



Discussing the 2018/19 Changes in Ethiopia: Bahru Zewde

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The Nokoko journal is committed to a world where people are free from all forms of oppression and exploitation, where respect for individuals' varied differences is maintained, and where everyone can realise their full potentials. NokokoPod is a companion to the journal, covering current African issues. It aims to bring forth new perspectives that broaden, trouble, complicate and enrich current discourses. Edited and annotated versions of the conversations will be made available on the journal website.

This is the first discussion, of three,¹ in a series that discusses the changes that have taken place in Ethiopia since 2018; changes which have raised many hopes as being transformational, while also many questions. This conversation occurred over Skype on March 4th, with Logan Cochrane based in Ottawa and Bahru Zewde in Berlin. The podcast for this discussion is available on the Nokoko journal website. This version of the PDF has been reviewed by Logan Cochrane and Bahru Zewde. In addition to the conversation, a set of annotations have been added as footnotes so as to strengthen the value of these publications and enable them to act as a

¹ The other two podcasts are:

Cochrane, L. and Hone Mandefro (2019) Discussing the 2018/19 Changes in Ethiopia: Hone Mandefro. NokokoPod 2019 (2).

Cochrane, L. and Asnake Kefale (2019) Discussing the 2018/19 Changes in Ethiopia: Asnake Kefale. NokokoPod 2019 (3).

resource for listeners and readers who want to have additional context and/or find additional resources on the topics discussed.

Logan: Ethiopia has gained a lot of international attention over the last year as there have been numerous and significant changes made. While there is great interest around the world to better understand, there are also many unanswered questions. Today it is my great honor to have Professor Bahru Zewde with us and to hear his perspectives. Professor Bahru is one of Ethiopia's greatest and most widely cited historians, whose books include: *A History of Modern Ethiopia*,² *Pioneers of Change in Ethiopia*³ and *The Quest for Socialist Utopia*,⁴ amongst many other publications. Today's discussion is the first in a series that will cover the recent changes, as our guest is an expert of history much of our conversation will be grounded in the historical experience. We would like to thank you Professor Bahru for joining us.

Prof Bahru: You are welcome.

Logan: My first question is a ground setting question Ethiopia made international headlines in 2018 for a number of reasons: making peace with Eritrea,⁵ freeing political prisoners,⁶ opening the political space for opposition parties and the media,⁷ making significant political changes within the ruling party,⁸ and a plan for

2 Zewde, B. (2002). *A History of Modern Ethiopia, 1855–1991*. Ohio University Press.

3 Zewde, B. (2002). *Pioneers of Change in Ethiopia: The Reformist Intellectuals of the Early Twentieth Century*. Ohio University Press.

4 Zewde, B. (2014). *The Quest for Socialist Utopia: The Ethiopian Student Movement, c. 1960-1974*. Boydell & Brewer Ltd.

5 For additional information, see: <https://www.economist.com/the-economist-explains/2018/07/17/how-ethiopia-and-eritrea-made-peace>

6 For additional information, see: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-ethiopia-prisoners/ethiopia-offers-amnesty-to-recently-freed-political-prisoners-idUSKBN1KA1U0>

7 For additional information, see: https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/policybrief_reform_in_ethiopia_0.pdf

8 For some context, see: <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/east-africa/2018-09-10/can-ethiopias-reforms-succeed>

free and fair elections for 2020.⁹ Could you give us a little bit of the recent history that led us up to the changes that we saw in 2018 and 2019.

Prof Bahru: That is not easy, but I will try. I think we could divide the background to the changes that took place into two components. First, the long-term perspective, that is long term within the EPRDF¹⁰ regime not in terms of the broader Ethiopian history. Second, short-term factors that led to the change, not of the governing regime (because in name at least it remained EPRDF), but a significant shift in policy.

