic, because the economic imperatives of Selassie's absolutism scuppered any possibility that agriculture would be permitted the requisite breathing space to develop. Instead it was further strangled by policies such as export taxation and price control, in order that the short-term exigencies of state survival could be met. His elites earnestly tried to build their industrial enterprises on the back of agrarian surplus, but in such a way that further smothered the sector, quashing its prospects for growth or recovery. The long-run inviability of this situation manifested in the economic hardships experienced by both peasant and urban classes, and eventually precipitated state collapse in 1974.

### **(ii) The Derg and the Emergence of State Landlordship**

At the time of the Derg's ascension to power, the land tenure question was at the forefront of the political debate. The exploitation of the south had reached an unbearable degree under Selassie's privatisation programme, as onerous rent payments and, in some cases, outright landlessness, had impoverished peasants to the point that the 'hungry season' had become a time of insurmountable suffering for many (Teshale, 1995, p.152-153). Both the state and its neftejna agents were held responsible for this, and a great deal of resentment was fostered among southerners towards their northern overlords. However, even among the new urban, predominantly Amhara classes this injustice was recognised, and gave rise to the 'land to the tiller' movement amongst Marxist student protestors in the 1960s, which would eventually become one of the slogans of the revolution (Bahru, 2001, p.225). In the north, relations between peasants and gult lords remained more amicable prior to the revolution, although poverty and widespread food insecurity were also becoming a gravely serious problem – evident in the 1973 famine. Peasants were especially fearful that privatisation would start to creep north, and so clung ever more vehemently to their rist system. Hence when the land reform proclamation of 1975 was issued, their response differed quite drastically from that of their southern counterparts.

In essence, the new socialist legislation of 1975 abruptly halted the process of land commoditization. All land was taken under the stewardship of the state, and usufruct rights were granted to peasant farmers on an egalitarian basis. A ceiling of 10 hectares was set as a limit to any family's holdings, and the large commercial estates held by the nobility were either broken up and redistributed by the newly created peasant associations, or expropriated by the Government. The sale, lease, exchange and/or mortgage of land were all prohibited, and, with the exception of inheritance, the process of transferring land became the sole jurisdiction of state ministries/agents (Nega et al, 2003, p.106). In the south this revolution in land tenure was ardently welcomed. Peasant associations were hastily formed in many areas and the process of land redistribution began immediately. In some cases this led to violent clashes with former landlords, but with the state's backing the peasants were ultimately able to drive them out (Dessalegn, 2005, p.8). In contrast though, northern peasants were generally hostile to the reform. They were suspicious of the new military government, initially perceiving it as an Oromo/Muslim assault on the Christian ruling order (Ottaway, 1978, p.12). In response, many joined provincial paramilitary units led by their former gult lords. These groups harangued the Government in its efforts to subdue northern regions for several years after the revolution. Nevertheless, as Pausewang (1983, p.112) has noted, the new land tenure regime edged its way north and usurped the traditional system in spite of the resistance. This was primarily because state courts simply stopped recognising rist claims. The distribution of land holdings as of 1975-76 was effectively frozen and, in the eyes of the state, peasant's current holdings became their legitimate usufruct share. This was aided by the fact that the status quo land distribution in the north was relatively equal (compared to the south), as the forces of privatisation had failed to significantly penetrate the region and hence an egalitarian redistribution was not deemed necessary. Overall then, the land reform brought about a kind of equalisation between the country's northern and southern tenure systems. After 1976, the majority of Ethiopian peasants were in possession a small plot of land, 'bequeathed' to them by the state, to which they were effectively permanent holders but not owners.

A further aspect of the 1975 land reform worth noting was that it comprised a reassertion, albeit momentary, of regional power. In the chaos of the early post-revolutionary period, peasants' associations (PAs) emerged in rural areas to fill the political vacuum. However, as Ottaway (1978, p.181) has described, if such an arrangement had continued then it would have been at the expense of the scope and influence of the new revolutionary state. However, in keeping with its hegemonic imperative, the regime opted to envelop and refashion the entire PA structure into a more loyal, top-led hierarchy. The regional reassertion proved to be a transient one, and the new decentralised peasant institutions were quickly deprived of any independent authority. This was possible because, despite its precariousness, the new socialist state nevertheless comprised a degree of power that dwarfed any regional resistance at that point. Therefore, the opportunity to enact a deconcentration of state power vis-à-vis the periphery, and perhaps diffuse some of the country's centrifugal tensions, was allowed to pass by unfulfilled. Instead, the new military regime opted to persevere with conventional statist and dictatorial strategies for effecting governance, at the expense of a possible reintegration between state and society.

The Derg's reassertion of central authority went hand in hand with a broader policy to capture and control the means of agricultural production, for the purpose of state building. In contrast to Selassie's regime, they perceived agriculture more than industry as the appropriate vehicle for state-led economic development (Eshetu, 2004, p.102). Therefore, they opted to utilise a two-pronged developmental strategy. On the one hand, policies of the type described by Bates (see chapter 2) were employed, hence, for example, peasants were forced to sell part or all of their produce to the Government's Agricultural Marketing Corporation (AMC) for a deflated price, which would then be resold on urban and international markets for a profit (Girma, 1992, p.20). On the other hand, the Government also favoured socialist development policies, such as compulsory agricultural collectives, state farming and villagisation. According to

Eshetu, the effect of these policies, combined with the increased military expenditure undertaken in response to spiralling regional separatist conflicts, was as follows: Between 1974 and 1990, the budget deficit rose from 3% to 17% of GDP; food production per capita fell by 2%; and the saving rate fell from 13% to 4% (Eshetu, 2004, p.131, 209-210). He concluded that: “the military regime left behind a bankrupt economy and an accumulation of social problems”. Therefore, when the Derg exited after 17 years of chaotic rule, they had successfully transformed the country’s economy from a condition of dilapidation to that of destitution.

### **(iii) The EPRDF’s Development Strategy - ADLI or façADLI?**

To date there has only been a partial recovery from these grim circumstances. GDP growth of 7.6% was registered in 1992-1993, mainly due to a 4.9% increase in agricultural production (Eshetu, 2004, p.268), but this could of course be related to the cessation of conflict. The country has experienced an average GDP growth rate of 4.5% between 1991 and 2004 (EEA, 2005, p.6), although with severe fluctuations in some years, which appear to be correlated with climatic events (FAO, 2005). For example, the growth rate of per capita income in agriculture was 8.8% in 2001, -5.7% in 2002, -14.7% in 2003 and 16.0% in 2004 (EEA, 2005, p.7). The years of negative growth correspond to a period during which there was extensive crop failure due to drought. Such abrupt oscillations in the figures led Eshetu (2004, p.284) to assert that the weather has a greater impact on Ethiopia’s economic growth than does the Government.

The EPRDF-led regime has acquiesced to some liberalisation measures, such as currency devaluation, export tax reduction, public sector salary control etc, but according to Eshetu: “although the TGE [EPRDF] is committed to privatisation on paper, there is no evidence whatsoever that this commitment is serious” (Eshetu, 2004, p.285). This would accord with the political analysis undertaken in the preceding two chapters, as government intransigence to liberal-democratic reform may be most

explicable when interpreted via the lens of neopatrimonialism. As a means to further investigate this idea, a more detailed analysis of the current regime's Agricultural Development Led Industrialisation (ADLI) strategy will next be undertaken. This will also serve to steer our discussion of socioeconomic history through the last decade or so back to the present day, and in so doing integrate the above with our preceding examination of politics. Furthermore, it is essential to consider ADLI in some detail as a prerequisite for the next chapter's analysis of the contemporary debate on land tenure, for the reason that the new incumbents have more or less persisted with the Derg's land tenure policy - arguing that 'publicly' controlled land is central to the efficacy of their development strategy. As the following will illustrate, this claim, like the ADLI strategy itself, is suspect.

The crux of the EPRDF's ADLI strategy is that agriculture, in this case smallholder peasant agriculture, is made the priority for development, because it is believed that a surplus can be raised in this sector, which can then be used to progressively develop industry. The economic rationale behind this is that Ethiopia has both land and labour but little capital at present, hence concentrating on these first two will play to the country's strengths, and create wealth for the future generation of capital (EEA, 2004, p.2-3). This of course also accords with the 'iron law' of development mentioned above, as agricultural wealth is envisioned as the catalyst to enhance industry. In this case it is assumed that the surplus will primarily be generated by: using technology and green inputs to intensify production on already cultivated land; expanding production onto free land by population resettlement; and by redistributing land that is being used sub-optimally (MoI, 2001, p.47-48). Within this model it is argued that a state-held, redistributive system of land tenure can contribute to rapid development by ensuring that land is made freely available to all farmers and allowing them to keep their own profits without paying rent - hence also ensuring a high degree of social equality is maintained. Interestingly, this perspective is somewhat reminiscent of the family farm model that was described in chapter one. Donors like the World Bank have in recent

years envisioned a model of development for Africa that is driven by smallholder agriculture, and may or may not comprise private ownership of land (World Bank, 2003). And indeed, as will be discussed in the next chapter, donor organisations in Ethiopia have generally received ADLI more favourably than have indigenous analysts. Nevertheless, from within the latter group a multitude of criticisms have been levelled against ADLI that have served to highlight inherent contradictions and political motivations lurking beneath its surface. It is important to consider some of these here as they provide further corroboration of neopatrimonial interpretive framework.

Some of the major criticisms of ADLI that have been advanced are as follows: Firstly, it has been contended that there are serious theoretical shortcomings inherent in the very idea of an 'agriculture first' approach to development. Many Ethiopian economists believe that to do so is to focus solely on supply, i.e. generating high crop yields, to the complete neglect of demand, i.e. the market where the crops can be sold. At present, farmers outnumber non-farmers in Ethiopia at a ratio of 7-1 (Berhanu, 2003, p.8-9). That fact, combined with the lack of demand on regional or international markets for the country's raw agricultural produce, unfortunately means that even if a surplus of output is brought about by more intensive and extensive cultivation, there is no market to absorb the excess. Instead, what has happened as a consequence of bumper harvests, such as were experienced in 1995-97 and 2000-02, is that agricultural prices have collapsed due to excess supply. Secondly, it has been argued by economists such as Getnet (2006, p.167-189) that there are no examples of an ADLI-like strategy having worked anywhere else in the world, because in countries like China, Japan and India heavy investment was simultaneously put into industry to create a complementary sector to agriculture. Manufacturing provided both a demand for agricultural inputs and a supply of capital outputs that could aid farmers in cultivation, hence raising efficiency and economic growth as a whole. Industry also provided an alternative means of employment for peasants as agriculture became more capitalised and its labour needs declined. Therefore, the relationship between agriculture and industry was more of a

symbiotic one than a 'first this, then that'. In light of this evidence, Ethiopian economists have attempted to persuade the Government to focus more upon industry and urban development (see, for example, Berhanu and Befekadu (eds.), 2003), and there appears to be some recognition of this fact in the Government's recently revised development strategy: Plan for Accelerated and Sustained development to End Poverty (PASDEP) (MoFED, 2005). The new policies suggest that a more balanced degree of emphasis will be placed upon both rural and urban sectors in future. Nevertheless, as will later be illustrated, this victory may be more virtual/rhetorical than it is substantial.

A final, and more fundamental point about the inadequacy of ADLI is worth considering, as it will lead us to an alternative conception of what the Government is primarily trying to achieve via the strategy. Interviews conducted in Ethiopia in 2007 suggested that, outside the Government, there is a wide consensus that there is little free land in Ethiopia onto which new farming populations can expand - short of carrying out major irrigation projects in the parched lowland areas or clearing forests in the southwest highlands. Moreover, the country has a rural population growth rate of 3% per year, meaning that the number of farmers is continuing to grow rapidly while the land is running out (EEA, 2005, p.148). Indeed, in some areas of the highlands population pressure has already reached a near unbearable degree, as was noted above. Farmers are forced to eek out their subsistence on 'micro-plots' (Dessalegn, 2005, p.7-8) and young people in these areas are commonly no longer allocated free land by redistribution, despite constitutional guarantees that they will be, because there is nothing left to give. Given such inherent limitations in the agricultural sector, ADLI's success would appear to hinge critically upon an expansion of employment in industry. However, as yet ADLI has failed to generate any substantive increase in the scope of this sector. As of 2004, industry's share had only grown from 9.2% to 10.7% of GDP since the 1960s (EEA, 2005, p.9). Industry's value added share is also fairly low – around 42% of the gross value of production (GVP), which is considerably less than the 60% benchmark posited by the World Bank, which represents the average value added

share of GVP for a firm in a developing country (EEA, 2005, p.49). Therefore, given the relative smallness of manufacturing in Ethiopia, there remain few alternatives to a peasant livelihood.

In light of such major impediments, it would seem rather unrealistic of the Government to assume that agriculture, in its current form, can by itself generate a surplus capable of driving rapid growth and industrialisation, when in fact, according to Dessalegn (2003c, p.1), “the rural economy is increasingly losing its ability to supply a marketable surplus”. Furthermore, as Dessalegn has also asserted, even the sporadic periods of increased production that have occurred since 1991 may be nothing more than temporary, weather-related blips - “the feeble squeak of a moribund economy” (Dessalegn, 2003c, p.8). The data would seem to support this view, as the average growth rate of agriculture has been 2.3% per year since 1992, which is less than the rate of population growth (EEA, 2005, p.146). Therefore, a more likely scenario than agriculture producing a surplus to drive industry would be a collapse of peasant production under the strain of its excess workforce, leaving behind a booming population without the means to feed itself. And indeed the fact that a growing percentage of the populace is becoming permanently dependent on food aid would seem to suggest as much (Dessalegn, 2003a, p.6).

It is apparent then a broad and long-term assessment of Ethiopia’s macroeconomic prospects does not yield encouraging conclusions. Therefore, the question remains: could the Government possibly have missed all of this? When I spoke with a senior member of the Ministry of Agricultural and Rural Development I was assured that ADLI is in fact a “perfect strategy” and is working very well. On the ground though, there is little evidence of ADLI in action. The Ethiopian economy is unquestionably heavily dependent on export revenue from agricultural products like coffee, livestock, flowers etc, and floriculture in particular has been on the increase in recent years. But according to anecdotal evidence gathered during fieldwork, and in stark violation of

ADLI's stated goals of equity, social justice and free land for all, the Government has been carrying out systematic, uncompensated evictions of peasant farmers in peri-urban areas of Addis, in order to auction off the land to foreign investors seeking to create large-scale flower exporting enterprises. Exports that can quickly generate cash for the Government are accorded priority in Ethiopia, and in fact government investment in agriculture as a percentage of GDP has reached its lowest ever level under the EPRDF regime (EEA, 2005, p.255), (Dessalegn, 2003a, p.8). In late 2005, the prognosis offered by the Ethiopian Economics Association, which conducts a detailed annual review of the Ethiopian economy, was as follows:

All other developmental policies have to be geared towards complementing and promoting export activities ... in a way, the development strategy of the country is, at least theoretically, export-led rather than ADLI which the Government is claiming to pursue (EEA, 2005, p.100-101).

This final, fatal contradiction in ADLI can in a sense account for all of the previously discussed flaws. Quite simply, ADLI is a predominantly fictitious development strategy, and much of its prognosis, out with the realm of government policy documents, does not in fact exist. The strategy does not possess the economic rationality to stand up to a serious examination, and it is contended here that it can only really be deciphered through a conceptual framework that incorporates underlying political motivations. The data clearly shows that the primary economic objective that the EPRDF regime has pursued above all else has been to maximise its own revenue, as is in keeping with neopatrimonialism. Another key component of that paradigm is that such regimes will attempt simulate characteristics of democratic governance, such as free elections, differentiated political parties and in this case it would seem a liberal development policy, primarily geared to appease foreign critics. In particular, this situation accords most closely with the bureaucratic variant of neopatrimonialism outlined previously, to which it was argued that contemporary Ethiopia reasonably

accords. For the EPRDF, ADLI serves as an ideological tool - similar to its other liberal trappings - that is ultimately intended to justify the monopolistic position of the ruling party in political and economic affairs. And within ADLI, the regime has utilised enough developmentalist language to hold the attention of donors, whilst nevertheless providing a pseudo-explanation for its pursuit of neopatrimonial imperatives from within this framework. For example, as will be explained in detail in the next chapter, in the sphere of land policy the EPRDF has struck this balance by ardently clinging to a nationalised, hierarchical system of land tenure as a means to control the peasantry, while citing dubious economic justifications for this policy from within the ADLI framework. In short, ADLI is a smokescreen, and has proved incapable of addressing the country's developmental problems.

