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Hussein Ahmed

Addis Ababa University Fifty-Three Years on An Insider's View*

This article does not claim to be an exhaustive study of all aspects of the genesis, growth, expansion and constraints in the development of Addis Ababa University as an academic and public institution or of those of its constituent units¹. Nor is it a review of its complex relations with the imperial, military/socialist and current regimes, and with the wider society. It is rather a brief account of selected aspects of the change and continuity in the history of the oldest and leading institution of higher learning in Ethiopia as perceived, understood and interpreted by one who has been associated with it for a quarter of a century. The views and interpretations expressed, the conclusions drawn, and the suggestions made, in the study should therefore be seen from the perspective of the writer's own perception and professional experience, and not from that of either the institution itself or its constituents. Needless to say, there are not only gaps in the narrative account but also a number of crucial themes and issues, other than those briefly discussed in the paper, that deserve deeper scrutiny and a more critical analysis in the light of official and private documentary evidence and oral sources. The impact of the University leadership and administration, the academic staff members and students, both individually and collectively, and that of the wider national and international contexts, upon the course

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1. A much more complete account of higher education and the institutional history of AAU was written by Professor Tadesse Tamrat (formerly a senior member of the teaching staff of the Department of History, Director of the IES and Dean of the College of Social Sciences) on the occasion of the University's 50th anniversary that was celebrated in 2000. The work is in the process of being considered for publication in the US (personal communication from Professor Tadesse, 3 September 2003). Professor BAHRU (2002: 211) hopes to write a book on the Ethiopian student movement as a sequel to his study of the reformist intellectuals.

of the evolution and development of higher education in Ethiopia in general and the AAU in particular is a subject worthy of a separate study. Periodic and critical reviews and assessments of the successes and failures of the University can contribute to a better understanding of the problems and challenges that it has faced, and of the responses it has made, as well as to an appreciation of its successes and a critical evaluation of its constraints and failures during the course of the fifty-three years of its existence.

Foundation and Early Development

The University College of Addis Ababa (UCAA) was founded in 1950 under the auspices, and on the initiative, of the imperial government, and in collaboration with, Canadian Jesuit educators who were entrusted with the responsibility of administering it for almost a decade. In 1962 it was renamed the Haile Sellassie I University (HSIU) and then, unofficially, the National University (NU) during the brief period of transition between the collapse of the imperial regime and the consolidation of the military junta (1974-1975). Finally, it acquired its present designation, Addis Ababa University (AAU), in 1975-1976, twenty-five years after its establishment.

UCAA's first administrators were a Canadian Jesuit, Lucien Matte, and an American, Harold W. Bentley (1961-1962). Subsequently, a policy of Ethiopianization led to the appointment of *Lej* (later *Dajjāzmāch*) Kāsā Walda Māryām (1962-1969) (an Oromo of Wallaggā and sometime provincial governor who later married a princess) as the first president. (The Chancellor was until 1974 the Emperor himself). The presidency was successively held by Aklilu Habtē (1969-1974), Täyyē Gullilāt (1974-1977), Duri Muhammad (who served for two terms: 1977-1985, 1991-1995), Abiy Kifla (1985-1991), Alamāyyahu Tafarrā (the first-ever elected executive) (1992-1993), Mogasē Ashannāfi (1995-2000), Eshatu Wanchaqqo (also elected) (2001-2002), and Andreas Eshetē, the current incumbent. All were (except Alamāyyahu and Eshatu) government appointees (and all from the University). The fact that most came from the Faculties of Science and Engineering in rapid succession has recently aroused some resentment. From 1969 to 1974 the Board of Governors nominated the president, but after the revolution, it was the Council for Higher Education, which assumed that function (Fisseha 1984: 44). While the Institute Directors and Faculty/College Deans are appointed by the Senate on the recommendation of the Academic Vice-President, Department Chairmen are elected by the teaching staff and endorsed by the Academic Commission of the Faculty/College. Over the last two years a policy of overhauling the administrative structure, the setting up of a university-wide website, and the provision of computers for use by the teaching staff was launched but was overshadowed by the events leading to the instalment of a new management in early 2003.