In the long term, I could say the current orientation of the regime is a long overdue response to the quest of the Ethiopian people for democracy, human rights and human dignity. The EPRDF regime, although it described itself as democratic, was anything but. This can be seen by a number of human rights abuses that are now being publicized and described in gruesome detail. A good example is the holding of sham elections, except for the one in 2005, which was when the regime came to realize that it was going to lose power. As a result of that realization, the ruling coalition resorted to a policy of repression and intimidation. That has become the norm up until recently. After 2005, Ethiopia has had only sham elections in which the ruling party won either 90 plus or 100 percent of the electorate, as in the last one.¹¹ This quest for democracy was something that was always there. When Prime Minister Abiy made his acceptance speech as Prime Minister,¹² to the parliament, to the Ethiopian people and to the world, he delivered a message that Ethiopians need democracy

9 For additional information, see:
<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/11/ethiopia-pm-promises-free-election-meets-opposition-parties-181127140319686.html>

10 Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front, which is a coalition of four political parties ruling the four major regional states.

11 During the 2010 election the EPRDF and its allies won over 99% of seats in parliament, for additional background see:
<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/may/26/ethiopia-election-result-meles-zenawi>
In the 2015 election, the coalition and its allies won 100% of the seats:
<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jun/22/ethiopia-ruling-party-win-clean-sweep-general-election>

12 A translation of the speech is available here:
<https://www.opride.com/2018/04/03/english-partial-transcript-of-ethiopian-prime-minister-abiy-ahmeds-inaugural-address/>

and that Ethiopians deserve democracy. I think that was a very important statement.

The second factor in the long-term perspective are the contradictions within the TPLF¹³ strategy for political hegemony. This is because the ruling EPRDF is supposed to be a coalition of four ethno-political groups. But not all regional states have equal power or participation within the federal EPRDF coalition. It was assumed that the other ethnic-based parties - ANDM,¹⁴ OPDO¹⁵ and the Southern party¹⁶ - would do the bidding of the TPLF almost indefinitely. This was bound to misfire. The ANDM and the OPDO in particular said 'enough is enough' and that they were not going to just remain satellites of the TPLF. It is important to note that the leaders of the current change are the leaders of the OPDO and ANDM.

The third long-term factor is that there was a general public disgust with the ethnic politics and ethnic economics that the TPLF regime instituted in the country. This disgust arose from a feeling that one segment of the population was gaining political power and economic benefits at the expense of others.

Finally, within the long-term factors, we can include youth unemployment. Ethiopia, like other countries in Africa - maybe even more so - was suffering from massive youth unemployment.¹⁷ There was simmering discontent within the segment of society that could not obtain any decent jobs even after acquiring first and second degrees.

In sum, these were the long-term factors: (1) a lack of inclusive governance and human rights abuses, (2) TPLF hegemony, (3)

13 Tigray Peoples' Liberation Front. The TPLF was founded in 1975 and was the leading group that would eventually overthrow, in 1991, the military government that itself had come to power in 1974. The TPLF continued to play a strong and leading role in the EPRDF coalition since 1991, at least up until the recent changes.

14 Amhara National Democratic Movement, now the Amhara Democratic Party, ADP.

15 Oromo Peoples' Democratic Organization, now the Oromo Democratic Party, OPD.

16 Southern Ethiopian Peoples' Democratic Movement, SEPDM.

17 Detailed, macro-level studies on youth unemployment are lacking. For some context, see: <http://www.oecd.org/dev/inclusivesocietiesanddevelopment/youth-issues-in-ethiopia.htm>

public disgust with patronage politics, and (4) youth unemployment.

In the short-term, there were several factors as well. There was the Addis Ababa Master Plan,¹⁸ which on the surface was not really a negative thing because it was an effort to create a greater Addis Ababa while benefiting at the same time the adjoining districts. However, it was perceived by the Oromo youth in particular as being put forward at the expense of Oromo farmers on the periphery of Addis Ababa. This led to a series of protests because the farmers on the outskirts of Addis Ababa had already suffered from a large number of real estate expansions and this Master Plan was perceived as being yet another measure to dislodge them without giving them due and adequate compensation. The Oromo protests spread to other parts of Ethiopia, such as in the Amhara regional state and also in the southern regional state¹⁹ to some extent.