Having completed our analysis of ADLI, and outlined its precursors in the sphere of development policy under the Derg and Selassie, we have effectively directed our discussion of the historical transformations in Ethiopia's socioeconomic conditions through to the present day. While the issue of macroeconomic growth policy under the various regimes may appear somewhat of a digression from this theme, it was essential for our purposes to delineate the remaining pertinent characteristics of the political economy within which socioeconomic phenomena, and in particular land tenure, have evolved. In summary, we can say that, from Selassie's time onwards, successive regimes have sought to rejuvenate the country's stagnating economy by way of rapid development engineered from above. Ultimately, this process could only have been successful had it instilled a compatible economic grounding for the political superstructure, i.e. by forging a new bond of political accountability between state and society and creating mechanisms for the legitimate distribution of wealth within the polity – absent since the pre-modern period. This outcome was highly unlikely though, for the reason that twentieth century Ethiopia has been burdened by neopatrimonial imperatives, which have impelled rulers to focus upon short-term political survival to the neglect of all else, and in so doing have drawn upon more resources than their

crumbling economies could muster up. Development under these circumstances was highly unlikely, even with the acquisition of huge loans.

In light of the above, it is now readily apparent why some commentators have depicted the political economy of countries such as Ethiopia as innately anti-developmental. However, it can also account for the results obtained by those who have focused more narrowly on specific components of micro-economic underdevelopment, some of which were discussed in chapter one and will be further explored in the next section. A recurring argument that has been advanced within this thesis is that, in the context of neopatrimonial Africa, it can be deeply misleading to focus upon isolated elements of the micro-economy, without considering the inadequacies of the system as a whole, as what are merely symptoms of a greater malady may be interpreted as fundamental causes. In the specific case of land tenure in Ethiopia, whether considered in either its historical rist-gult form or its contemporary nationalised one, the above has highlighted why it is misleading to interpret the tenure system as in some way responsible for the country's underdevelopment. In the next chapter it will be further advanced that the tenure system cannot be construed as a major barrier to future progress – in so far as reforming it would likely instigated major changes in productivity growth, due to the same systemic limitations described previously. However, before we can turn our attention to this key issue in the contemporary debate on Ethiopia's development, it is important to firstly consider some of the alternative interpretations of the evolution of land tenure that have featured in the literature. These alternative accounts, particularly that of Dessalegn Rahmato, have been very influential, and so our analysis would be incomplete if we did not consider, firstly, whether the differing perspectives can provide us with further insight into the issue despite the areas of contention, and secondly, precisely in what way such views contrast with those expressed here and how if at all the differences can be reconciled. This will be the objective of the following section.

## **Section (e) – Competing Narratives: Alternative Accounts of Socioeconomic Decline and Land Tenure**

The preceding discussion of twentieth century development policy and land tenure has again factored political analysis into the interpretative framework. It has depicted land tenure within an economy that was fatally constrained by hegemonic imperatives. That however is not an approach that is commonplace in the contemporary prescriptive literature. Instead, Ethiopia's economic underdevelopment is generally attributed to straightforwardly socioeconomic phenomenon, such as the land tenure regime itself. In particular, the post-revolutionary nationalised system of land holding has been subject to a barrage of criticism, which, whilst comprising some degree of validity, has not always entirely accorded with political and historical reality. In light of such incongruities, and given that it will be necessary for us to make use of contemporary prescriptive sources in the next chapter when examining the debate on land tenure in Ethiopia, it will be useful to here consider the intellectual antecedents of that literature. This will allow us to integrate some insights from that material into our perspective, and to identify where these efforts have erred, thus facilitating a more expedient treatment of such sources in the next chapter.

An unfortunate obstacle to the above endeavour is that the historical, political and economic assumptions upon which much of the contemporary prognosis rests are generally not explicitly stated within these sources. Rather, they offer a seemingly scientific presentation of the subject, focusing almost exclusively on technical economic issues, and hence their underlying premises can only be intuited. Nevertheless, for our purposes it is essential to try and ascertain what assumptions underpin that work. The fact is that a scientific methodology does not surmount the problem that land tenure is highly interconnected sociological phenomenon, and that it is requisite to possess some broader perspective on the workings of the political economy within which a tenure regime is situated, before one can offer meaningful prognosis on how to improve tenure as an isolated component. However, because in

many cases unanswered questions remain about precisely what view of Ethiopia's political economy the writers hold, as well as how they have interpreted historical and political phenomena within their work, the following will therefore seek to unpack and evaluate the foundations upon which of much of that analysis rests.

The point of departure for our critique will be to consider the work of renowned Ethiopian economist Dessalegn Rahmato. Upon surveying the literature, it is readily apparent that, since the publication of his pioneering study 'Agrarian Reform in Ethiopia' in 1984, Dessalegn has been the major contributor to the understanding of land tenure in Ethiopia. Unlike many of his contemporaries, Dessalegn's work does itself comprise considerable historical, and to some extent political, analysis. However, in the subsequent work that has built upon Dessalegn's efforts, little has been done to develop his initial conceptions of how contiguous historical and political phenomena have impacted upon land tenure, despite the fact that many insightful interpretations have been published in recent years – some of which have been discussed above and in the previous chapter. Therefore, that body of work has been insufficiently integrated into contemporary studies of land tenure, which still rest heavily upon Dessalegn's initial conceptual premises. Or perhaps more accurately one could say that, subsequent to Dessalegn's early efforts, prescriptive studies of land tenure have neglected to consider the impact of political economy whatsoever, and hence have continued to decipher its influence upon the efficacy of the tenure system through an outdated framework. It will therefore be our task to re-evaluate Dessalegn's conceptions in light of the more recent work on Ethiopia's political history. This should ultimately contribute towards the construction of a more reliable theoretical basis for the derivation of applied work – a task that will be completed by way of the final chapter.

An important fact that was noted in an earlier section was that Dessalegn did not differentiate between the pre and post-Menilek rist-gult systems in his account of Ethiopia's historical tenure regimes. He primarily orientated his perspective around the

land nationalisation of 1975, viewing the 'traditional' system that preceded this event somewhat uniformly (Dessalegn, 1984, p.30-33). Indeed he has been very scathing of that production complex; depicting it as backward and inefficient, and, critically, has not considered the extent to which the system was a necessary derivate of the country's ecology, or a key pillar of its political superstructure. The following quote starkly illustrates his interpretation of the pre-modern state and the rural economy as discrete systems:

Modernisation left the land system and the role of the state in resource allocation largely unchanged. Centralisation was superimposed on a traditional polity without disturbing existing social relations (Dessalegn, 1984, p.22).

But as was described above, while the centralisation and modernisation processes were not accompanied by changes in the rules governing traditional institutions like land tenure, they nevertheless altered the underlying socioeconomic conditions of those systems, which in turn altered their functioning and ultimately the prosperity of rural economies. Dessalegn has not taken this less overt mode of transformation into account, and neither has he considered the connection between socioeconomic institutions and the political accountability of the ruling order. It would seem that in seeking to assert Ethiopia's entitlement and capability to undergo modernisation, and to undermine analysts who may romanticise traditional African societies, Dessalegn has both overstated the backwardness of the old rist-gult system and underemphasized the deleterious consequences of the intrusion of international economic forces. This in turn has had the consequence that the critical limitations on Ethiopia's developmental prospects, imposed by the breakdown in legitimacy between state and society resulting from the aforementioned modernisation process, have not been factored into the prognosis offered by Dessalegn and hence others. As shall be illustrated below, this has led to two primary errors that have recurred in the much of the subsequent literature, which are as follows: Firstly, the relative significance that socioeconomic phenomena

such as land tenure pose as a barrier to development has been exaggerated. Secondly, there has been an underestimation of the systemic obstacles posed by the country's neopatrimonial political economy, which has emerged as consequence of the aforementioned breakdown in political accountability.

Further clarification of the direction in which interpretations such as the above have steered subsequent research can be observed in Dessalegn's writings on agricultural stagnation in the twentieth century. In a sense, he has offered an inversion of the perspective outlined in this chapter, because rather than emphasising how the forces of modernity may have eroded rural socioeconomic conditions, he has in fact blamed both archaic indigenous institutions and bad policy making for failing to harness the productive potential of modernisation. He is both pre-emptively scolding of those who might question the benefit of incurring global economic forces, and rueful of what he has perceived as a failure by the country's past economic planners to adequately harness the opportunities that new modernising environment presented.

There is a tendency on the part of some writers to exaggerate the magnitude of the 'capitalist offensive' in agriculture, and to view the emerging rationalisation of production as some kind of catastrophe. (Dessalegn, 1984, p.29)

Unless one took the position that the gods had forever doomed the country to stagnation and poverty, agricultural modernisation, with all its warts and blemishes, held some promise for improvements in the national economy. (Dessalegn, 1984, p.30)

Dessalegn seems to greatly rue the equalisation process instigated by the 1975 land reform - highlighting the disastrous consequences for productivity of subdividing already fragmented land in densely populated areas. This practice has contributed to the emergence of what he has termed 'micro'-plot holding (Dessalegn, 2005, p.7-8), which has undoubtedly reduced the prospects for raising an agricultural surplus from

smallholder farms. He has also lamented the class equalisation - or “peasantisation” in his words (Dessalegn, 1984, p.61) that was precipitated by the revolution. For Dessalegn, Selassie’s modernisation and commercialisation of agriculture had laid the foundations for the emergence of a kulak/yeoman class of small-scale owner operators, capable of driving agrarian development and economic transformation (Dessalegn, 2005, p.8). He has therefore blamed post-revolutionary land tenure policies for the country’s “agrarian involution” - in which potentially enterprising commercial farmers have retreated from markets into peasant subsistence production.

It considering Dessalegn’s perspective on the above issues, and his conclusion that bad land tenure policies since the 1970s can in good part account for the stagnation of agriculture, the effect of his interpretation of history on his prognosis of more contemporary phenomena is starkly apparent. For example, it was demonstrated above that peasants began to retreat into subsistence cultivation far in advance of the revolution. This process ultimately began as village economies collapsed under Menilek and Selassie’s expansion of international trade. Peasants, ill-equipped to compete under the changing circumstances, saw their economic power within the national economy gradually expropriated by blossoming national, urban and regional markets, and this sparked their retreat into subsistence farming. While the process may well have gathered pace following the land reform, their heightened propensity towards self-reliance could have been due to many different aspects of the Derg’s abysmal economic management, rather than simply because of the reformed tenure system. Therefore, the grounds for blaming either the pre or post-revolutionary tenure systems for Ethiopia’s failure to develop, in isolation from broader political and economic phenomenon, appear shaky, and Dessalegn’s assumption of such a restricted explanation may be indicative of a deficient interpretation of both politics and history.

Of course, Dessalegn is not the only commentator who has opted to attribute a high degree of blame to institutions like land tenure for Ethiopia’s underdevelopment, as the

next chapter will illustrate (see also EEA (2002, p.22-23)). Hence it may be useful at this stage to undertake a brief digression in order to consider the conceptual limitations inherent in such narrow perspectives. To *blame* land tenure for Ethiopia's underdevelopment is to envision the tenure system as too disparate an entity. This is abstraction gone awry. Such conceptions would seem to imply that a tenure regime could somehow be discretely lifted out of its encompassing socio-economy and replaced by a more appropriate system. But, to use a linguistic analogy, this is like trying to say that a given word has meaning *in of itself*, out with the bounds of the language in which it is spoken; when in fact the meaning is only a relative one – that is, relative to all the other words in the language. Likewise, while a tenure regime is, by definition, a system of rules governing land use, it is nevertheless intangible out with the bounds of a specific historical, ecological, socioeconomic and political context. The direction of causality between an institution and its environment goes both ways, and hence a tenure regime cannot itself be profoundly changed if there are major rigidities that are contiguous to it. The political economy within which its must operate is an obvious such contiguous factor. In any specific instance, far from solely precipitating economic transformation, the land tenure system must be both a product and producer of change. In the case of Ethiopia, it became a component part of a declining socio-economy – a broad and transformative process that was sparked by the incursion of exogenous phenomenon into what was previously a closed and functioning system, and within which land tenure itself became both defective and defected. And in terms of its ability to serve as a conduit for economic development, it effectively became imprisoned within a political economy that was anti-developmental by its very nature.

Returning to our discussion of erroneous interpretations of land tenure and history, what can be most directly inferred from this more abstract digression is that land tenure represents a point of convergence between disparate environmental constraints, which include political, ecological and socioeconomic phenomena. In reality the interaction and evolution of such factors is ongoing, indivisible and intangible, and of course must

be somewhat simplified and differentiated for conceptual purposes. But if that differentiation is too exclusive, and filters out too many contiguous factors, then it can lead to highly misleading suppositions. Where more recent accounts of land tenure in Ethiopia have erred most in this regard has been in neglecting to consider the potential role of political and historical factors. And interestingly, as the next chapter will demonstrate, it is again a failure to account for political constraints that has been the most striking omission in the very recent prescriptions for land tenure reform. Broadly speaking, a degree of political analysis can at times be observed, but it rarely gets to the crux of the issue. For example, Dessalegn (2004, p.42) has stated that nationalised land tenure has been used by the Ethiopian state as a “political weapon” with which to control rural populations. He therefore suggested that political calculations have at times overridden economic rationality in the formation of state policy. Likewise, an Ethiopian Economics Association survey conducted amongst peasant farmers found that 38% of respondents believed ‘political calculations’, intended to control the peasantry, have factored heavily into government land policy (EEA, 2002, p.97). However, such observations serve to both confirm the above perspective, by demonstrating that politics is a key determinant of land tenure, and simultaneously discredit themselves, by failing to plausibly integrate this awareness of political constraints with the main body of their economic analysis. Were they to derive the full implications of their insights, then they would realise that land tenure by itself is neither the cause of nor solution to country’s economic problems. Rather it is the broader conditions of state-society rupture and a prevailing neopatrimonial political economy that are the locus around which other maladies have grown.

### **Section (f) – Concluding Remarks**

The above could perhaps be construed as a somewhat unorthodox historical account of land tenure in Ethiopia, in the sense that less attention has been paid to the precise tenure rules themselves than to the context in which they have operated. The case made here has simply been that if one is to accept the reasonable contention that

socioeconomic phenomena like land tenure are to a great extent conditioned by their environment, then such an outcome is largely unavoidable. In fact, such has been the magnitude of the ecological, economic and political constraints on the evolution of Ethiopian society, that those narrower phenomena, such as land tenure and its associated institutions, somewhat pale in comparison. This is not to dismiss these essential elements, but simply to view them with realistic perspective. More extensive and intricate delineations of land tenure systems have been undertaken elsewhere, and indeed it was argued above that this technical detail has often been at the expense of incorporating more fundamental determining factors into the analysis. Here however the intention was not merely to consider Ethiopian land tenure in a void, but rather to credibly elucidate its role within the country's historical development. This has therefore necessitated that both the institution itself and broader economic and other environmental phenomena be granted a balanced share of the analysis.

It was argued above that the traditional rist-gult tenure regime functioned effectively within the pre-modern rural economy, and in fact constituted a key pillar of the overarching political superstructure. It accorded peasants with a degree of economic power such as to render their burden for the most part tolerable - evidenced by the fact that the system comprised sufficient political accountability for the redistribution of wealth within the polity to endure over time. It was this legitimacy that in turn allowed for the continued existence of the political superstructure itself, and therefore it is the subsequent erosion of this legitimacy – a consequence of the impact of global economic forces on the rural economy - that has precipitated economic stagnation and the onset of neopatrimonial governance. Unfortunately though, because much of the contemporary prescriptive literature has opted to target more specific components of the micro-economy rather than consider the broader political economy, the impact of defective institutions like land tenure on development has frequently been overstated. And conversely, the explanatory power of both history and in particular politics has been greatly undervalued. Nevertheless, some analysts have accorded these factors

more consideration, and this may serve to lay the groundwork for a future re-evaluation. For example, the greatly respected economist Eshetu Chloe arrived at the following conclusion in one of his later works, which aptly sums up the above perspective:

I am persuaded that the most fundamental cause of Ethiopia's underdevelopment is political, and this applies to all three regimes. To be sure, all of them desired economic progress and perhaps strove for it in the ways that they deemed most appropriate. The question, therefore, may not be one of will. It is rather a question of whether the entire political environment was conducive to development. And I submit that this was not the case. (Eshetu, 2004, p.2)

That being established, the framework is now in place within which the contemporary debate on land tenure reform can be examined.

## **Chapter 5 The Debate on Land Tenure Reform in Ethiopia**

### **Section (a) – Introduction**

This final chapter will provide an analysis of both the debate on land tenure in Ethiopia, and the forces driving that debate. It will sketch out the various perspectives held by key actors within the field, and outline the main arguments that have been advanced for and against various forms of land tenure reform. In particular, the thoughts of the Government, donors, academics, indigenous practitioners and ordinary farmers will be expounded. In so doing, many lengthy comments gathered from field interviews conducted in Ethiopia during February and March of 2007 will be reproduced<sup>39</sup>. The rationale behind this approach is that by extensively drawing upon the spoken, as well as written, views of key actors, maximum insight into the nuances of the various perspectives should be achieved. In so doing, it will become apparent that much of the debate has taken form that is at times oblique and at other times largely fallacious. This is due to a combination of political expediency and also narrow conceptualisations of the tenure issue. Some commentators have taken sanctuary within the restricted bounds of their discipline, discussing only the technical aspects of land tenure. Others have adopted the practice of debating around the debate, circumventing controversial issues to avoid provoking the Government, and hence again disproportionately emphasising certain aspects of the issue to the neglect of others. The nature and consequences of this tangential analysis and dialogue will be explored.

Following on from a delineation of the debate, a practical illustration of the consequences of skewed, narrowly conceived analysis will be provided by way of a discussion of the land administration and certification project that was launched in 2004. It arguably represented a landmark compromise on land reform between donors, such as USAID and SIDA, some Ethiopian economists and the intransigent Federal

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<sup>39</sup> As in the previous section, many of the comments are quoted anonymously at the request of the interviewees.

Government, and was portrayed by supporters as an innovative means to address the country's tenure insecurity problems. However, an analysis of the programme reveals there is little in the way of common understanding or purpose underlying the compromise, and in fact the mentality amongst some donors, such as the World Bank, UNECA, USAID, SIDA etc is now one of development in spite of the state – which they know on some level to be corrupt and ineffective. Unfortunately though, because such projects must be implemented at least in part via the arms of Government, then the implausibility of this method would seem to be readily apparent. It will be argued here that evidence of this fact can already be observed in the administration and certification scheme, even though the project is still in its infancy. What will be concluded from the analysis is that the very idea of development in spite of the state is a ludicrous one, and will only serve to perpetuate further merry-go-rounds of analysis, debate, policy proposal, compromise with the Government, partial implementation and then project abandonment in the face of failure, followed by a 'reconceived' analysis, debate, policy proposal, etc.

In light of the above, and in keeping with the prior analysis offered in the thesis, it will be concluded that land tenure reform, and indeed many other developmental endeavours in Ethiopia, are likely to meet with very limited, if any, progress, so long as the systemic barriers to the process are ignored. This prognosis more or less accords with that of Lockwood (2005) for Africa more broadly, as was previously described. It will therefore be argued that the land reform debate will be best served if attempts are made to widen the sphere of analysis, from a narrow conception of tenure as a technical problem to a broader understanding of it as a component part of an overarching political ecology. This will allow for the derivation of more balanced assessments of the role that tenure reform can feasibly play as either a constraint on or a vehicle for development in Ethiopia in the formulation of future interventionist strategies.

## **Section (b) – The Federal Government on Land Tenure, Part 1 – Rhetoric**

As described in earlier chapters, the system of state landholding in Ethiopia vests farmers with only usufruct rights over land under their possession. The relevant passage in the 1994 constitution reads as follows:

The right to ownership of rural and urban land, as well as of all natural resources, is exclusively vested in the state and in the public. Land is a common property of the Nations, Nationalities and Peoples of Ethiopia and shall not be subject to sale or to other means of exchange. (Fasil, 1997, p.231)

Holding rights are considered permanent, although the Government has reserved the right to redistribute more or less any land whenever it sees fit, as occurred in Amhara region in 1996-97 (Ege, 1997). As the above clause states, land can be transferred permanently by inheritance, but never by sale, and temporarily by rental. Free land is also available to all citizens who desire an agricultural livelihood according to the constitution. However, for those who wish to move into other spheres of employment, the state can expropriate their land for cultivation by others, and will at best only pay compensation for ‘improvements’ on the land, but not the land itself (FDRE, Proclamation 456/2005, article 9.1). The political imperatives underlying such a strategy, most notably the desire to control the peasantry, will be discussed later in the chapter. For now though, in order to proceed with an analysis of the primary content of the land tenure debate, the issue will be assessed more at face value in terms of its economic rationality. The EPRDF has encased its land policy within an ideology of rapid state-led growth and social justice. However, much of the economic justification offered by the Government in support of its stance is so incoherent and contradictory that it defies any real possibility of reasoned debate and analysis<sup>40</sup>. Therefore,

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<sup>40</sup> See MoI (2001, p.39-51). Claims are made like “the transfer of land is not a development-oriented activity in its own right; it wastes capital”. Such statements err so far from fundamental economic principles, that answering them would require corrections that are too lengthy for the word limits of this thesis.

competing perspectives have tended to focus upon the few key arguments advanced by the regime that are most plausible<sup>41</sup>, and it is only those that will be outlined here.

The main justification offered to support state retention of land is that if peasants could sell their land then, given Ethiopia's high poverty levels, many would undertake distress sales during hard times. In the long run this could have the polarising effect of creating a minority of wealthy landlords and a huge underclass of landless, destitute peasants (Interview with MoARD source, February-March 2007), which would be both socially and economically undesirable. This of course mirrors the prognosis offered by the World Bank (2003, p.93-98) that was discussed in chapter one, which asserted that the free sale of land might have a deleterious effect on welfare in some parts of Africa, for reasons such as distress sales, speculation by exploitative investors etc. Therefore, until economic growth and hence substantive off-farm employment have been generated, the Ethiopian Government is intent on restricting land transfer by way of the nationalised tenure system. This objective is further illustrated by the restrictions placed upon labour mobility under their land policy. Federal law states that land left uncultivated for 2 years by a migrant labourer may be confiscated and redistributed to the landless, and in fact the Government has been fairly open about its reason for this. During an interview conducted in the MoARD, a senior staff member was upfront about the fact they have attempted to keep peasants confined to their rural localities in order to reduce urban in-migration, due to the fear of spiralling urban unemployment and homelessness (Interview with MoARD source, February-March 2007). Overall then, state ownership has been conceived as a means to avert the harmful effects of a free land market.

The Government has also adopted several other lines of argument in favour of state landholding. They have claimed that privately owned land could not feasibly be used as

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<sup>41</sup> See, for example, the very impartial and even magnanimous reviews of land policy issues conducted by Berhanu Nega et al. (2003), Dessalegn (2004) and Samuel (2006a).

collateral in rural Ethiopia, as banks do not possess the capability to administer confiscated land in the case of default (MoI, 2001, p.45). They instead assert that only a group credit scheme is viable given current conditions, which can best be administered within a system of state-freehold. The Government has also made the case that, were land to be privatised and then consolidated into large commercial farms by wealthy individuals, then this could actually reduce productivity growth. This is because if the new owners were to institute agricultural capitalisation, then this would reduce employment requirements, which would be sub-optimal in a country that is labour but not capital abundant. Alternatively, were commercial farmers to employ peasants as tenants and opt for a labour intensive strategy, then productivity would also be reduced because, according to neoclassical/neoliberal economic theory, owner operators tend to be more efficient and hardworking than tenants because they can reap the fruits of their own efforts, rather than receive a fixed wage (MoI, 2001, p.42). It is therefore argued that state landholding can provide the best of both worlds, as it prevents land from being accumulated by the rich, while still allowing individuals to enjoy the rewards of their own labour, hence maintaining Pareto-efficient incentives.

There are two levels at which one can respond to the above prognosis. Firstly, the Government's contentions can be debated in purely economic terms – as they have been by indigenous intellectuals whose responses will be considered in the next section. However, a broader and more fundamental reply could also be offered, which necessitates prior consideration, because it highlights a critical distinction between how the Government and opposing intellectuals view land tenure. This can in part explain how and why they have been, in a sense, debating the issue at cross-purposes. This key disparity will therefore be highlighted here before the competing perspectives on land tenure are considered.

It can readily be deciphered from the arguments offered by the Government that they view the land tenure system as a static set of rules, and this has manifested itself in their

very conservative attitude to reform. Their central arguments concerning state landholding display a generally negative conception of the efficacy of tenure, in the sense that they mainly highlight ways in which privatised tenure would undermine economic growth, rather than delineating how state ownership would contribute towards this. They do not believe land reform can or should contribute to economic development in the way that many economists do, and this fact is evidenced in statements such as the following: “As the experience of many countries has shown, the reliable solution for fragmentation of land is rapid growth, not land ownership policy” (MoI, 2001, p.49). The Government continually defers to an impending prosperity that is somehow going to transform the Ethiopian economy, but, critically, without utilising pivotal institutions within the economic system itself, such as the tenure regime. Land reform is therefore not a vehicle for growth in the Government’s eyes, but rather a tool that can be used to keep at bay other phenomenon that could undermine development, e.g. wealthy capitalists, landless/unemployed masses etc, but without really being a component part of development itself. The EPRDF has characterised tenure as a passive set of conditions that must be upheld in order that their Agricultural Development Led Industrialisation (ADLI) strategy can work its magic and transform the economy. In their view industrialisation would precipitate off-farm employment, hence relieving the burden on agriculture and the tenure system, without the rules of the latter needing to change. But the fatal flaw in this logic is in the fact that the best available evidence seems to suggest that ADLI is utterly incapable of delivering any significant growth at all. It rests shakily on an implausible and contradictory foundations, which, as argued in the last chapter, may be due to the fact that it is above all else a derivative of the neopatrimonial political conditions extant in the country. Sound economic policy and growth must often be forsaken in order that immediate political survival can be ensured. Could it therefore be the case that the Government’s land policy, like its broader ADLI strategy, cannot be taken seriously?

The preceding analysis offered in this thesis would suggest that there is a very real possibility that the answer to the above question is that it cannot be taken seriously. Nevertheless, as was also previously demonstrated, neopatrimonial regimes may still contain pockets of rational bureaucracy attempting to assert a positive influence, say within departments like the MoARD, and in fact evidence to support this conjecture has been gathered from fieldwork<sup>42</sup>. It is therefore possible, and indeed probable, that the Government's land policy is an ambiguous mix of both disguised political imperatives and sincerely thought-out attempts to effect positive change from within the confines of those core dictats. This is more or less the assumption that indigenous economists and especially donors, such as the World Bank, UNECA, USAID, SIDA etc, have proceeded under in entering the tenure debate, and, putting aside the issue of whether or not this can ultimately be effective for now, we will next consider their opposing perspectives and the extent to which they have adhered to the politically motivated restrictions imposed by the state.

### **Section (c) – Ethiopian Economists on Land Tenure**

As Yigremew (2001) and Haile (1998) have described, in the past the land tenure debate has often been polarised around the question of nationalised versus privatised ownership – especially during pre-election times, as many opposition parties have campaigned for privatisation (Aalen, 2002, p.89). During an interview, one academic source suggested that there might have been more political than economic objectives underlying such stances, because if the EPRDF was to concede on the issue of state landholding, then it would in effect be conceding the right to control the peasantry, upon which much of its power rests. This notion of land reform serving as an ideological proxy for other political objectives will be explored below. However, out with the ranks of opposition parties, criticism of the Government's land policy has generally been derived from more straightforwardly economic analysis. The debate has

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<sup>42</sup> Upon visiting the government's ELTAP and EPLAUA agencies, it was apparent that many technically competent and dedicated members of staff were earnestly working on land tenure reform and other development-oriented activities.

moved on somewhat from the earlier public versus private ownership impasse (Yigremew, 2001), and as will be discussed below, many economists and other Ethiopian thinkers are now more reserved on the issue of out-right privatisation. That is not to say that such critics have entirely ignored the more fundamental political problems, but they certainly have preferred to undertake narrower, technically focused analyses of the issue, which may of course be related to the degree of harassment that opposition party members have suffered in the country. What is more definite though is that there is a striking difference between how economists and the Government have conceived land tenure, which would seem to indicate a stark contrast in growth philosophies, as noted above. The former have depicted it not as an inert and passive institution that must remain unchanged until the mysterious onset of economic growth, but rather as a component that can contribute towards the growth of the overall system. In their eyes land tenure is a dynamic developmental tool that can be utilised to both channel and even precipitate wealth creating behaviour by way of its effect upon the incentives of individuals operating within its bounds. This perspective will be illustrated by the discussion below, beginning with an outline of the more prevalent criticisms that have been levelled against the EPRDF's policies and the prevailing landholding system.

It was argued above that the Government seems to possess a static view of land tenure. Having failed to either spell out a constructive role for it within development, or fully outline the efficacy of their own policies, they have instead 'justified' their stance by simply criticising the alternatives. Hence they cite a plethora of imagined negative outcomes that supposedly only state stewardship can prevent – e.g. land accumulation by the rich, mass distress sales, lack of credit, the inefficiency of commercial farms etc. But according to Dessalegn (1994, p.11): “these arguments are based on assumptions and fears, and very little hard evidence is offered to support them”. Many analysts have rubbished the Government's claims, for example, arguing that peasants would not be so irrational as to sell their only source of income in hard times. Surveys carried out by the

EEA/EEPRI (2002, p.48-49) indicate that most peasants (over 90%) would choose only to rent land rather than sell to meet short-term food needs. Girma (2006, p.40), using a dataset that factored in investor's preferences etc, estimated that only 5.8 - 8.3% of agricultural households would be displaced by privatisation. Nevertheless, it is impossible to say conclusively what would happen under a privatised system, and this is a fact that the Government has attempted to exploit in order to redirect focus from the status quo, and onto to 'what if' scenarios.

Upon considering the different criticisms that have been levelled against the prevailing system by economists, it quickly becomes apparent that the vast majority have centred upon a single theme – the distortion of agents' incentives to invest and produce under a nationalised ownership system. The Government has maintained the right to redistribute or repossess land without conceding any possibility of refusal by peasant farmers, and indeed has enacted this en masse in Amhara region and also numerous peri-urban areas. Therefore, many economists have argued that farmers lack tenure security under such conditions. In the words of Yeraswork (in discussion with the author, February 2007), the prevailing system can: “deform how people relate to the land and perform in productive and reproductive activity”. Fear of losing their land in the near future has seemingly engendered a very short-term mentality amongst producers, which has been manifested in things like a lack of long-term investment projects undertaken by households, as argued by Berhanu Gebremedhin et al. (2003, p.12-13). It may also explain farmers' preference for planting quick yielding rather than longer-term crops in Ethiopia<sup>43</sup>. For example Workneh (2006, p.147) provides data showing that 93% of Ethiopia's total cropland is dedicated to annual, temporary crops. Furthermore, a lack of tenure security could result in a failure to undertake adequate

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<sup>43</sup> I was told a famous anecdote while on field research about an Ethiopian farmer visiting the Middle East. He saw an elderly man planting a palm tree that takes 17-20 years of growth before it produces its first crop, and the Ethiopian asked why the old man was planting something he would likely never live to see the fruits of. The old man replied that his food came from the labour of his grandfathers and so he was now working for his own grandchildren. My informant advised me that such a collective, long-term mentality is sadly lacking in Ethiopia.

conservation efforts on land, such as fallowing and anti-erosion measures. Empirical evidence to support this point is weaker (Hagos and Holden, 2006), but nevertheless even the Government, or at least its decentralised regional arms, have themselves sought to address this critical problem by reinforcing tenure security via land titling projects, as will be discussed below. Yeraswork (2000, p.213) has also highlighted the effect that skewed ownership incentives could have had on the birth rate. Under both the Derg and EPRDF the primary legitimate means by which new land could be acquired was when a young individual ‘came of age’ and requested their first plot. Given this fact and also the very low average income levels, having extra children may have been perceived as a means to procure extra family land and also to ensure financial security in old age. If it were the case that land policy has in part exacerbated population growth, then this would seem to be a gravely serious issue that tenure policy must promptly address.

Other arguments levelled against the prevailing system of land holding have mainly centred on issues related to land transfer. For example, Deininger et al (2003a, 2003b) and Samuel (2006b) demonstrated various ways in which land transfers via sale or rental could in theory contribute towards efficiency, tenure security and increased investment in agriculture. Furthermore, it has frequently been argued that many individuals must be encouraged to leave agriculture in order to relieve the current burden on the over-cultivated highlands<sup>44</sup>. This redeployment of labour would be facilitated if individuals were allowed to freely transfer their land when required, and were entitled to full compensation for land that is relinquished. However, as described above, the Government, which wants to prevent movement out of agriculture until more alternative employment is first generated, is currently pursuing precisely the opposite policy. Their stance rests critically on two key assumptions. Firstly, that agriculture can sustain the number of people currently seeking a livelihood within it,

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<sup>44</sup> See, for example, the work of Cour (2003) and Solomon and Mansberger (2003) on the key importance of urbanisation for economic development in Ethiopia.

and secondly that off-farm employment is in the process of being generated during this period of delayed urbanisation. The former assumption would seem to be highly dubious, given the fact that food aid constituted 20-25% of rural food in the 1990s (Dessalegn, 2003a, p.6). And the latter appears equally unlikely, as economic data indicates that the industrial sector has failed to rejuvenate at all during the last 15 years, but has rather continued to deteriorate (EEA, 2005, p.43-79). Therefore, it would seem that the Government's rigid opposition to land transfer and population movement will become increasingly untenable over time.

In light of the above, the proposed policy reforms advanced by Ethiopian intellectuals have been mainly concerned with reinforcing tenure security and liberalizing markets. The former aim in particular has evoked a great deal of attention and consensus amongst economists - in the words of Dessalegn (1999, p.9): "I think we all agree that tenure security is primary". Hence it is advocated that land policy in Ethiopia should above all else be geared towards bolstering farmers' long-term holding rights via: a cessation of administrative redistribution (Dessalegn, 2004, p.36), (Deininger et al., 2003a, 2003b); full compensation for land confiscated by the state (interview with donor source, February-March 2007); and a liberalised land market to facilitate transactions (Girma, 2006, p.35-42), (Ahmed et al., 2002), (Samuel, 2006b). However, in the political sphere, some have campaigned for full privatisation in light of this latter notion, and, as noted above, this has been a serious bone of contention between the Government and opposition political movements. Recognising the futility of this situation, economists have again sought to emphasise that they believe it is tenure security rather than the actual ownership regime itself that is pivotal, and, for example, Dessalegn (1999, 2003b), Berhanu Gebremedhin et al. (2003) and World Bank (2003, p.120-131), have argued that tenure security can be provided without full privatisation.