In the short-term, we also have to factor in the personality of the new Prime Minister Abiy. He came from inside the EPRDF, but was able to supersede its ethnic-oriented organization. He was able to put forward a pan-Ethiopian vision. His personality mattered a lot. He was not alone; he was supported by his allies within the OPDO and the ANDM, or what has come to be known as 'Team Lemma'²⁰

Logan: For some external observers, and for some Ethiopians and maybe particularly for some youth, this experience of rapid change - be it political, policy or legal, or even the ability to engage in political discourse - is a relatively new experience. Could you, looking at the historical experience of Ethiopia, talk about other moments when there was rapid change of a similar type?

Prof Bahru: Not in terms of popular participation, no. However, in terms of change that shifted the nature of society significantly, yes. If you look back to the 19th century, you can

18 For additional information, see: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jan/14/ethiopia-addis-master-plan-abandoned>

19 Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples' (SNNP) regional state.

20 For an example of the use of 'Team Lemma' in Ethiopian media, and additional information on what it entails, see: <https://www.ethiopia-insight.com/2018/12/03/can-team-lemma-bridge-ethiopia-political-chasm/>

identify Emperor Tewodros²¹ as a significant departure from the past because he grew up in the period of what was known as the *Zemene Mesafint*, or the Era of the Princes, and yet came to supersede it.²² At that time, the hereditary monarch had become a puppet and power was concentrated in the hands of the regional lords. Tewodros rose against that and was able to destroy the regional lords, one by one, and eventually reconstitute the power of the Emperor. This is why he is described as the founder of modern Ethiopia. The idea of a unified Ethiopia was conceived during his time. Tewodros had his own problems, personal problems related to his character, making it impossible for him to have an enduring effect on the country. You could say that compared to what was before and what came after, that the period of Tewodros could be described as a significant departure from the past.

In more recent times, there was the 1974 revolution, which completely destroyed the old regime, removed the Emperor who was effectively seen as a demi-god, and the dynasty that counted its age in terms of millennia²³ The new military government, the Derg,²⁴ initiated a land reform policy that abolished landlordism, specifically the land proclamation 1975.²⁵ This was a radical change.

21 For a short biography, see: Rubenson, S. (1966). *King of Kings: Tewodros of Ethiopia*. Haile Sellassie I University.

22 For additional information, see: Abir, Mordechai (2011). *Ethiopia: The Era of the Princes*. Tsehai Publishers.

23 For some resources on the revolution, see:

Chege, M. (1979). *The Revolution Betrayed: Ethiopia, 1974—9*. *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 17(3), 359-380.

Clapham, C. (1990). *Transformation and Continuity in Revolutionary Ethiopia*. Cambridge University Press.

Donham, D. L. (1999). *Marxist Modern: An Ethnographic History of the Ethiopian Revolution*. University of California Press.

Tiruneh, A., and Andargachew, T. (1993). *The Ethiopian Revolution 1974-1987: A Transformation from an Aristocratic to a Totalitarian Autocracy*. Cambridge University Press.

Valdelin, J. (1978). *Ethiopia 1974-7: From Anti-Feudal Revolution to Consolidation of the Bourgeois State*. *Race & Class*, 19(4), 379-397.

24 'Derg' means committee. The government that ruled from 1974 to 1991 is often referred to as the Derg.

25 This is discussed in: Cochrane, L. (2017). *Strengthening Food Security in Rural Ethiopia*. Dissertation submitted to the University of British Columbia: Kelowna.

Then in 1991, you could also say there was a very significant departure from the past because the EPRDF regime instituted an ethno-federal structure²⁶ and changed a highly centralized governance structure. What makes the current change different from the previous ones? One is that it has wide-spread popular support, superseded only by the 1974 Revolution. It really struck a chord with so many Ethiopians. But it remains reform from within, rather than change from the outside. That is a major difference.