One fact that is puzzling, given the number of practitioners who have emphasised the efficacy of reinforcing tenure security, is that there is in actuality a distinct lack of

empirical evidence to corroborate such claims. Neither the Ethiopian context nor the broader African one has generated conclusive data demonstrating a parallel between the strengthening of tenure security via the formalisation of land rights and the realisation of increased micro-level investment or productivity growth. Chapter One described the lack of evidence to support the idea that titling interventions in developing countries have significantly affected household investment decisions. Likewise, data from Ethiopia is equally weak/ambiguous, and rests mainly on theoretical assumptions about the centrality of tenure security. For example, studies by: Holden and Yohannes (2001), Hagos and Holden (2006) and Deininger et al (2003a) all reported either inconclusive or insignificant results about the efficacy of efforts to strengthen tenure security on investment decisions. This fact is not lost on the tenure security advocates, as for example both Tesfaye (2003, p.41-43) and Dessalegn (2004, p.17) acknowledge the lack of hard evidence at present, but are nevertheless convinced that it is a significant factor. However, for tenure security to be accorded with a position of centrality, then surely a more substantive foundation for this claim should firstly have been established.

The sceptical viewpoint outlined above is not however intended to cast doubt on the theoretical validity of tenure security. When considered in abstract terms, the very crux of a property right system is that it secures the property, in this case the land, of the individual in possession of it. Therefore, the economic rationality behind the recommendations of Ethiopian economists is undoubtedly sound - far more so than that of the Government. Nevertheless, it has been argued earlier in this thesis that using narrow abstract representations to derive concrete strategies for intervention is problematic. This is because land tenure systems are so interconnected to the other aspects of their socioeconomic and political contexts, that they cannot be altered in isolation from these other factors. A logical development of this proposition that is of key importance here is that land tenure systems cannot meaningfully be altered at all, if their surrounding environment, or critical aspects of it, have been rigidified for some reason. I would contend that this is precisely the case in Ethiopia. Therefore, the

explanation for the lack of forthcoming empirical evidence to support the centrality of tenure security may be precisely because it is *not* central, at least not in the sense that altering it alone can have a profound effect. But because indigenous thinkers have felt so compelled to avoid dealing with the politically sensitive contiguous issues related to land tenure and development, and have focused narrowly and technically on certain aspects of the system in isolation from the whole, then there may be some sense in which tenure security itself has been blown out of proportion. Furthermore, as will be discussed below, it may be that the invariability of these narrowly focused methodologies to yield applicable strategies for intervention is being overlooked.

In light of the above, it is apparent that the economists have won the theoretical debate over land tenure. However, this is ultimately because the EPRDF's vision was not a serious piece of economic analysis in the first place. As will be discussed below, the political imperatives that land policy has been forced to accommodate, most notably nationalised ownership, have for the most part dictated what the outcome of the policies must be before the empirical data has even been considered. The facts are then awkwardly fitted in *a posteriori*, and hence the prognoses appear to be inconsistent and illogical. The empirical reality of socioeconomic conditions and the objectives pursued on the ground, do not correspond to the Government's public interpretation of these things, and hence its land tenure policy is, in good part, fictitious. Therefore, what has actually been achieved by indigenous intellectuals is *not* a critique of the EPRDF's land tenure policy *per se*, but rather a critique of its *stated* policies, which do not in reality function as is claimed. This would seem to compound the difficulty of formulating meaningful strategies for tenure reform within the prevailing political economy, because to assume, even for prudence sake, that there is a predominantly technocratic agenda underlying the Government's policies, is to distort the real nature of the policy-making process. It is conceivable how one could generate ideas for policy reform by looking at the ways in which current policies are failing. However, to do so by considering not how the current policies are operating in actuality, but rather at how

someone is telling you those policies are operating, and a very unreliable someone at that, would seem to constitute a further movement away from empirical reality, which as stated above may be detrimental to interventionist strategising.

A further caveat should be inserted at this point, and that is that the above is not intended to suggest that Ethiopian intellectuals are entirely unaware of the true nature of politics within their country. Off-the-record comments obtained from field research would suggest quite the opposite is true. Therefore, it is only in their professional published work that indigenous critics have opted to approach these issues from an apolitical perspective. In light of this fact, there may be an alternative way to interpret all of the above, which could salvage much of the economic analysis. That is to decipher the pursuit of tenure security and its corollaries as being somewhat synonymous for a liberal-democratic, capitalist approach to development more broadly. For example, one insightful comment from a donor source offered in response to a question about the necessity of land tenure reform for development, was suggestive of such a link:

It is a solution in so far as it is linked to ideology, whereby a change in land tenure would tend to reflect a change in growth philosophy; hence it may be a signifier of increased liberalisation. On its own though it is not sufficient. (Interview with donor source, February-March 2007)

Another view espoused by an indigenous critic suggested a similar line of thinking: “It is a big obstacle, but it is also an ideological issue, and peoples’ stance on it often reflects political views” (Interview with indigenous analyst, February-March 2007). Therefore, one could perhaps suggest that a heavy emphasis is placed upon tenure security precisely because this is one of the safer aspects of a liberal democratic agenda that can be espoused in Ethiopia without incurring the Government’s wrath. For those interested in land - a highly political subject in this context – tenure security may have

been utilised as an outlet for research. And while this may entail the risk of overstating its relative significance, perhaps such commentators simply believe that you can never really have too much tenure security.

Evidence gathered on field research to support the above hypothesis was mixed. Some indicated a genuine belief in the centrality of tenure security; others asserted that political constraints are pre-eminent, while others still heavily emphasised both factors. Some pertinent comments gathered from experts in the field were as follows:

Land tenure is an important element in rural agricultural development, but cannot bring about economic growth by itself. Simply changing the tenure arrangement and doing nothing else will have no significant effect. (Interview with indigenous analyst, February-March 2007)

It is a serious obstacle. More rapid growth would have been achieved with a more flexible and secure system, so the current tenure system has contributed to rural poverty. (Dessalegn Rahmato, in discussion with the author, March 2007)

There are aspects of the rural economy that precede tenure in terms of significance for development. If these things were all in place and tenure was the only barrier then we would see farmers themselves pressing the Government for change. (Interview with indigenous analyst, February-March 2007)

The first steps towards development are politics and stability etc and then economic policy comes as secondary. You have to first get the political environment sorted out and then you can think about things like land tenure. (Interview with indigenous analyst, February-March 2007)

Whether or not there is any truth in the hypothesis that tenure security may be held to be more of a synonym than an end in itself by those that would ideally seek to manage a process of economic transformation in Ethiopia, nevertheless does not take away from the fact that a face value reading of the literature does not convey this. Rather, it merely accords tenure insecurity primary culpability in the country's failure to engender micro-level investment, and a plethora of such research output will unavoidably colour the ensuing debate. In this case it has arguably led to a donor-funded project to provide certificates of landholding to highland farmers within the prevailing political constraints, in the belief that this can effectively reinforce tenure security and stimulate investment and conservation. Such has been the attention drawn to the security factor that even the Government itself has been persuaded to address it, via these regional-level titling initiatives. Therefore, whether the notion is meant conditionally or unequivocally, both research and debate on land reform, and their applied derivations, have been directed to pursue tenure security above all else in the sphere of land policy.

It is hardly surprising that when one focuses solely on land tenure and nothing else that is connected to it, then one is going to find that tenure security is the most pressing issue to be addressed, because land tenure *is* fundamentally about providing tenure security. The above has argued that this is a critical weakness in the literature on land tenure reform in Ethiopia. If one looks at the political economy more broadly, and those factors that are primarily inhibiting it, then tenure security may suddenly shrink in its apparent significance. Furthermore, it is unlikely to be a coincidence that Ethiopian economists have become highly preoccupied with tenure security at a time when the issue has assumed a position of centrality in global development thinking. The rise of legally oriented, 'apolitical' ideologies advanced by organisations like the World Bank and scholars like De Soto has been discussed previously. It may therefore be the case that the diagnosis of Ethiopia as critically lacking tenure security has been due more to the influence of such theories on economists' thinking, than to empirical

observation. And indeed donor organisations operating in Ethiopia, perhaps even more so than indigenous economists, invoke conventional theory as a basis for their applied research work. Their perspectives on the land tenure issue will next be considered.

### **Section (d) – Donor Organisations on Land Tenure in Ethiopia**

The degree of unanimity of perspective described in the preceding section is less evident amongst donor organisations engaged in development in Ethiopia. Those that have most been actively involved in land tenure reform, such as SIDA and USAID, have tended to emphasise more or less the same goals as the economists, i.e. tenure security and market liberalisation. Staff from other organisations may at times emphasise different facets of development, and can even be more sceptical about the efficacy of land reform than the economists. However, what generally unifies the donor perspective is, firstly, a greater degree of optimism about both the potential impact of their developmental endeavours and the country's prospects for takeoff; and secondly, a much greater faith in the Government than have most Ethiopian intellectuals. Publicly this has manifested in an almost complete unwillingness to criticise the regime, and privately even when they may do so, there nevertheless remains a willingness to work with it. Some of the key views gathered during fieldwork will be considered in more detail below, followed by a more lengthy analysis of the SIDA/USAID-funded land certification project, which has constituted the greatest involvement of donors in the land reform process to date. This latter issue will mark a culmination of the dilemma advanced in the last section, i.e. how to derive workable interventionist strategies in this context from limited, mainly theoretical/non-empirical foundations, by way of a concrete, working example.

Of the dozen or so donor representatives interviewed on field research (see Appendix 1), most believed tenure insecurity to be either the main, or at least one of the main factors inhibiting economic growth in Ethiopia. For example, one commentator put it as follows:

If you look at all the other facets of development, i.e. agricultural production, resources conservation etc they all revolve around land tenure. Without first addressing this then nothing else works. (Interview with donor source, February-March 2007)

Others were keen to emphasise the fact that farmers themselves have indicated a willingness for strengthened rights over their land, as will be further discussed in a later section. A number of donors put more emphasis on the need for full privatisation rather than just tenure security itself, and indicated scepticism that the latter could be achieved in the absence of full ownership via things like the certification project. Some were also keen to stress that there are equally, or in their view even more significant constraints on development than tenure. A source from the Netherlands development team stated that tenure security: “ is an obstacle, but to say the major one may be to make it a scapegoat”. A DFID source suggested that farmers’ expectations of future environmental shocks may be of possibly greater importance than tenure insecurity, via the negative effect it can have on decisions to invest in land and new technology. Only a few outright sceptical views on the issue were recorded. However, one very intriguing statement that was made about tenure insecurity was as follows:

I do not see it as an obstacle. I know that goes against much of the consensus, but I don’t think it is a major constraint, although it is a component or aspect of development. But the biggest problems come from inside. (Interview with donor source, February-March 2007)

This alludes to the role of political impediments and will be further discussed below. Firstly though, as an introduction to this issue, and having already given some insight into donors’ views on tenure security, it is worth considering their perspectives on the EPRDF’s land policy.

As stated above, donors will rarely engage in any public criticism of Government policy, although as the following quote suggests, many are nevertheless aware of problems:

Informally, you often find agreement about these systemic and political constraints, but of course officially people do not say these things. Furthermore, individuals within the system itself are often receptive to ideas for change and will talk openly, but the system as a whole does not operate this way. (Interview with donor source, February-March 2007)

However, even privately some donors do not reject the EPRDF's vision to the extent that Ethiopian economists have. There may be a degree of naivety at play here amongst some about the overall workings of the system, which is far less prevalent amongst indigenous development practitioners. For example, two donor sources who were interviewed stated that they believe Ethiopia to possess considerable free and untapped agricultural land suitable for more extensive cultivation or even population resettlement: "they haven't even begun to tap it; lots of productive land isn't even in use" (Interview with donor source, February-March 2007). While definitive data on such things is difficult to procure in Ethiopia, there are now no credible empirical sources that would support the Government's claims about available and suitable land for expanded cultivation – quite the opposite in fact, as noted previously. And indeed other donor representatives flatly contradicted such a view:

Forget about resettlement! In the broader picture, out with the narrow perspectives that some people working in government departments may have, it will be of no practical value. It cannot outweigh the rate of population growth. (Interview with donor source, February-March 2007)

It is therefore troubling to uncover such uncritical views amongst influential donors. Furthermore, these same representatives expressed a much greater faith in the Government's ADLI and PASDEP (Plan for Accelerated and Sustained Development to End Poverty) development strategies. One stated:

I think that the frameworks are now right in Ethiopia. Expertise and considerable funds from aid are in place, and we are seeing an increased focus on the private sector. (Interview with donor source, February-March 2007)

Again, both empirical and anecdotal evidence gathered during fieldwork would seem to such cast serious doubt on such claims. One Ethiopian source, expressing an entirely contradictory view to the above, made the following remarks:

What is a huge problem in this country is the mindset of high officials. They think the state must undertake all of the developmental and economic activities. In other countries the private sector takes the lead, but here the Government keeps undermining it. The term 'businessman' has a stigma attached to it. (Interview with indigenous analyst, February-March 2007)

Such viewpoints are taking us away from more specific interpretations on land tenure and so for now will be put aside until the narrower issues are first dealt with. But, to conclude the above, and as an explanation for this more receptive attitude towards the Government's land policy, it could perhaps be suggested that what we are seeing is a unanimous preference for diplomacy amongst donors, being taken to different degrees by different organisations. The majority seem to have maintained reservations, either privately or in discussion with close colleagues, about the efficacy of both tenure security reforms and the Government's land policy. Nevertheless, the absence of outright public criticism to counteract the Government's unlikely claims appears to have fostered a somewhat myopic outlook amongst many. This may be especially the

case for donor representatives who work closely with members of the ruling party. They have an agenda for development, more or less derived from a neoliberal perspective although at times combined with local sensitivities, which they would ideally wish to implement. However, they also possess organisational imperatives for good working relations with the EPRDF, to the extent that they may at times combine their efforts with those of government development practitioners in order to implement concrete projects. But in order to uncritically accommodate such disparate perspectives, it may be the case that meaningful content and even ideology itself must ultimately be sacrificed in favour of mutually acceptable middle ground. This would seem to be comprised of mainly bland, open-ended statements of theory and technical jargon with little that is concrete and practicable, as can readily be observed in many donor publications.

As a possible explanation for the above outcome, one academic suggested the following during an interview: Donor developmental methodologies have changed in recent years, in that they have moved away from the locally based projects of the past and towards more coordinated, national level ones. They have realised in so doing that there is a danger of creating parallel channels of development that would compete with and undermine indigenous efforts, and so have opted to work through local NGOs and also the arms of the state. However, this latter choice has the consequence of bolstering state departments relative to any other extant indigenous organisations, and may in fact smother the emergence of alternative civic movements. Donors want to both implement rural development projects, such as land titling, and also to foster the development of autonomous civil society groups. But their primary means of advancing the former goal may be negating the latter. In effect they may be assisting the state in achieving a hegemonic position in the development sector (Interview with academic source, February-March 2007).

Other commentators have observed that the Government has become very adept at utilising neoliberal language to appease donors, while in actuality possessing no serious commitment to such ideals (Vestel, 1999, p.136-137). One anecdote related to me during fieldwork was that at one point in recent years certain donors expressed a desire to fund civil society groups within Ethiopia. In response, the Government promptly set up a branch within the MoARD responsible for promoting civil society, which would assist donors in allocating these funds. But of course such an outcome is farcical, as the Government is well aware that civil society groups represent a challenge to its hegemony and has, in particular, sought to repress organisations with a political bent, e.g. the Ethiopian Human Rights Council (EHRCO) and the Ethiopian Women Lawyers Association (EWLA) (Dessalegn, 2002, p.110-112). In light of its record, allowing the regime to manage the distribution of civil society funding would seem to indicate either a lack of good judgement or a lack of genuine commitment on the part of donors. It may even be that their collective desire to simply function as organisations in Ethiopia at times overrides their wish to have a positive effect. In light of instances such as the above, the following quote, also gathered on field study, provides an apt summary of the problem:

Donors are very weak in Ethiopia, despite the large amounts of money they possess. They work under the Government and will not oppose or contradict it. So, for example, the Government hasn't really tried to develop civil society in Ethiopia, but donors have neither opposed this nor proposed any alternatives. They simply use what the Government offers to debate and write reports, and they have no capacity to really influence policy. (Interview with indigenous analyst, February-March 2007)

It is easy to observe various ways in which donors have come to occupy an enfeebled position. The Government has proved itself quick to respond to criticism with fiery

rhetoric and even expel dissenting foreigners from the country with little provocation<sup>45</sup>. Donors cannot credibly retaliate to such aggression, e.g. by threatening to leave the country, because their presence is only tolerated by the regime - as opposed to having been sought out - and both parties are well aware of this fact. Much of what they do in Ethiopia and Africa more broadly is propelled by their own humanitarian and organisational imperatives, and so their bargaining power with governments is minimal. Hence it is apparent that the mindset many foreign organisations have adopted is simply to toe the line in order to be allowed to continue their work. One representative made the following statement, which is typical of such a mentality:

I think you can't just stop tackling one pillar (i.e. the economy) when another is defective [the state]. If you take the case of Zimbabwe then simply withdrawing in the face of bad governance has not helped the country. Therefore, it's about finding ways to develop even when the system is not working. This is what we see NGOs doing in these countries. (Interview with donor source, February-March 2007)

This is the essence of the development in spite of the state mentality, and indeed I would argue its central myth. It is the belief that, such is the power of microeconomic forces, significant progress can occur from below and drive society forward, even if the state acts as an obstacle to the process. This is because, like a rock in the middle of a stream, the state can only deflect the path of transformation, but by itself is not capable of containing the entire flow. By way of empirical material to assess the validity of this notion in the sphere of land tenure, the donor funded land certification and administration project carried out in Amhara State will next be considered.