Logan: Do you see any parallels between the 1960s and 70s student movement in the sense of youth becoming energized, expressing their opinions and demanding political change. Between that and the youth movements that emerged in 2014 and 2015?

Prof Bahru: In a way, yes. In both cases it was the youth that played a crucial role. After the collapse of the student movement in the wake of the Ethiopian revolution when the Derg came to power, the role of the youth was minimized or nil. This was because of the 'Red Terror',²⁷ which was a time when the Derg liquidated the opposition, particularly the EPRP²⁸ and its young members and its supporters. After the 'Red Terror' the youth shied away from politics. Politics was feared. This continued until a brief moment of

26 For additional readings on ethnic federalism, see:

Aalen, L. (2006). Ethnic federalism and self-determination for nationalities in a semi-authoritarian state: the case of Ethiopia. *International Journal on Minority and Group Rights*, 13(2-3), 243-261.

Abbink, J. (2011). Ethnic-based federalism and ethnicity in Ethiopia: reassessing the experiment after 20 years. *Journal of Eastern African Studies*, 5(4), 596-618.

Cochrane, L. and Yeshtila W. B. (2019). Politics and Power in Southern Ethiopia: Imposing, Opposing and Calling for Linguistic Unity. *Language Matters*.

Mehretu, A. (2012). Ethnic federalism and its potential to dismember the Ethiopian state. *Progress in Development Studies*, 12(2-3), 113-133.

Mengisteab, K. (2001). Ethiopia's ethnic-based federalism: 10 years after. *African Issues*, 29(1-2), 20-25.

Tesfaye, A. (2002). Political power and ethnic federalism: The struggle for democracy in Ethiopia. University Press of America.

27 'Qey Shibir' (Red Terror) was a period during the Derg rule when violence was used to repress opponents of the Derg, which occurred in 1976 and 1977. The estimates of the number of people killed during this period range from tens of thousands to hundreds of thousands.

28 Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Party, which was founded in 1972. It called for the revolutionary transformation of the country.

excitement around the 2005 elections, but that was also followed by massive repression by the regime.

The recent movements were the first time after the student movement of the 1960s and 1970s where the youth came to the fore. There are some similarities and there are also some differences. The similarities are that they both had passion, the passion to change, to think about change, and to think about social justice. The fact that both of them, in different ways, had their global networks and global connections. For the 60s and 70s movement, there was the Worldwide Union of Ethiopian Students as well as the interaction with Leftists, particularly with groups in Europe and America. However, in the current situation there is a different structure. The role of social media is new, and its engagement with the diaspora, which played a critical role in bringing about the change. There is another difference in that the message of the Ethiopian students in the 60s and 70s was largely through the written word, they wrote quite a lot and had a lot of publications – both outside and inside Ethiopia. Whereas now, social media has taken over and has played a greater role than literature. Both were also driven by passion; passion more than reason. Each portrayed inadequate understanding of Ethiopian reality, history and society. There continues to be more passion, as opposed to more sober analyses and discussions about the problems of the country and finding solutions to those problems.

Logan: Without saying that they are the same, but looking at some of the parallels, some of what we have been seeing with the youth is that the changes that have occurred, to an extent, have largely been changes amongst the existing political elite. Maybe that includes the involvement of those who were outside of the ruling coalition. For example, the involvement of someone like Berhanu

Nega,²⁹ but at the end of the day these are political elite and the voices of the youth have not substantially changed in terms of their power. How might you see that in terms of the post-1974 moment. Is it similar in the sense that the youth were the drivers, they were the callers and advocates for change, and once change did emerge it occurred within an elite political circle, and after the changes occurred the youth voice was minimal?