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<sup>45</sup> See BBC News (31<sup>st</sup> March 2005) 'Ethiopia expels US poll officials', (<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/4397545.stm>) and BBC News (1<sup>st</sup> September 2005) 'Ethiopian PM attacks EU monitor', (<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/4205370.stm>).

### **Section (e) – Case Study: Land Tenure ‘Reform’ in Amhara State**

A land administration and certification project was undertaken in Tigray state in 1998, and Amhara, Oromia and Southern regions subsequently followed suit. In each case regional, rather than federal level government initiated the programmes, although the latter has come to assume a position of increasing stewardship over the process. For example, the Environmental Protection, Land Administration and Use Authority (EPLAUA) was created in Amhara by the Regional Government to undertake the administrative and tenurial reforms. However, it has subsequently been subsumed under the direct stewardship of the Prime Minister’s office. In Amhara State, SIDA began funding two pilot titling projects in 2003, with the intention that EPLAUA would eventually extend this to the entire region. EPLAUA had nearly completed this task by March 2007 - the time at which fieldwork was undertaken. Certification has been carried out on a kebele by kebele basis in conjunction with locally elected committees of farmers, and has involved the following procedures for each individual case: A basic survey using traditional methods, such as rope measurement, is carried out to delineate the boundaries of all plots under possession. This information is then recorded, along with the names of a given farmer, their spouse and dependents, and is compiled into a book of holding that is issued to the farmer. The books also contain photographs for identification purposes, a rough sketch of each plot under occupancy, and a description of what farmers’ rights are over their land. These include the promise of permanent use rights over land under possession, rights to compensation in the case of expropriation and an end to involuntary land redistribution (FDRE, Proclamation 456/2005) – the significance of which will be discussed below. In the pilot sites a cadastral survey was then carried out using Total Station Technology, which basically uses computerised mapping to give a more precise delineation of each plot. However, financial restrictions were such that only the traditional measurement techniques were used across the rest of the state, and as Berhanu and Fayera (2005, p.26) have pointed out, it is unclear why SIDA funded the limited use of this advanced technology, given that it was never thought to be financially viable for wider use. However, discussion of the technical and

organisational details of the programme will be minimised here, and a more thorough account can be found in Kanji et al (2005), Berhanu and Fayera (2005), and Solomon et al. (2006). The remainder of this section will focus mainly upon those aspects of the project that are relevant to the preceding discussion.

As previously stated, the land titling initiative represented somewhat of a compromise, or at least blending, of disparate perspectives. The Regional Government initiated the project, as land administration falls within their jurisdiction due to the decentralisation of administrative duties that the ethnofederal political reforms have entailed. As noted, the Federal Government has kept close tabs on it, but nevertheless it is not the case that the regime has sought to oppose the measures. Rather, they have seemingly been supportive of the initiative (in spirit that is, not in budgetary terms), and in fact have charged all highland regions with the responsibility of carrying out land administration and certification (FDRE, Proclamation 456/2005). And they have hailed the SIDA funded pilot projects in Amhara as a model for the country as a whole (EPLAUA source, in discussion with the author, March 2007). How can this attitude be explained, in light of their intransigence on tenure reform more broadly? This question can best be answered by considering the evidence on how, firstly, the Government, and then the other actors involved, have perceived the project and what precisely they have sought to achieve by it. It will become apparent that commonality of neither interpretation nor purpose can be assumed, which is a major weakness of the venture.

Land certification is only briefly mentioned in the agricultural section of the Government's 2006 revised national development strategy PASDEP (MoFED, 2005, p.98), as it mainly focuses upon increasing the use of inputs and technology. However, the MoARD, backed by USAID funding, did create a special department called ELTAP (Ethiopian Land Tenure and Administration Project) in 2006 to oversee the process of land certification. In the first sentence of ELTAP's mission statement, the Minister of State asserts the need for: "a sound land certification system that provides holders of

land-use rights in Ethiopia with robust and enforceable tenure security in land” (Solomon et al., 2006, p.iv). The work being carried out within this department would seem to suggest that, at least within the MoARD, a genuine technocratic attempt to address a perceived problem is being made. However, while departments like ELTAP and EPLAUA fall within the jurisdiction of the Federal Government, it is evident upon visiting them that there is a distinct break between decision makers within the ruling party and their civil servants, despite the fact that the country is a de facto one-party state. There is a clear chain of authority, but for developmental initiatives such as this, it may be that there is an ambiguity over what exactly those at the top wish their technocratic subordinates to achieve. The following quote obtained from an indigenous analyst would seem to confirm this fact:

It is very hard for me to know exactly what the politicians are really thinking about this. They don’t want to hear about limitations to tenure, given that they declared the issue to be ‘dead’ two years ago. It may be that they do understand the reality but won’t accept it, or it may be that they are working on bad information that is providing bad policy. (Interview with indigenous analyst, February-March 2007)

But what other source of information can politicians have about on the ground conditions, other than that gathered by subordinates within their ministries? One suggestion made to me was that, “they do not base decision making on expert opinion, but simply make gut decisions” (Interview with indigenous analyst, February-March 2007). This would accord well with the neopatrimonial theory outlined previously. Elites do not seek consultation on policy-making because the policies, first and foremost, reflect their core interests, i.e. maintaining their positions of power, and so, from their perspective, there is no possibility of discussion over these. For issues that are more contiguous, such as land certification then, assuming privatisation has been sufficiently guarded against, the stance that politicians must take for personal expediency is less clear-cut. Therefore, it may be that the lack of any definite objective

that can be deciphered from the regime on this issue is simply indicative of an ambivalent, or even disinterested attitude towards it. This in turn may have allowed technocrats and civil servants a greater freedom to effect their own interpretation and agenda on the proceedings, although of course cautiously so. The following quotes obtained during fieldwork would seem to suggest exactly this:

The Government has been criticised for the last 15 years for its land policy, and have finally come up with this certification venture. But in reality they have neither the capacity nor interest to carry it out. If they were really serious about it then they wouldn't leave it to the kebele level! (Interview with indigenous analyst, February-March 2007)

I wouldn't say land certification is really a breakthrough for the tenure system, because the Government still has a hand on it. For me, I see it as a scapegoat to divert attention and satisfy donors, given how the tenure issue has often been vocally raised. (Interview with donor source, February-March 2007)

Several other interviewees also stated the belief that the Government has only half-heartedly promoted land certification as a means to appease critics. This does not mean that no dedicated work is being carried out in the relevant ministries - undoubtedly it is, but rather that there is no clear message emanating from the top as to why this is being done. Moreover, as the follow quote suggests, politicians' apathy may also stem from a degree of concern about what kind of influence the project may ultimately have on people's civic values, especially in light of the aftermath of last election.

I get the impression that the Federal Government has lacked interest in the land certification issue because it empowers people more than they would like them to be, which can give rise to protests etc. (Interview with indigenous analyst, February-March 2007)

At Regional Government level, the situation is somewhat different - at least in Amhara State. According to Dr Zerfu Hailu, one of the senior staff at EPLAUA, land certification and administration came about as follows. The Regional Government was concerned about the huge degree of soil loss and other environmental deterioration that was occurring in Amhara. Dr Zerfu and others persuaded them that by reinforcing farmers' feelings of tenure security, the problem could be alleviated, as farmers would take better care of their land if they believed it would not be taken from them in the near future. As a result, various proclamations were passed to legislate reform<sup>46</sup>, and EPLAUA was created in conjunction with SIDA and Bahir Dar University, charged with the task of carrying out land administration and certification. This was a highly significant development as Dr Zerfu and his colleagues had managed to force tenure security onto the agenda, although in the Regional Government's mind not for the primary reason of reinforcing micro-level productivity enhancing investments, but rather as a means to effect better environmental protection. Because of this, the legislation concerning the rights accorded to farmers by the certificates also stipulated various conservation activities that had to be undertaken as a condition of acceptance. There are in fact punitive consequences spelled out in one of the proclamations for failing to undertake these obligations, which include the possible confiscation of land (FDRE, Proclamation 133/2006, articles 20-21). This would perhaps seem anomalous if one was seeking to, above all else, convince farmers that they their land will be under their possession in the long term – as the economists have advocated. But because it is rather environmental concerns that have primarily driven this initiative, then it has taken a form that does not entirely accord with conventional, liberal property-right theory.

From the perspective of economists and donors, especially those backing the project, many still see it as a worthwhile venture overall, so long as tenure security is reinforced

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<sup>46</sup> Of particular importance were proclamations: 46/2000, 47/2000, 456/2005 and 133/2006.

to some extent. They have focused particularly on the issue of involuntary land redistributions and confiscations. As described above, such things have occurred in the recent past and this has no doubt contributed to feelings of insecurity and a short-term outlook amongst farmers. In Amhara, this was especially the case, as the notorious land redistribution of 1997 was widely perceived as targeted score settling by the EPRDF against former Derg sympathisers, which severely undermined trust in the Regional Government (Ege, 1997). The titling project has therefore been touted as a means to convince farmers that this will not happen again, and various articles in the new legislation do indeed seem to indicate that this will be the case. For example, it is stated that land under cultivation will now only be redistributed at the request of a given community (FDRE, Proclamation 456/2005, article 9.3). However, while such promises may serve to reassure farmers in the short term, this may not have the desired longevity. Farmers are aware that there is now virtually no free land to give to youngsters in the highlands and this aspect of the constitution has been de facto sidelined. Nevertheless, the most recent proclamations still maintain the right. If in future this population of the landless young continues to grow, it may be that pressure for further redistribution will increase. And the existence of such a clause for the possibility of community instigated redistribution, rather than there being simply a blanket ban, would seem to detract from the sense of long term assuredness that donors and economists want to see imparted.

Furthermore, another article states that farmers use rights on their land have no time limit (FDRE, Proclamation 456/2005, article 7.1), which would seem to be amenable to the economists' cause. However, sub-clauses have been added that do allow for the Government to expropriate land in certain cases, e.g. for investors, public works etc. The legislation states that the evicted farmers would be fully compensated for their loss, but does not state how the value of their property is to be calculated, or what rights they would have to appeal against the valuations of local officials. And anecdotal evidence gathered during fieldwork suggested that many farmers residing on land that

borders growing towns and cities have been expelled with little or no compensation. This is especially the case in peri-urban Addis Ababa, where large-scale flower farms have been on the rise<sup>47</sup>. In light of such facts, even the most optimistic commentators have voiced reservations about the efficacy of the certification project (although many remain overall supportive). The following quotes obtained from interviews illustrate this wariness:

The titling venture should ensure that there is no more redistribution. There are preconditions in place which could still permit this, which somewhat undermines security, but we are now generally moving in the direction of individualised tenure. (Dr Belay Demissie (USAID), in discussion with the author, February 2007)

It is not a sustainable system like ownership could provide. It is better than nothing because at least it provides some short to medium term guarantees of retained possession. So it is a good step but by itself insufficient. (Interview with donor source, February-March 2007)

Certificates may indeed provide a backbone to support the prevailing situation, but because the starting point is not an optimal one, they may have little effect on economic development. (Interview with donor source, February-March 2007)

Other donor and indigenous commentators have been even more sceptical about the project, for various compelling reasons. For example, it had initially been hoped that the certificates could be used as collateral with which farmers could obtain small bank loans for investment. However, because the sale of land or land use rights is still prohibited, then there would be no way for banks to dispose of confiscated land in the case of default, and so they have unanimously rejected the title books as securities

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<sup>47</sup> See BBC News (25<sup>th</sup> May 2006), 'Flower farming blooms in Ethiopia', (<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/5016834.stm>)

(Kanji et al. 2005, p.4). It was also hoped that the titles would reduce wasteful litigation expenditure over boundary disputes by more precisely clarifying the exact contours of each farmer's land. But because only basic measurements and sketches were used out with the pilot sites, then these cannot be used in court as evidence, and so boundary disputes may be equally prevalent in future (USAID, 2004, p.18). Another key issue is that, in order for the system of administration to function successfully, there must be procedures in place to continuously update the database after the initial registration. In the 1998 Tigray registration insufficient attention was paid to this issue (Mitiku et al. 2005, p.17), and it is unclear whether resources in Amhara state are such that this can be and is being adequately addressed. In the long run, the donors involved have envisaged that the system will be maintained by charging fees for farmers wishing to amend and update their records (USAID, 2005, p.33). However, given that the registration was initially highly unpopular (Berhanu and Feyera, 2005, p.22) and that in the case of Tigray few were willing to notify the authorities of subsequent land transactions (no doubt in part due to illegal sales), then it is far from certain that in Amhara farmers will consider the land certificates sufficiently valuable to pay to update them. Therefore, continued funding is likely to be critical to the success of the registration project, and given the lack of Federal Government interest, it is unclear where this will come from in the long run. USAID has estimated that, based on the Eastern European experience, the total cost of implementing an effective land registration and certification system in Ethiopia would be \$240 – 640 million. However, SIDA has only been able to pledge \$2 million over a four-year period (USAID, 2004, appendix p.17) – woefully short of the estimated target requirement. Unsurprisingly, signs of financial neglect were evident even at the showpiece pilot site in Amhara, such as a lack of human resources, machinery, training facilities, transport, office space etc. It was intimated that the situation is far worse in the majority of other kebeles undertaking reform out with the pilot areas, which will no doubt impact upon their efficacy. However, despite the extent of these financial limitations, there is in fact

another potential constraint to the success of the titling project that has been perceived as of even greater significance by some critics. That is the issue of Government resolve.

The loopholes inherent in the proclamations on land redistribution and expropriation were described previously, and it is difficult to precisely ascertain how much these will undermine efforts to convince farmers that they can securely undertake long-term investment on their land. As the following quote suggests, there would seem to be the legitimate fear that, in light of the country's recent history and politics, these may have been inserted for insidious purposes:

All the limitations placed on things like land use open the door for the administration to harass farmers. Ambiguous clauses that state "proper care" must be taken else land be confiscated simply gives power to ruling party agents. They can effectively say: "since you didn't vote for me then I think you are not taking proper care of your land and so I will take it". (Interview with indigenous analyst, February-March 2007)

Many interviewees highlighted the key importance of trust in state institutions like the legal system if the new laws are to be deciphered positively. As the following quotes suggest, ambiguously worded legislation need not by itself present a fundamental barrier to changed economic behaviour by farmers, so long as there is a degree of faith in the Government's intentions. But in Ethiopia this may be fatally lacking.

Certification can increase feelings of ownership, provided the Government follows through on its commitments. But if the issue is simply political expediency in the short run, and the Government is not committed, then it will achieve nothing. (Interview with indigenous analyst, February-March 2007)

The certificates give rights that are good, but in Ethiopia the more important issue is enforcement of these rights. If there is a lack of confidence in this then it will reduce

farmer's feelings of security. Therefore, building Government capacity to enforce these laws is key. (Interview with donor source, February-March 2007)

And it is at this point that we have effectively travelled full circle in our analysis of both this project and in fact such 'apolitical' interventions more generally. It was noted at the start of this section that the Federal Government in Ethiopia has shown little interest in projects such as land administration, because it is primarily concerned with pursuing its neopatrimonial imperatives to the exclusion of all else. One aspect of such governance that was highlighted in Chapter two is the absence of a reliable and independent legal system, as ruling parties inevitably seeks to circumvent the law at times for their own ends. A constitution and other such trappings will generally be in place in neopatrimonial regimes, but will not be consistently enforced. This is because they are primarily there to serve as symbols of supposedly legitimate government, rather than because they are valued as an end unto themselves. And it is in this fact that the impossibility of development in spite of the state is most starkly revealed. Projects such as land tenure reform rest critically upon legislative change of the type described by De Soto in Chapter One. But in the absence of an independent legal system, reworked legislation may be hollow and impotent – resting solely upon the good grace of the ruling party to enforce it. In an interview conducted in March 2007, Dessalegn made the following comments about the certification project, which may hint at this inherent flaw:

Taking the example of land certification in this country, I would argue that there are some issues that De Soto has missed. He would appreciate the project, but the circumstances in which it has been unfolding and the way it has been implemented raise issues. One of the main weaknesses in De Soto is his exclusive focus on property right law in isolation. In fact it is linked to all other kinds of laws and rights, i.e. democratic ones, the justice system, human rights etc. (Dessalegn Rahmato, in discussion with the author, March 2007)

In a country like Ethiopia, which has as yet failed to resolve its problems of human rights abuse, democratisation and judicial independence, there would seem to be a serious credibility problem when it comes to attempting lower level legislative reforms from within the political edifice. Even if all politically sensitive issues are put aside, such as the privatisation of land, then it is still not possible to carry out development that circumvents the state, so long as state institutions are relied upon as a part of the process. The situation culminates in somewhat of a paradox for donors, as their developmental efforts begin to falter as soon as they attempt to fall back upon that very system they are trying to evade. But evade it they cannot, as their reform efforts can go nowhere without some degree of engagement with government institutions.