Prof Bahru: You could say that about 1974 - although not exactly in 1974, but by 1976 the student movements and the leftist parties that grew out of the movements were sidelined. Power came to be concentrated in the hands of the Derg. In effect, the student revolution was hijacked by the Derg. In fact, it was not just hijacked, it resulted in the liquidation of the left. Whereas now, it is too early to say that the expectations of the youth have not been met. We are just beginning. There does not yet appear to be a sense of disillusionment regarding the current regime, or the current political structure, the political power of Abiy. It is too early to say. Much depends on how things develop from now onward.

Logan: One of the things that I have been looking at recently is the evolution of rights and entitlements.³⁰ In particular, looking at the constitutions from the Imperial to the Derg and to the current, it seems to me that in that long run, that long historical perspective that you mentioned, there has been a slow, sometimes abrupt, development of the relationship between citizens and the state

29 Berhanu Nega is an academic and politician. In the 2005 election he won the seat of mayor of Addis Ababa. Related to the unrest that emerged after the 2005 election, Berhanu was arrested and later fled to the United States. The Ginbot 7 movement that he launched was deemed a terrorist organisation. In 2015, Berhanu went to Eritrea to lead the armed struggle of his movement. A lengthy essay was published by the New York Times regarding this (available here:

<https://www.nytimes.com/2016/09/04/magazine/once-a-bucknell-professor-now-the-commander-of-an-ethiopian-rebel-army.html>). After the change of government in 2018, Berhanu Nega returned to Ethiopia. An interview with him following his return is available here: <https://www.cbc.ca/radio/asithappens/as-it-happens-wednesday-edition-1.4820431/everybody-is-hopeful-says-exiled-ethiopian-rebel-leader-who-returned-after-11-years-1.4820435>

30 See, for example:

Cochrane, L. and Birhanu, B. B. (2019). Pathways of Legal Advocacy for Change: Ethiopian Women Lawyers Association. *Forum for Development Studies* doi: 10.1080/08039410.2018.1534752

Lemma, D. J. and Cochrane, L. (2019). Policy Coherence and Social Protection in Ethiopia: Ensuring No One Is Left Behind. *Societies* 9(1): 19.

where the state has a greater responsibility to meet the needs of citizens and the citizens also have a greater sense of entitlement that the state is responsible to meet some of their basic needs through service provision and so on. In that long-term historical perspective, would you see that the moment of 2018 is in line with this with this long-term changing experience of state-citizen relations?

Prof Bahru: It will depend on what kinds of institutions will be set up. So far, it is personalized change that we are seeing. The changes to-date largely revolve around the personality of Abiy. How this change is going to be institutionalized is going to be the test of the change. The constitution is always a matter of considerable discussion; whether it could continue as it is, whether it might have to change, and if so, how significantly? How drastically could it change? A commission has been set up - not for the constitution - but for something that is very central to the constitution, which is the borders and identity question.³¹ What the commission is exactly going to do, what kind of recommendations it is going to make regarding the constitution, and what that constitution is eventually going to look like will determine whether the state-citizen relations have indeed changed.

Logan: Regarding the rise of the student movement in the 1960s and 70s and the taking of power by the Derg government and what followed, do you think there are any lessons that we can draw about what kind of changes need to take place in order to result in that institutional change, beyond individuals?

Prof Bahru: There have been major changes up until now: peace with Eritrea; the release of political prisoners; the pan-Ethiopia discourse that Prime Minister Abiy has initiated; the concept of '*meddemer*', which can loosely be translated as 'coming together' or as 'synergy'; the unbanning of so-called terrorist organizations (like the OLF³² and Ginbot 7³³), amongst many other important changes. The style of leadership is quite distinctive, by engaging people directly. This includes, for instance, the message Abiy sends on every holiday - for both religious and other national holidays. The most important

31 For more information, see: <https://www.africanews.com/2018/12/20/ethiopia-pm-to-regulate-border-and-identity-disputes-in-regional-states/>