It may be that donors are not the only party guilty of overlooking certain problems here. While critics such as Dessalegn can spot the deficiencies in programmes such as the land certification scheme, the fact is that they too have been ardently campaigning for efforts to promote tenure security, and have also avoided excessive political commentary for expediency's sake. So the question would seem to be, within the confines imparted by the prevailing political economy in Ethiopia, how else could an intervention aimed at strengthening tenure security have been enacted? If political sore spots are to be avoided then it is difficult to conceive of any alternative outcome. But if in actuality it is believed that the barriers imposed by ruling elites are in fact to firstly be challenged, then why is tenure security receiving the degree of emphasis that it currently is in the debate on development in Ethiopia, when it is clearly a subordinate factor? As suggested above, this may be because tenure security is really more of a professional preoccupation, signifying a wider ideological orientation that presupposes certain other preconditions that simply cannot be openly stated in Ethiopia, than it is a primary developmental objective unto itself. It is evident from the following sample of anonymous comments gathered about the link between land tenure and political reform

that this may indeed be the underlying agenda, and that the tenure security crisis may not be as paramount as the literature would seem to suggest:

Democratisation is definitely the solution to all of these problems. It would provide room to move, whereas present government interference prevents much movement on issues like the sale and transfer of land. (Interview with donor source, February-March 2007)

With the right enabling environment things could happen. When we talk about lack of development, this is not primarily due to lack of technology, research, good soil, climate etc. Rather, the big issue is good governance and democratisation. (Interview with indigenous analyst, February-March 2007)

We may see positive change on the surface, but the current climate of distrust is inhibiting long-term sustainable investment. There is a lack of a collective outlook and people possess a short run mentality. This has been fuelled by the lack of democratisation. (Interview with donor source, February-March 2007)

The politics of development are what is hampering the country. The Government claims to be a pro-peasant, agricultural movement, but in reality does little for them. The real strategy is to survive and in these circumstances development is not easy. (Interview with indigenous analyst, February-March 2007)

To summarise then, it would seem that the land certification project in Amhara state is somewhat of a Frankenstein-like endeavour, in which different agendas such as conservation, tenure security, diplomacy, image building, authority enhancement and appeasement have been haphazardly cobbled together on a small budget. The result has been a multifariously flawed venture, and similar outcomes can no doubt be expected in the other regions undertaking certification, as the briefly considered Tigrayan

example would seem to suggest. It is unclear whether the projects will even sustain in the coming years, let alone propagate microeconomic development via strengthened tenure security. The systemic barriers to such efforts may be unassailable, and it is not clear why donors have persevered with such apolitical strategies, in the face of this. Indeed, one comment made by an Ethiopian critic most aptly made this point.

Security is not going to be provided by the certification project, and donor organisations like the World Bank and USAID must be aware of the logistical and capacity problems. It is questionable therefore why they are still pushing ahead with the project since it can't possibly work. Their strategies are failing and nothing will really change until farmers stand up for their rights. (Interview with donor source, February-March 2007)

It is to the preferences of farmers that this chapter will next turn.

### **Section (f) – Ethiopian Farmers on Land Tenure**

It is undoubtedly the case that the subset of Ethiopian society that has inputted least into the land tenure debate is the strata of individuals that are most affected by it, i.e. ordinary farmers. According to Tekie:

It is seldom, if ever, that farmers are actually asked how they feel about these issues, controversies, and the policy options, all of which are entertained and created by outsiders who are usually out of touch with farmers' realities. (Tekie, 1998, p.67)

Those few surveys that have been conducted in recent years do not yield entirely coherent results that point to any specific course of action that farmers would generally favour. For example, an EEA survey (EEA, 2002, p.40-49) found that 61% of farmers believe the current land tenure system to be 'good'. However, the same survey found that only 26% of farmers believe there will be no more redistribution in the near future,

and less than 10% believe they will still be in possession of their current land in 10 years time. Given that various other questions asked in the survey revealed redistribution to be deeply unpopular, then there would seem to be a contradiction in the fact that a majority of farmers both like the current tenure system but also believe they will be a victim of redistribution under it. This would seem to suggest either they failed to understand all of the questions or were afraid to answer honestly.

One fact that has been more consistently disclosed in surveys such as the above is that there does not seem to be particularly strong support for privatisation amongst farmers. The EEA (2002, p.43) found that, when asked what their first alternative preference to the status quo would be, 46.8% of farmers chose 'public or state ownership with secured use right', whereas only 31.5% opted for private ownership. Berhanu and Berhanu (2004, p.12-14) uncovered similar results in their survey of farmers' opinions. They found 53% to be in favour of strengthened tenure security under nationalised ownership and 32% to prefer full privatisation. In his survey, Tekie (1998, p.73-74) found that only around 50% of farmers would be willing to pay for full ownership of their land, even if they were provided with favourable loans to do so. Unsurprisingly, such statistics have not been lost on the MoARD and when one of their staff was asked about limitations to the tenure system during a field interview, he asserted the following:

Farmers are limited in that they cannot sell land, but the majority, over 70%, support this policy. Some do not agree and favour privatisation but they are not the majority. Most are happy with permanent possession without sales. (Interview with MoARD source, February-March 2007)

Recently, it seems that economists and other non-governmental actors too have more or less accepted this interpretation of farmers' wishes. According to one such individual interviewed:

Based on our discussions with farmers, they are less worried about who owns the land than they are about guaranteeing their access to it. Therefore, there is a potential for a middle ground, via some kind of usufruct regime that provides long-term security. (Interview with donor source, February-March 2007)

As the debate has more recently progressed from earlier and more polarised private versus public stances (which were mainly between the EPRDF and urban-based opposition parties), and the focus has shifted onto tenure security, there have proposals for such hybrid systems, e.g. Dessalegn's community/associated ownership scheme (Dessalegn, 2003b). And the land certification programme itself sought to achieve such a consensual position, i.e. to reinforce tenure security within the system of nationalised ownership. Nevertheless, when one more closely scrutinizes both the data on farmers' preferences and the various proposals for reform, it becomes apparent that there is still a major bone of contention between the state and other actors here – despite the revocation of privatisation from the agenda, and it is in its failure to resolve this more subtle discordance that the certification scheme has again fatally erred.

As was described above, the Government has stated that the danger of wealthy investors taking advantage of destitute peasants is the primary reason for its opposition to land sales. It was also noted that farmers themselves have little interest in sales, as over 90% stated that they would never sell their land under any conditions, even if they were allowed to do so (EEA, 2002, p.49). In keeping with such facts, Dessalegn, in his associate ownership plan, has proposed that land transfer should not be forbidden outright, but rather that local communities be empowered with the means to overrule any sales that they deem antithetical to the welfare of their members (Dessalegn, 2003b). This would accord a greater flexibility and hence economic efficiency than a blanket ban, as it would allow socially useful sales to proceed, especially within the community, while keeping wealthy urban speculators at bay. However, what differs

most strikingly between this proposal and the actual certification that was carried out is that in Dessalegn's version, while land rights are not fully privatised, they are decentralised to a local level. But because the Federal Government has been entirely unwilling to make such a concession, insisting that land must ultimately remain under its ownership, no such delegation of authority has occurred. In light of this, and aside from the economically superior option, which would seem to be Dessalegn's, it would be helpful to know which option peasants would prefer. Does their apparent preference for usufruct rights and public ownership mean that they want a paternalistic regime to hold land on their behalf, or is it rather that they just have reservations about selling land? There is no data that can provide a definitive answer to this question one way or another. However, the following account from fieldwork may be suggestive.

In March 2007, interviews were conducted with local officials at the land certification pilot site in Gozamen, Amhara. When describing the project's merits, several officials assured me that one of the most significant breakthroughs achieved by the project was that certificated land now constitutes a form of joint ownership between the state and the farmer, unlike before when it was solely the property of the Government. But this is in fact a misleading description, because the state can still expropriate any land it chooses without the right of appeal, and so there is no sense in which this 'partnership' is one of equality. Nevertheless, if this is how the titling project has been sold to farmers, given their initial opposition (in the pilot kebele at Gozamen, Amhara, only 7% of farmers initially agreed to register their land), then it would seem to be a recognition of the fact that farmers ideally want greater control over their land. And that would suggest that they want the Government to relinquish at least some, and possibly most, of its power to the individual farmers in possession of land. This however is not what the certification programme has actually done. No real authority has been conceded but rather regional governments have sought to assure farmers their position has been strengthened, without giving them any means to hold the state to its promises in the future. It is in effect a simulated concession of power, unlike

Dessalegn's alternative, which proposed a genuine one. And this may explain why Dessalegn's idea of community ownership has not been taken on board - because it would involve an actual concession of power over land. It would seem that the EPRDF want to both maintain absolute control over rural areas, while simultaneously encouraging farmers to undertake long-term economic behaviour as if the former was not the case. This is the unresolved dilemma at the heart of the certification venture.

What can tentatively be deduced from the above is that the Government believes farmers do want greater authority over their land, regardless of whether or not they support full privatisation. This is perhaps the crux of what economists mean by 'reinforced tenure security', i.e. devolution of landholding power to ordinary farmers. When put in such terms, it would seem to be more apparent why the Government has been so loathe to address the issue, and they have been aided by the fact that farmers' voices are quiet and somewhat ambiguous. Nevertheless there is evidence to suggest that farmers are not entirely content with the status quo, and while specific policy recommendations are not forthcoming, it would seem reasonable to deduce that the desire for a greater degree of personal decision-making power over land is a prevalent one. Unfortunately for farmers though, the Government is only hearing what it wants to hear, and the absence of a definite and concerted position amongst them makes this selective interpretation easier. But such apathy, or more likely hesitancy, is a trait that Ethiopian peasants are notorious for, and perhaps this is simply a consequence of lifetimes spent under conditions of authoritarian government. Whatever the case may be, demand-driven land policy reform is unlikely to emerge any time soon.

### **Section (g) – The Federal Government on Land Tenure, Part 2 – Reality**

In order to round off this chapter on the varying perspectives of different actors in the land tenure debate, it would perhaps be fruitful to return to the central issue of what the Government is seeking to achieve by way of its land tenure policy. We began by discussing the official rhetoric on land tenure and found that it has served to obscure a

surreptitious agenda, different aspects of which have been discussed throughout the section. But in order to better clarify the Government's true position on land reform, to the extent that it can be deciphered, we will elucidate the primary means by which their current stance contributes to the overriding neopatrimonial mission outlined previously. As earlier chapters have argued, neopatrimonial regimes harbour the two-fold goal of seeking to stay in power, and to ensure sufficient resources are procured in order to do so. With these primary objectives in mind, four key ways in which the prevailing nationalised tenure system facilitates this process can readily be identified. As a means to introduce the first of these, we will return to the issue on which the last subsection ended – the refusal of the Government to concede any genuine authority over land to the peasantry within its land titling and administration programme.

Chapter four of the thesis described how northern Ethiopian peasants experienced a de facto disenfranchisement of their economic power as the *rist-gult* system declined. It was also explained that the post-revolutionary nationalisation process has failed to reverse this situation. The above has detailed how the EPRDF has staunchly resisted attempts to alter the tenure system in such a way as to reduce their power vis-à-vis rural peoples via land reform. Hence the question is, why, in this political context, is controlling the land and the peasantry such a core interest of the ruling party? Is it not possible that the economic improvements that could result from a loosening of this control may actually heighten their prospects for retaining power? And yet investment in agriculture has never exceeded 10% of public spending under the EPRDF – in certain years dropping as low as 7% - despite the centrality of that sector to the economy as a whole (EEA, 2005, p.263). However, this is a situation that is explicable when considered in light of our theoretical framework, as neopatrimonial regimes are generally preoccupied with satisfying short-term exigencies – a perpetual form of disaster prevention, with neither the resources nor breathing space to adequately consider longer-term goals. In Ethiopia, it must therefore be the case that the Government perceives the empowerment of the peasantry as an immediate threat to its

rule that must be averted. And indeed when one considers some of the preceding analysis, then there is evidence to suggest why and in what ways this might be so.

The issue of political accountability and the EPRDF was discussed in chapter three. It was found that out with Tigray the party enjoys little popular legitimacy, and even in Tigray itself cracks have begun to develop in its base of support. It has struggled to maintain a façade of credibility, and in certain regions, e.g. Hadiya, not to mention Addis Ababa, simply conceded outright in the face of overwhelming support for the opposition. In general though, the regime wages a continual battle for loyalty, employing tools like: outright brute force and intimidation; the monopolisation of green input production and its clientelistic distribution; and the threat of eviction for voting for the opposition, to ensure obedience and support are maintained. When one considers these various tools of coercion, and in particular the latter, it is apparent why a nationalised land tenure system is a prerequisite for their success. Privatised land ownership would obviously remove the grave threat of eviction. It would also be difficult for the Government to maintain a monopoly position in the distribution of green inputs in a privatised rural environment, as prospects would be much greater for the emergence of small-scale, private agriculture-related enterprises. Moreover, as Powelson and Stock (1990, p.7-8) described, there are ideological and hence political benefits to such a monopoly position for the ruling party, as it can pose as the sole protector of the peasantry. Overall then, state landlordship constitutes a key means of rural political cooptation within Ethiopia. It should also be noted that, while these are not particularly novel observations - Dessalegn (2004, p.42), the EEA (2002, p.97) and many others have noted how nationalised land tenure facilitates the regimes duplicitous behaviour vis-à-vis peasants – what is more uniquely being conceived here is that such actions are systemic political imperatives, derivative of an underlying neopatrimonial logic at the core of the state, rather than simply dirty tricks.

A second and related means by which the prevailing rules governing land tenure facilitate a neopatrimonial mission is in their conditioning of the long-term possession of land upon residency. Recall that a MoARD source confirmed that the Government has sought to reduce urban in-migration, and hence homelessness and unemployment, via this policy. What he perhaps could have gone on to say is that poverty in Addis Ababa and other major cities is steadily rising according to the data (EEA, 2005, p.116-117), and that such conditions present an opportunity for opposition political movements to increase their support. Neopatrimonial theory suggests that urban areas generally comprise a greater threat of popular uprising than do rural areas due to the potentiality for mass action, and indeed the bloody scenes that followed the disputed 2005 election in Ethiopia may be testament to that fact. Therefore, the conditions in the prevailing legislation on landholding that threaten land confiscation if the occupier lives out with the rural locale, would seem to be an effective tool in limiting the urban in-migration of impoverished peoples. Instead, the vast majority of Ethiopians are confined to the more politically apathetic countryside, despite the fact that the carrying capacity of the rural highlands may already have been surpassed, in order that the Government can better restrict the growth of rival urban parties. Nationalised tenure is again a prerequisite to this restriction of movement, as a genuinely privatised system would permit landowners to come and go as they choose.

In spite of the above, rural areas may still present a significant political threat to the regime, and potentially in a more radical militant form than in cities, given the lack of institutionalisation of many less populated regions. The Government has sought to keep the OLF, ONLF and more lately EPPF at bay during its tenure, and indeed the TPLF itself began as a rural insurgent group. Given Ethiopia's spiralling population, there would seem to be a further threat to the regime posed by the growing numbers of young, impoverished rural Ethiopians, and again nationalised land tenure has provided a means by which the Government can temporarily evade this impending danger. According to the constitution, "Ethiopian peasants have the right to obtain land without

payment” (Fasil, 1997, p.231). Within this state-owned usufruct system, all young farmers are entitled to a free portion of land to farm, which should in theory limit the accumulation of large numbers of destitute, landless youngsters in the countryside, from which insurgent groups could recruit. However, the issue is further complicated by the fact that land is already overcrowded and subdivided into ‘micro/starvation-plots’ as previously described, hence it is unclear to what extent this constitutional requirement is actually being fulfilled. During a field visit to Addisna Gult Kebele, East Gojjam I asked community leaders about the provision of land to the young and was simply told that there is no free land to give. In response to such difficulties the Government has undertaken a population resettlement programme<sup>48</sup>, although critics have questioned the long-term viability, safety and environmental consequences of the project. In spite of these difficulties, the Government has refused to budge on the issue of land redistribution to the young, and as noted above, in the more recent proclamation about reinforced user rights aimed at supporting the titling and administration project, has reiterated this entitlement to free land (Proclamation No.456/2005, section 5.1.a). Therefore, the Government’s obstinate retention of this seemingly unworkable and certainly unsustainable proviso, in the face of compelling economic criticism would, along with other factors, suggest that an underlying political imperative is at root of the policy. As discussed, it may be an attempt to minimise the number of landless youths in the countryside and hence the growth rural insurgency movements, and again nationalised land tenure is necessary condition for such ongoing redistribution of land.