32 Oromo Liberation Front, see: <http://oromoliberationfront.org/english/>

33 Ginbot 7, the Movement for Justice, Freedom and Democracy. See: <http://www.ginbot7.org/>

was winning over the diaspora³⁴ This was something that previous regimes were unable to do; the diaspora was previously completely against the regime. Now they have a different stand. Having said that, we have some very serious challenges. The most important is to institutionalize this change. Some steps are being taken to do this, such as within the judicial system and the electoral system. Ensuring stability amidst these changes is one of the challenges that the current government faces, as there are outbreaks of violence, mass displacement of people, and other issues that tarnish the hope that has been created by these changes. There are quite a few serious challenges.

Logan: One thing that I have been thinking about more recently, especially spending a lot of time in the south, is that institutional change and a new leadership that is giving a more positive and optimistic message is very important, however we also need change from the bottom up. This includes change regarding ideas about relating to one another - between ethnicities, between faiths and so on. The policies, laws and institutions can only do so much and we should only expect so much of them.

Prof Bahru: Exactly. I have talked a lot about how the change came, it came from within the EPRDF. It came from above. There is still a lot that remains to be done such that these ideas and this new spirit reaches and percolates to the base, at the community level. The base still contains the tensions that existed, which were created and were fostered by the previous regime. It will take quite a while to reform institutions as well as for the individuals and personnel throughout the country to develop and emerge who will lead the change at the base. This is a major challenge that remains to be addressed.

Logan: In the coming months and years, potentially leading up to the 2020 election (assuming it stays its course), are there particular moments or particular decisions that you will look for as a critical signal for what the future holds or the future direction of the country?

Prof Bahru: The first and most important thing that will have to be seen is what is going to happen to the EPRDF. How is it going

³⁴ See, for example:
<https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2018/08/abiy-ahmed-meets-the-ethiopian-diaspora/566591/>

to continue? As the EPRDF or as transformed into another organization? The latter seems to be the direction that Abiy is leading the EPRDF. The core of this new structure involves many new actors, including those previously regarded as second-class citizens, such as the Amhara and so on. The government is inviting members of opposition parties, some of which were previously based outside of the country, and saying that they could join the system. This is an important move that Abiy is undertaking because he cannot obtain the support of all Ethiopians as the EPRDF stigma persists. There is a need to re-arrange, re-orient, and to change the EPRDF. This is something that Meles³⁵ could have done, but did not do, which is to transform the EPRDF into a truly pan-Ethiopian organization.

Another critical factor, that is a challenge, is taking measures to reduce youth unemployment. This is because the youth are the engineers behind this change, but at the same time, unless something is done to address their basic needs, then there could be a change of attitude - they could turn out to be enemies of the change. Finally, of the critical challenges, is what Abiy is going to do with the EPRDF, specifically how the changes will be negotiated with the TPLF.

Logan: You raised the idea of ensuring stability and reducing conflict. Despite all the optimism and all the positive leadership that we are seeing, there are a number of conflicts that have emerged in the last year.³⁶ Is there anything specific to either resolving those conflicts or finding a way to reduce them that you see as being critical?

Prof Bahru: In a way, conflict is to be expected. This happens when an old, repressive structure comes to an end, when people's rights have been neglected for far too long and they are emboldened to assert their rights, and navigate their own decision making amidst these challenges and changes. While it is to be expected, it also has to be controlled. The government has started engaging on some of these issues, such as the commission that relates to questions of

35 Meles Zenawi died on August 20th, 2012. He had effectively been ruling the country since 1991, first as head of the EPRDF since 1991, as President of the Transitional Government of Ethiopia from 1991 to 1995, and then as Prime Minister from 1995 until his unexpected death in 2012

36 For geographic distribution of displacement, see: https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/20190122_Ethiopia_Internal_Displ.pdf

identity, peace and order. The proliferation of arms has to be addressed. To some extent it is related to the question of the TPLF; the resolving of the TPLF issue itself would contribute a lot to address the challenge of the proliferation of arms.