A fourth and final means by which the state’s stewardship of land supports neopatrimonial objectives is in making it cheap and easy to allocate free land to foreign investors. In the last chapter it was shown that the Ethiopian economy is primarily based upon the export of agricultural commodities. In recent years a floriculture industry has developed around Addis Ababa as noted above, generating considerable

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<sup>48</sup> See BBC News (3<sup>rd</sup> March 2005), ‘Ethiopians move for food security’, (<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/programmes/newsnight/4312717.stm>)

tax revenue for the Government. However, anecdotal evidence gathered on fieldwork suggested that the Government has been simply evicting peasants from their land in this area with either little or no compensation. The lack of individual legal rights over land that the prevailing tenure system accords farmers, and in particular the lack of entitlement to retain a specific piece of land for as long as the occupier chooses, again make such authoritative acts possible for the regime. Vital short-term revenue can be generated at the expense of a relatively small number of disgruntled peasants, thanks to the prevailing land tenure system.

In an underdeveloped country in which around 90% of the population lives in rural areas, it is unsurprising that a ruling party lacking any deep political accountability would opt to retain a system of nationalised land tenure. The above has depicted four obvious ways in which that tenure system can contribute towards a neopatrimonial mode of governance, and there may well be others. That being established, we will conclude this chapter by reiterating the key effects that this political reality, and its denial by many analysts, has had upon the debate on land tenure reform in Ethiopia.

### **Section (h) – Concluding Remarks**

It would seem that the land tenure debate in Ethiopia is a partially smothered one. Outside of the Government there is a strong desire to address the issue, in order that some of the country's most daunting developmental problems can begin to be tackled, e.g. food insecurity, population growth and the urban and industrial sectors. But the debate goes nowhere because the Government has not only refused to properly engage with the issue, but has in fact demonstrated no serious interest in finding ways in which land tenure could better contribute to development. Their land certification programme is merely an overdue response to pressure for reform from both indigenous and donor critics: it is their attempt to quietly put an end to the land tenure debate. The reasons behind this unyielding attachment to the status quo have been outlined. In essence: he who controls the rural periphery controls the country. Ethiopia is still awaiting its first

fully legitimate government, and under such conditions, development is the inevitable victim. One quote gathered from an indigenous donor representative provides a fitting summary of these unfortunate circumstances:

As long as the EPRDF is in power then the land tenure issue cannot really be discussed, and it makes politicians nervous whenever it is raised. BUT certification has tempered the donors somewhat and provided an outlet for discussion. However, until the issue is put out on the table properly for discussion, from both political and economic perspectives, then I see no solution to it being forthcoming. (Interview with donor source, February-March 2007)

This is the unfortunate note upon which we must end – that the land tenure debate in Ethiopia is currently insoluble. It continues to go around in circles, driven by both frustrated Ethiopian intellectuals and the land tenure ‘experts’ within donor organisations, who continue to search in vain for solutions from within the confines of their neoliberal discourse. Periodically, development strategies and projects are concocted that seek to target various aspects of the micro-economy, while bypassing those areas of political sensitivity. But in forfeiting a broad political economy approach, donors have effectively consigned themselves to merely tinkering with the current immovable mass, with little prospect of effecting substantially positive results. And because, for prudence sake, the fact that the state is an intransigent barrier cannot even be explicitly stated, then some donor organisations actually seem to ‘forget’ the extent to which it is such a problem – perhaps in part due to the periodic inflow of new and inexperienced staff. The same may also be true for academic newcomers to the field, and the emphasis placed on ‘tenure security’ in the literature may exacerbate that. Hence in the politics of land tenure and development in Ethiopia, myopia prevails, and little in the way of practicable output ever emerges. For reforms to be meaningful, more systemic change must either precede or accompany them due to the ingrained political

barriers outlined above. Until that occurs, then the land tenure debate in Ethiopia is little more than debate for debate's sake.

## Conclusion

Having now reached the culmination of our analysis of the political economy of land tenure in Ethiopia, and having considered a fairly wide range of correlative material, it will no doubt be helpful at this stage to reiterate the key conclusions that have emerged from each chapter. This will in turn allow us to more easily envision how all of the interrelated components of the land tenure issue fit together, from which broader conclusions can be drawn. Much of this section will be dedicated to the latter undertaking, as many relevant individual points from the chapters will necessarily be restated in so doing. However, it will not be possible to repeat all of the contributing arguments to the main conclusions that have emerged – only the complete chapters themselves can adequately achieve this. Therefore, this section will focus more upon bringing to fruition the main ideas that have emerged during this analysis, rather than reiterating all of what has already been stated.

In chapter one an attempt was made to elucidate some key principles of ‘good tenure’ that could serve as a benchmark against which a potential case for land reform, such as Ethiopia, could plausibly be assessed. However, upon surveying the empirical evidence on land tenure in Africa, it was discovered that much of the economic theory from which reform strategies have been derived remains as yet inadequately substantiated. Whether or not the theoretically guided objectives of tenure reform, i.e. strengthened holding rights, land market liberalisation, improved availability of credit etc, are appropriate remains uncertain. But what is more apparent is that donor and/or state-led interventions to try and externally propagate such change have fared particularly badly in Africa, to the extent that one can identify a greater degree of efficacy extant in certain unreformed customary tenure systems. It was argued that formulating strategies for effective social engineering of this kind is particularly difficult in the sphere of land tenure, because tenure systems are so deeply embedded within their sociopolitical, economic and indeed ecological contexts. It would seem that many past interventions

have insufficiently considered the breadth of these phenomena prior to undertaking invasive measures, and in particular it was observed that political analysis is most strikingly absent from the prognosis. Indeed, it was found that an econometric approach, arguably quite abstract and which ignored the intensely political nature of land, had dominated prior debates. It was therefore advocated that a broad and politically informed evaluation of a given society should precede any intervention in its tenure system. For the case of Ethiopia, that is precisely what this thesis has striven to achieve.

In chapter two an examination of postcolonial African politics was undertaken, in order to provide a theoretical framework through which our case-study country could be deciphered. It was found that governance in the post-independence period has been fraught with many difficulties, such as ethnic factionalism, corruption, clientelism, and weak state institutionalisation and accountability, all of which were in good part a consequence of the colonial legacy. The mode of rulership that has emerged in response to these hostile conditions has been depicted in much of the literature as ‘neopatrimonialism’, and generally comprises some or all of the following characteristics: highly personalised politics functioning in an uneasy coalition with a degree of rational bureaucratic administration; a blur between the state and ruling party; the profusion of patron-client networks; a short-term orientation in economic policy – mainly geared towards generating revenue for redistribution by the ruling elites; endemic corruption and a mentality that the state is a ‘honey-pot’ of resources; and prevailing sub-national biases, e.g. towards ethnic kin-groups, and a lack of collective national identity and ambition. Many of these traits are derivative of the fact that neopatrimonial regimes must engage in a perpetual struggle to retain their grip on power, due to the hostile conditions within which they seek to function. And of particular importance for this thesis is the further consequence that African states have often been construed as ‘anti-developmental’. The redistributive and military exigencies that the ongoing power-struggle has entailed are such that states have been

unwilling and in a sense unable to undertake the degree of long-term productive investment required for sustained economic growth. This is a deeply significant point, as it suggests that there may be serious limitations to what can plausibly be achieved via developmental interventions within current political and economic constraints. This state of affairs would become more clearly evident in later discussions of the Ethiopian case.

From a broader perspective, chapter two also made the point that the above phenomena may be indicative of a period of volatility within a broader evolutionary process in which African societies and their externally fabricated state structures have attempted to come to terms with each other, and fashion a workable means of integration. This historiological point was significant, because it demonstrated a fundamental commonality between Ethiopia and the rest of Africa, despite the uniqueness of Ethiopia's history as a sovereign state. This parallel is in the fact that Ethiopian history has also comprised an ongoing struggle between the state and its constituent societies. It was therefore argued in chapter three that this enduring tug of war between state and periphery has been *the* defining characteristic of Ethiopia's political history, and that from Selassie's reign onwards (i.e. after 1930), successive regimes, like their African contemporaries, have utilised the tools of neopatrimonialism in order to try and maintain their hegemony. Evidence was offered to support the charge of neopatrimonialism in the case of both the Selassie and EPRDF regimes, with particular emphasis upon the latter, which was found to be best characterised by the typology of 'bureaucratic neopatrimonialism'. This realisation allowed us to delineate a suitable exposition of the contemporary political environment in Ethiopia, which would serve as a foundation for the later analysis of land tenure. Some of the more pertinent features of Meles Zenawi's Government and the prevailing political economy that were outlined are as follows: The TPLF have headed a de facto one party state since 1991, which has been cloaked behind an ethno-federally structured system of administration; the distribution of political power in the country is top heavy - weighted in favour of TPLF elites, and

disseminated through a vertical patron-client hierarchy within which agents of the state must above all else focus upon pleasing their superiors rather than ordinary citizens; political opposition has been consistently undermined throughout the EPRDF's tenure via various measures, i.e. propaganda, human rights violations, rigged elections etc; key sources of revenue and indeed much of the economy is control by the TPLF and its agents, and the processes by which this wealth is redistributed to regional governments serves as a mode of patronage; destructive conflict over scarce resources can be observed within the ethno-regions, as can perceptions of the state as a "honey-pot"; a degree of rational-bureaucratic exertion nevertheless emanates from some areas of the state's administrative apparatus due to the earnest efforts of some civil servants; and finally, the Ethiopian variant of neopatrimonialism comprises a greater degree of authoritarianism than conventional depictions of the model have often entailed – the "big sticks and small carrots" approach. It was therefore concluded that the neopatrimonial model and its 'bureaucratic' variant offer a great deal of insight into the Ethiopian case.

Chapter four further detailed the relevant economic components of Ethiopia's pre-modern and twentieth century transitions in political economy, as well as tracing out the changes in land tenure that have been associated with these periods of socioeconomic change. In effect it offered a bottom-up perspective on the process of societal transformation outlined in the preceding chapter, emphasising the two-way causality between property right institutions and wider microeconomic phenomena within this changing environment. It was argued that the rist-gult land tenure system emerged as correlate of both the ox-plough agricultural complex in the highlands and the region's overarching pre-modern political ecology. Rist-gult provided the sociocultural and institutional pretext under which surplus wealth generated from agriculture could be channelled upwards to political elites to such an extent that made it possible for the isolated Abyssinian state to sustain itself as an independent Christian polity. One key cultural aspect of this system that aided in its legitimation was the

phenomenon of social mobility. Class barriers were highly fluid and aided meritocratic induction, such that enterprising individuals from any background could achieve political and economic advancement. This accorded well with the teachings of Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity, and gave rise to an ethos of hierarchical individualism that operated in good part through the institutional mechanism of rist-gult land tenure. It was also argued that the closed nature of the rist-gult, ox-plough production system ensured a high degree of wealth circulation and clientelistic redistribution within communities, which further legitimised the sociocultural status quo by, for the most part, preventing a level of material inequality emerging that was unbearable for peasant farmers – that is until the epoch of Abyssinia’s economic isolation ended.

Following this characterisation of land tenure and the pre-modern economy, chapter four then detailed the effects of Abyssinia’s reconnection with international economic forces. In particular this new relationship allowed for the southward expansion of the state via modern weaponry, which gave birth to the contemporary geographical Ethiopian entity. The profusion of global trade networks also fatally undermined the northern system of production. The re-circulation of national wealth and the porousness of class barriers ceased with the establishment of Menilek and Selassie’s modern states, and this undermined both the cultural and economic viability of the rist-gult tenure regime. The historical process in which the state maintained itself by bleeding the periphery continued, but the ideological basis for this arrangement was destroyed, as was the political accountability of the central hegemon. Broadly speaking, this is in effect the socioeconomic account of the twentieth century breakdown of state-society integration, and of course the consequent onset of neopatrimonial rule. It also offers an explanation for why rist-gult tenure became exploitative in its latter years. Out with the context of the closed village economy in pre-modern Abyssinia, i.e. in the absence of social mobility and wealth redistribution, the tenure system simply provided the institutional guise for the presence of a parasitical elite class and the rigidification of material inequalities. Hence it was in fact the de facto loss of economic autonomy for

northern peasants under the modernisation and centralisation processes, rather than the tenure system itself, that prompted the degree of impoverishment that befell Ethiopia's rural peoples in the twentieth century.

Chapter four then described some of the means by which twentieth century Ethiopian regimes have attempted to refashion the economic basis of the state via agricultural and industrial growth drives. Selassie's attempt to establish a manufacturing sector was discussed, as were the predominantly agriculture-driven strategies of latter regimes, i.e. the Derg's 'scientific' socialism and the EPRDF's ADLI. However, severe structural constraints and the exigencies of neopatrimonial politics, such as the short-term resource requirements of the state, were found to have thwarted all of these efforts, and the majority of Ethiopians remain rooted in subsistence agriculture. Under such conditions, the land tenure system has again been at the fore of analysis and policy formulation. The Derg regime undertook a famous nationalisation and equalisation of farmers' holdings, which the EPRDF has thus far sought to maintain. Both have argued that the country's development has been undermined by an exploitative, inequalitarian distribution of landholding, which state ownership can prevent. However, when considered in light of prevailing neopatrimonial politics, it would seem that nationalisation has rather provided a means by which the state has been able to maintain its grip on the hostile periphery – a key point that would be developed in the fifth chapter.

Chapter four concluded by stressing that the majority of commentators who have published prognoses for land reform in Ethiopia have failed to fully apprehend the nature of the political economy within which that system is situated – a charge that was levelled at African practitioners more generally in chapter one. It was contended that the analysis offered in this thesis could plug that gap, by providing a broader politically and historically consistent evaluation of the issue. As a final component of that project, chapter five then sought to carry out a critique of the contemporary debate on land

tenure reform in Ethiopia. Interviews were conducted with key actors in the field and the recent literature was surveyed in order that an insight into the views of the Government, academics, ordinary farmers, donor organisations and other development practitioners could be obtained. Some of the main arguments offered by the various participants in the land reform debate were as follows: The Government has persistently focused upon the imagined negative consequences of privatised tenure as a justification for the retention of nationalised ownership, at least in its official rhetoric. They have characterised land tenure statically and negatively – as a means to obstruct change rather than facilitate it, based on the dubious assumption that economic growth will be delivered from entirely out with the tenure regime via their ADLI programme. The erroneous economics behind such claims were outlined, and it was argued that a neopatrimonial logic is ultimately at the root of the Government's stance. This fact is further illustrated by their seemingly ambivalent attitude to the land titling initiative, which donors like SIDA and USAID have pushed for. Civil servants within state departments such as ELTAP and EPLAUA have been charged with undertaking reform but without any firm sense of commitment from their leadership. This may be indicative of the Government's desire to both appease donors but ultimately maintain the power over rural peoples that nationalised tenure accords it.

Ethiopian thinkers and donor organisation have generally brought more coherent economic arguments to the debate on land reform, utilising the recent theory and evidence published by organisation such as the World Bank in an attempt to propose contextually sensitive solutions, e.g. they have acknowledged potential weaknesses in outright privatisation. These commentators have frequently cited reinforced tenure security as the primary objective of their efforts, in light of the seemingly distortive effects of nationalised ownership on farmer's incentives to carry out productive investment. Nevertheless, in spite of the intelligent analysis that has been undertaken, it was argued that the body of economist and donor work on tenure reform in Ethiopia suffers from profound weaknesses – most notably in that controversial political factors

have been omitted for prudence sake, and tenure insecurity has been assumed a key culprit of micro-level investment shortfalls, despite a lack of hard evidence to substantiate that fact. These two misconceptions are of course interrelated, because in failing to apprehend the political dimensions of prevailing structural constraints, more fundamental causes of underdevelopment are removed from the radar. From this restricted viewpoint, subordinated, less contentious but nevertheless interrelated factors such as the land tenure regime can become disproportionately emphasised. From the perspective of most Ethiopian commentators, it was suggested that firstly, this avoidance of political analysis was more likely due to fear of government reprisal rather than naivety, and secondly, that the notion of tenure security may be being used somewhat euphemistically as a signifier of a broader liberal-democratic agenda for reform. However, in the case of some donor developmental practitioners, a greater belief in the possibility of effecting substantive economic change via processes such as tenure reform from within the confines of the prevailing system was uncovered. This myopia may be due to some combination of organisational imperatives and a lack of contextual knowledge. Other donor representatives were sharply attuned to political realities, but like many Ethiopian critics indicated a strong desire to avoid provoking the government.