Logan: The reports on the amount of arms that have been found is quite stunning. I have not seen anything like that over the last 20 years of engaging with Ethiopia³⁷

Prof Bahru: Yes, the weapons have to be controlled. As well as the money that is being smuggled out - the money that is caught on the border - there are hundreds of millions of dollars involved.³⁸ Where does this money come from? This is a very important issue that has to be addressed.

Logan: Do you see the political changes in the south, potentially the emergence of new regional states,³⁹ as a critical juncture for the future of ethnic federalism?

Prof Bahru: In a way, these requests are to be expected because there is a new attitude in the country. Also, it is expected because at the beginning of the EPRDF regime, in the early 90s, these entities were planned as, or seeking to be, regional states - Sidama was a

37 Examples of these reports (which have mostly been limited to local media reporting): 1,000 weapons and \$10 million cash seized, 2 June 2018 <https://www.africanews.com/2018/07/22/ethiopia-intercepts-about-10m-in-joint-security-operation/>; 53 handguns, 17 July 2018 <https://ethsat.com/2018/07/ethiopia-authorities-seize-illegal-weapons/>; 50 pistols seized, 20 Sept 2018 <https://allafrica.com/stories/201809200303.html>; hundreds of illegal guns seized, 28 Oct 2018 <https://borkena.com/2018/10/28/hundreds-of-illegal-arms-originating-from-sudan-seized-as-oil-tanker-truck-fell-over/>; 50 Kalashnikovs, 20 November 2018 <https://www.ezega.com/News/NewsDetails/6789/Ethiopian-Police-Seizes-50-Kalashnikov-Rifles-in-Debre-Berhan>; 498 guns seized, 1 Jan 2019 <https://borkena.com/2019/01/01/bahir-dar-498-illegal-guns-seized-in-the-residence-of-a-police-commander/>; 4 machine guns and ammunition, 20 Feb 2019 <https://borkena.com/2019/02/20/ethiopian-police-seized-4-smuggled-machine-guns-over-46000-ammunition/>; These are examples of the reports that have been regular over the past months.

38 As an example, a \$10 million seizure in July, 2018: <https://borkena.com/2018/07/21/federal-police-seized-10-million-us-dollar-as-it-is-leaving-ethiopia/>; \$1.5 million in smuggled gold seized, 6 Feb 2019 <https://borkena.com/2019/02/06/ethiopia-seized-7kg-smuggled-gold-over-us-1-5-million/>

39 See, for example: <https://borkena.com/2018/11/28/wolaita-supports-gurage-statehood-in-ethiopia-press-release-wchr/>

region, Gurage was a region, and so on. We do not exactly know the circumstances that resulted in the merging of potential regions into what is now the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples' regional state. In a way, this is the unwinding of that merger, which is not a problem in and of itself. In some ways, these new entities would conform more to a historical reality than the amorphous structure that you have by the name of Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples, which does not correspond to any geographical or historical entity. It is not alarming. However, the question is how is it to be addressed? And further: What kind of federal structure is going to develop? That is going to be the main question.

Logan: Does it raise an old question of who are the 'nations', 'nationalities' and 'peoples' and therefore who is entitled to regional state status and who is not? For example, why I am watching Sidama, and if that is approved others to likely follow, is that not only in the other ethnically diverse regional states (such as Gambella and Benishangul Gumuz regional state) but that all the regional states have ethnic diversity and we might see calls for new regional states of minority ethnicities throughout the country.

Prof Bahru: This is going to be quite tough. How do you accommodate minorities? There will be minorities in regional states, there is no doubt about it. How we accommodate these minorities is quite a challenge. The commission will have to make sound recommendations, and it will have to be resolved one way or another.

Logan: This is quite difficult. For example, if you look at the arguments of Wolaita, they will say that historically they were slated to be a regional state, but were not given that status. However, Harar was given regional state status and that ethnic group is much small in terms of population.⁴⁰ Even the original structure was not consistent in terms of defining who is a nation, a nationality, and a people, and as a result who gets regional state status.

Prof Bahru: Wolaita is one case, Kaffa is another, Gurage is another. As I said, these were recognized during the transitional

⁴⁰ Harari regional state is essentially the area surrounding the town of Harar and home to the Harari people. However, they were not, and are not, a majority in their own regional state. For additional information: <http://www.ethiopia.gov.et/harari-regional-state>

period⁴¹ as regional states. Later on, for some unknown reason, they were merged into one regional state. I think they have a valid reason to constitute their own autonomous regional states.

Logan: Constitutionally, they have a strong case.

Prof Bahru: Yes, I would say that.

Logan: The reason why I ask you about that in particular is that I think there are two ways to look at the future. One is the top - what is happening with the political elite and the political party and let's say institutional change and so on - and then there is from the bottom. For me, these questions are more of those from the bottom. These raise questions about potential border disputes, potential fragmentation of administration and so forth.

Prof Bahru: A lot will depend on the elite. The elite are the moving force, not the rank and file. The elite has to be on board. They have to come to be a part of the change. They have to exercise their leadership positions with a sense of responsibility.

Logan: Based on your detailed experience with historical documents, in 1974, 1975 and 1976, how did the political elite respond in those times of transformative change?

Prof Bahru: In the 1974 to 1976 period, the groups were divided into two parties and as a result had to make clear statements. They had to clearly articulate what they stood for and what they wanted to see in Ethiopia. Currently, we do not have those clearly articulated statements by leaders. In the past, it was transparent, to a degree, because we knew which group was writing what, and it was clear what stand they took on various issues. The main problem was that there was no consensus on the Derg, and specifically the role of the Derg. There was a section of the Left, Me'ison, that argued the Derg should be granted critical support. Whereas the other group, EPRP, stood in opposition from the outset. They felt the revolution would result in a military dictatorship and must be opposed, that the Derg should be opposed from the outset and not be allowed to develop.

Logan: Based on how things are changing at the moment, do you see the government (political elite) coalescing around a

41 The Transitional Government of Ethiopia ran from 1991 to 1995.

particular vision? Is the current government developing that vision, a clear mission to give a consistent statement to the public?

Prof Bahru: The current political elite, who are also representing certain political organizations, have a positive attitude toward Abiy, I think. Several of the opposition parties are, on the whole, in support of what Abiy has initiated. The problem may be, or was, the OLF. It is unclear if that has been addressed or not, it seems to have subsided of late. There is a sense that people are going to give Abiy a chance to institutionalize change, and organize - for the first time in Ethiopian history - a fair and free election. If not in 2020, at least, sometime soon. This would begin a process of democratization that this country has been waiting for, that the people have been demanding for so many years and decades.

Logan: One thing that I noticed, which I really took away, was that throughout 2018 I was in Tigray, Amhara and SNNP regional states, as well as in Addis Ababa and experienced a general sentiment of optimism and positivity that I had never seen before. For me, that is something. If everyone feels good about the future of the country, it is a signal.

Prof Bahru: It is not limited to those within the country either. As I have mentioned, the diaspora as well. In the past, the government had a hard time going to international capital cities because of opposition parties rallying against them in the diaspora. Whereas now it is completely different. The diaspora have been coming in droves to listen to the messianic speech of Abiy. At the same time, it would seem that in order to have a solid base the change needs to be institutionalized. This would enable Ethiopia to have a new, better way forward.

Logan: I think that is a great point to end on. For those who are interested in getting a sense of what is happening in Ethiopia - and are asking questions if, on the whole, if it is positive or negative. What is happening is that a lot of these changes are real and a lot of these changes are very positive. This has occurred as a result of the demands of a mass amount of the population. However, in that context, there are still many issues that need to be addressed and new issues that are arising that will require responding to. Thank you very much Professor for taking the time today. It was really interesting speaking with you.