The limited information that is available on the preferences of Ethiopian farmers has indicated both a wish for greater autonomy over their land and reservations about outright privatisation. In light of this fact, the example of the Amhara regional land titling initiative was outlined, as both the Government and certain donors have touted this as a means to address the needs of farmers within the confines of the prevailing political economy. However, upon scrutinising the programme it was found that its prospects are extremely poor due to an apparent lack of genuine political will, manifested in both a lack of investment in the programme and ambiguous legislation, which stops short of explicitly empowering peasants. It was argued that the crux of a land reform project to strengthen tenure security is precisely in its accordance of peasants with greater

individual, legal power over their property, and so by avoiding such a concession the Government has rendered the entire process impotent. They have rather sought to use the programme as a means to try and convince peasants that they have been empowered, and encourage them to engage in greater risk-taking investment as if this were the case, but without actually committing themselves to any real loss of authority. This is of course but another inevitable and predictable expression of the neopatrimonial exigencies that underlie Ethiopian politics, and as commentators such as Lockwood (2005) have argued, when regimes are ensnared by this logic then development programmes such as land reform are a sure victim. Therefore, as a culmination of the preceding discussion of the competing perspectives on land tenure reform, a final section on the reality of the Government's position on land tenure as it can best be deciphered was included in the chapter. This also provided a contrast to the unconvincing economic rhetoric that has constituted their official perspective as discussed in the first section. As is evident below, in incorporating an understanding of political economy into one's perspective on land tenure, more plausible albeit cynical explanations for the Government's policies become apparent.

The final section of chapter five outlined four key ways in which the prevailing nationalised tenure system is requisite to the neopatrimonial exigencies of the regime. Briefly, these are as follows: Given the regime's lack of popular legitimacy and accountability, state landlordship has provided an effective means for the EPRDF to coerce and co-opt the peasantry, and ensure that dissent and disloyalty are minimised. The tenure legislation also restricts urban in-migration – alleviating the potential build up of impoverished individuals in the cities, and hence reducing the potential support base for political opposition. Moreover, providing free rural plots of land to all is a means of reducing rural landlessness and hence the potential recruitment base for insurgency movements, even if each endowment is effectively a starvation micro-plot. It was noted that this policy is particularly unsustainable, given the rate of population growth and diminishing availability of suitable cropland. This is again a stark instance

of political imperatives overriding economic rationality, which would seem to necessitate efforts towards the consolidation of rural micro-plots and increased urbanisation. Finally, it was observed that nationalised landholding allows the regime to cheaply and easily allocate land to foreign investors. In the absence of clear-cut and enforceable individual rights over land, the Government has been able to carry out uncompensated evictions in areas like peri-urban Addis Ababa to meet the needs of large-scale flower farming enterprises. This again accords well with the prior assertion that it is the generation Government export revenue, rather than the development of smallholder agriculture, that constitutes the primary focus of the EPRDF's economic policy.

It was concluded in the chapter that elaborate ruses such as the Ethiopian land titling initiative have been made possible by the fact that political and economic realities such as the above have been omitted from the prognosis. Many donors have been blind to these facts and have persisted with infeasible projects like the land-titling scheme - allowing their resources, as well as the recent debate on land tenure to be dedicated to such impractical ventures. This outcome has accorded well with the Government's short-term interests, and indeed some indigenous critics have argued that it was precisely its intention to alleviate pressure for land reform via this programme, by simulating a substantive response. Conversely though, many donors have failed to consider the import of such potentially duplicitous objectives, and harbour the belief that they can engineer development both in spite of the state and simultaneously using the arms of that state. This seemingly contradictory stance is only possible because they have chosen to avoid taking on board all of the evidence about how countries like Ethiopia actually work. They assume that regimes either in good part want to deliver economic growth but cannot, or are simply apathetic on the issue – both of which would of course justify a pre-eminent role for donors in such processes. But if they rather accepted that regimes invariably want development to a lesser extent than they want to stay in power, then it would become apparent to donors that African

governments have an incentive to either passively or actively resist any developmental measures that threaten to undermine their authority. Badie aptly summed up this situation in the following quote:

On the one hand, economic development is a goal that every head of state must pursue...On the other hand, an overly active policy of development risks producing several negative results: it would valorize the competence of the technocratic elite relative to that of the fragile political elite, break up social spaces and favor the constitution of a civil society capable of counterbalancing the political system, and indeed, neutralize neo-patrimonial strategies (Badie, 2000, p.19).

This situation constitutes an innate and systemic barrier to the process of development, and the degree of pressure for liberal reform that contemporary donor organisations in countries like Ethiopia have proved capable of applying to elites has proved insufficient to surmount their more pressing political imperatives. In effect, many projects pit donors on the opposite side of a tug-o-war for power with the state, and in order to avoid antagonising their host governments, it is almost a forgone conclusion that donors will simply acquiesce to the core interests of the party in power. In the above example of land titling and administration, some donors backed the programme in the absence of supportive legislation that concretised any firm individual rights for farmers over their land. They did not, or could not, force a genuine concession of authority from the Government - in the absence of which it would seem that there was little point in pursuing the project - based on its stated aims of reinforcing tenure security, for the reasons outlined previously. Therefore, and more generally speaking, were donors to fully acknowledge the political circumstances under which they must operate then they would have to accept that there are far greater limitations to the scope and efficacy of their operations than they currently do. In essence, development in spite of the state would have to be abandoned as an impossible dream. It was on this unfortunate note of impotency that the chapter ended.

Returning now to the narrower issue of land tenure in Ethiopia, and in order to preempt an obvious criticism of the above perspective, it is here contended that the pessimistic note upon which the discussion of the debate on tenure reform ended is not excessively negative or unconstructive, as some might have it. Rather, based on the preceding analysis offered in the thesis, it was both inevitable and desirable. No practicable solution to Ethiopia's land tenure dilemma can feasibly be provided until the full extent of the problem itself has firstly been uncovered. That was precisely the aim here, i.e. to broadly delineate the issue of land tenure reform within the bounds of its historical, political and economic context. In so doing it was inevitable that many proposed interventions that have attempted to shortcut this relatively complex process would fall by the wayside. Therefore, if the full scope of the problems with which developmental interventions to reform land tenure in Ethiopia must contend has been more sharply defined, then the objective of this thesis has been achieved. Current constraints may limit practical action according to this prognosis, but at least this means that unworkable efforts can be more easily averted. The analysis may even pave the way for more modest, realistic developmental endeavours. However, a more fundamental point concerning Ethiopia's political economy should be emphasised, and that is that substantive and lasting development is more likely to come from within. It is on this issue that we will round off our discussion.

At present it would seem that the Ethiopian land tenure system is not integrated into the country's political ecology to the extent that it once was. The rural highlands are becoming dangerously overcrowded, much of the land is fragmented into starvation plots, litigation over disputes continues, and many communities do not possess the free land to allocate to young adults as demanded by the Constitution. And yet the Government continues to pursue policies aimed at quelling urban in-migration, and maintaining the status quo vis-à-vis the distribution and nationalisation of rural land. How can we explain this policy-making? Is it ignorance, incompetence or rather

political necessity? Neopatrimonial theory would suggest that it is primarily the latter that accounts for Ethiopia's beleaguered rural property right regimes. Unfortunately then, the land tenure system, in a state of disconnectedness and dilapidation, cannot really be fixed until the political problems that have precipitated its decline have themselves first been remedied. This will occur when the tension between state and periphery in Ethiopia has been better resolved, and the former has refashioned itself as an entity that is accountable to the latter. Only then will land tenure synergize with the overarching political economy – a far more credible outcome than the expectation that reform by itself can unleash the productive assets of the poor, as if politics did not exist. As one Ethiopia interviewee assured me:

The first steps towards development are politics and stability etc and then economic policy comes as secondary. You have to first get the political environment sorted out and then you can think about things like land tenure. (Interview with indigenous analyst, February-March 2007)

Land tenure reform must assume an appropriate place in the queue of Ethiopia's as yet unresolved economic problems, and that place does not precede structural political transformation. That is not to say that a process of change would be straightforwardly linear, as economic and political transformations would in good part go hand in hand. But nevertheless it is hard to fathom any way in which tenure reform could be meaningfully implemented without some modification firstly occurring in the distribution of political power. Of course that change could in part come in the form of the tenure reform legislation itself, if it encompassed a genuine transfer of authority from the government to ordinary farmers. But so long as the ruling party's over-riding objective remains to control the peasantry and garnish its compliance then this simply will not happen. It is therefore this facet of the Government's operation that would need to change for meaningful land reform to be made possible. In other words, what Ethiopia firstly needs is a government that will accept losing an election. If and when

such a government does emerge under circumstances in which regime change does not mean turbulence and bloodshed, then it may be a sign that Ethiopian society and its political superstructure have at last come to terms with each other, and forged a bond of mutual compliance and accountability. For now, it is to bringing forth that outcome that developmental efforts in Ethiopia should primarily strive.

In order to round off our discussion, and in light of the above prognosis, consideration of a final and indeed pivotal issue would seem to be appropriate – i.e. what are the prospects for a state-society political reconciliation in the future? Are there any signs that a process of gradual and underlying harmonisation is underway, and is an end to the destructive cycle of neopatrimonialism on the horizon for Ethiopia? Attempting to provide definitive answers to such questions is obviously problematic, so perhaps a suitable way to approach the matter would be to reproduce more of the thoughts offered by those informed observers that have lived and worked in the country in recent years. As can be observed in the following quotes there are mixed views on the issue:

We will see major transformation in Ethiopia eventually, because the will of the people is for this. I don't know when this might happen but we have seen from the past experiences of others that it eventually does. Everyone still speaks about that here, however quietly, and the will of the population at large is what determines development. (Interview with indigenous analyst, February-March 2007)

We have seen considerable change within the circumstances over the last twenty years - most notably the slow build up of a civil society. I think some of the policy shifts we have seen in recent years have been a consequence of these increasingly loudening voices. (Interview with indigenous analyst, February-March 2007)

Sometimes it takes a crisis to get things done. Maybe this will come and spur people on, but development is a slow process and I am not optimistic. To create the right

conditions, progressive leadership is needed. But, for example, at present many young Ethiopians aspire to move to the US or Canada. This signifies that there is a lack of hope and vision for the country. (Interview with indigenous analyst, February-March 2007)

There is potential in what has been started during the previous election, in terms of multiparty politics, truer democracy, elected leaders etc. What people had dreamed of was beginning to happen, and had a democratic culture developed then we would have moved even faster. (Interview with indigenous analyst, February-March 2007)

A key event mentioned in several of the above quotes was the 2005 election, which offered something of a snapshot of current conditions. The bloody and repressive aftermath, which saw protestors shot by the police and the opposition leadership incarcerated, was mentioned previously. However, now that a few years have passed since these events, and indeed the opposition have been pardoned<sup>49</sup>, some analysts that were interviewed during fieldwork have come to consider the entire process more broadly, focusing on aspects of the pre-electoral period that may signify genuine potential for progress. According to one diplomatic source that was interviewed, there was initially an unprecedented commitment by the EPRDF to genuinely democratising the process. This intention was manifested for example in: regular dialogue with the opposition; increased tolerance of the private media and civil society groups; televised debates during which the regime was criticised; and efforts to educate the public on civic processes like voting. However, according to the source, things went sour because the Government had assumed that its tolerant attitude would be recognised by the public and rewarded with votes. But rather there was a surge in support for the opposition. This prompted a knee-jerk reaction by EPRDF, and much of the above openness was swiftly reversed and indeed replaced by more familiar repressive measures – e.g. the

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<sup>49</sup> See BBC News (23<sup>rd</sup> July 2007), ‘What next for Ethiopia’s freed leaders?’, (<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/6911429.stm>).

private press was again suppressed, journalists and opposition members were arrested, and efforts were taken to infiltrate and fragment opposition parties. In other words, the neopatrimonial directive to stay in power at all costs remained insurmountable from the EPRDF's perspective.

A further aspect of the 2005 election that some interviewees placed stock in was the fact that the experience of civic behaviour and democracy in the pre-electoral period, short lived as it was, may nevertheless have a lasting effect. As can be observed in the following quote, again from a diplomatic source, some believe that such experiences will change people's expectations, so that over time a rigid undemocratic position will become increasingly untenable:

People do not forget the unprecedented things they have seen, e.g. televised criticism of the Government. It will likely resonate in a way that may facilitate future surges in civic/democratic behaviour. (Interview with diplomatic source, February 2007)

Moreover, upon considering Ethiopian politics broadly, the same source characterised the situation as follows.

A very long-term perspective would probably suggest a gradual movement towards democracy in Ethiopia, but with spikes of openness and dips of repression. These open spans have coincided with periods of peace and stability in the country, and conversely repression with instability. (Interview with diplomatic source, February 2007)

An academic source also suggested that if one focuses more upon the microeconomic picture rather than the bleak macro-level statistics (and after all it would likely be from the former sector that an innovative solution to the country's problems would emerge) there might be some cause for hope:

If you start from the ground, and see people innovating, diversifying, coping and actually improving their lives, e.g. by undertaking irrigation, utilising remittances, making use of newly available consumer goods, creating increased rural-urban linkages etc. combined with the effects of fifteen years of relative peace, stability and economic liberalisation, then there are many things to be optimistic about. (Interview with indigenous analyst, February-March 2007)

This experience of greater openness during peaceful times would again seem to accord with the fact that neopatrimonialism is a mode of governance apt for periods of turmoil and conflict. Clearly then, Ethiopia's prospects for political resolution depend in good part upon its ability to reconcile its internal political conflict i.e. between core and periphery. However, the EPRDF's ethnofederal model of governance was an attempt to achieve precisely that, but as previously described has thus far failed to comprise that pivotal element for long-term reconciliation: a genuine decentralisation of power. And the fact that since 1990 there has been *relative* peace should not lull one into the false assumption that peripheral conflicts are close to resolution, most notably in the Oromo and Somali regions. Rather it is simply that, relative to the chaos and bloodshed of the civil war, the last fifteen years have been low-key. Given that the thesis has thus far attempted to confront Ethiopia's problems of political economy without sugar-coating them, it would be insincere to end on a note of unsubstantiated and somewhat enigmatic optimism as the above quote implies. Rather, the fundamental problem that Ethiopia must resolve is that of effecting peaceful, accountable and, ideally, representative governance in an underdeveloped, resource-poor, multi-ethnic state. A long-term solution to that dilemma has as yet failed to emerge, and until it does, neopatrimonial governance is likely to persist, as are other short-term strategies to maintain loyalty and unity, such as recurrent border conflicts with neighbouring countries. Only when such core deficiencies are resolved will sustainable economic development, and indeed worthy projects such as land tenure reform, have a realistic

chance of taking root. Presently, the evidence does not seem to suggest that such a terminal point is on the horizon.

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## Appendix: List of Interviews Conducted During Fieldwork in Ethiopia:

7.2.7	Dr Yeraswork Admassie	Addis Ababa University (AAU), Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology
8.2.7	Dr Belay Demissie	United States Agency for International Development (USAID)
9.2.7	Yigremew Adal	AAU, Institute of Development Research
12.2.7	Tim Robertson	UK Department for International Development (DFID)
14.2.7	Margaretha Sundgren	Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA)
15.2.7	Gizachew Abegaz	Ethiopian Land Tenure and Administration Program (ELTAP)
16.2.7	Jeeva Perumalpillai-Essex	World Bank
19.2.7	Dr Berhanu Adenew	Ethiopian Economic Policy Research Institute (EEPRI)
20.2.7	Dr Solomon Bekure	ELTAP
23.2.7	Dr Merera Gudina	Oromo National Congress (ONC)
23.2.7	Girma Mengistu	Discovery Consultancy
26.2.7	Dr Alula Pankhurst	Addis Ababa University (AAU), Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology
27.2.7	Amara Worku	Ministry of Agricultural and Rural Development
28.2.7	Pim De Kaiser	Netherlands Embassy
28.2.7	Dr Girma Mogust	NEK Consultancy
1.3.7	Ahmed Jamal	FARM-Africa
1.3.7	Zelalam Temesgen	FARM-Africa
1.3.7	Joan Kagwanja	United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA)
2.3.7	Paul Mattieu	United Nations Food and Agriculture Program (UNFAO)
2.3.7	Dr Beyene Petros	United Ethiopian Democratic Forces (UEDF)
5.3.7	Dr Tadesse Amsalu	Environment Protection, Land Administration and Utilization Authority (EPLAUA)
5.3.7	Lars Palm	EPLAUA
5.3.7	Dr Zerfu Hailu	EPLAUA
6.3.7	Dr Yalew Endawoke	Bahir Dar University, Department of Land Administration
6.3.7	Teshome Taffa	Bahir Dar University, Department of Geography
9.3.7	Kebele Committee	Addisna Gult Kebele, East Gojjam
9.3.7	Group of Farmers	Addisna Gult Kebele, East Gojjam
9.3.7	Amsalu Kebede	EPLAUA, Gozamin Wordea Office, East Gojjam
9.3.7	Adane Mehari	EPLAUA, Gozamin Wordea Office, East Gojjam
12.3.7	Dessalegn Rahmato	Forum for Social Studies (FSS)
15.3.7	Takele Teshome	United Nations Development Program (UNDP)
20.3.7	Dr Eshetu Mulatu	European Commission (EC)
20.3.7	Teressa Jelleta	EC
22.3.7	Dr Samuel Gebreselassie	Ethiopian Economics Association (EEA)
23.3.7	Dr Dejene Mekonnen	Ireland Aid
26.3.7	Feyera Abdi	SOS Sahel