Originally the UCAA had its main campus at Arat Kilo (the Quartier Latin of Addis Ababa), not far from Emperor Menilek's palace, the parliament, the Ministry of Education, and a big slum area to the southeast. (This was, of course, half a century before the district was graced by the recently-constructed luxury hotel, Sheraton Addis, the flagship of MIDROC, the conglomerate owned and managed by *Shaykh* Muhammad Husayn al-'Amūdī, the flamboyant and philanthropic Saudi investor of Hadramī/Ethiopian origin, who received an honorary doctorate from the University in late July 2003). In 1961 the main campus moved to Siddist Kilo into Emperor Haile Sellassie I's *Gannata Le'ul* (Princely Paradise) palace. The emperor "donated" the sprawling compound to serve as the main university campus and the site of the central administration offices, the social sciences (the Faculty of Arts until 1979), education and law faculties, the Institute of Ethiopian Studies (IES), the Institute of Language Studies (ILS), and the Kennedy Library.

It has been asserted that the emperor's decision was not an act of royal generosity and benevolence² but was inspired by a desire to obliterate from his consciousness the haunting memory and ghost (Hailu 1993: 3) of the massacre of members of the aristocracy that took place in what was then called the Green Salon (or *Rās* Makonnen Hall) (now the main reading room of the IES Library) (Addis Ababa University 1980: 12). The bloody act was committed in a moment of desperation by the leaders of the 1960 abortive coup d'état who belonged to the elite Imperial Bodyguard, and was the forerunner of the summary execution of sixty members of the royalty and aristocracy by the military government in 1974. The emperor was, at the time of the *coup*, on an official visit to Brazil.

According to Trudeau (1968: 55-56): "Classes began at the University College of Addis Ababa on December 11, 1950. It was a humble beginning. There was a staff of nine teachers, the principal included. There were seventy-one students, all men..." The first decade of its existence lasting from 1950 to 1960 can be described as a period of slow but steady growth in terms of infrastructure. In 1961 it had about 900 students and 100 academic staff members. (Twenty years later the number of students had risen to 11,000 [including fee-paying ones attending evening classes] and that of the academic staff to 600). "By the end of the first decade of its existence, Addis Abeba [Haile Sellassie I] University had grown to be one of the largest universities in sub-Sahara[n] Africa in both enrolment and diversity of educational programs" (Fisseha 1984: 1, 11). Its graduates were largely recruited into the civil service and enjoyed a high social profile

2. As claimed by the emperor himself in a speech he made on the occasion of the inauguration of the Haile Sellassie I University: "Today, We have dedicated Our home... as a free gift to the nation..." in Haile Sellassie I University: A Blueprint for Development (Addis Ababa, August 1970), 19 (typescript).

and prestige. This was perhaps the only decade in the history of the institution when its students and staff were either apolitical or indifferent, neutral and inactive, if not completely lacking in political consciousness³. It was a period of paternalism and imperial patronage of higher education in the country.

The Student Movement during the Imperial Era

The second decade (1960-1970), which was characterised by the rise of student political activism and social critique, witnessed the coming and failure of the *coup*⁴, the decolonization of Africa (there were African students on government scholarships⁵) and the rise of global student radicalism (for example, in Paris in 1968). These internal and external events had a direct and indirect impact upon the political and social outlook of university students who now became vocal activists, articulate and intransigent, both in and off campus⁶, having abandoned, as Amutabi pointed out while referring to Kenyan university students, “...their ivory tower mentality” (Amutabi 2002: 161-163). As Addis noted: “The sixties were a decade crowded with demonstrations, rallies, and active mobilisation of forces against both feudalism and imperialism” (Addis 1975: 95). One of the factors that provided a pretext for student unrest was paradoxically an incident that was not even remotely connected to politics: a fashion show (Balsvik 1985: 213-233) (held in 1968)⁷, promoting the values of Western culture, that aroused indignation among students and staff, and led to a wave of anti-American protest (against the Peace Corps (Teferra 1997: 57), the war in Vietnam and the presence of an American military base/centre of communications in Asmara), a distant echo of the military government’s anti-US stance in the

3. But see TEFERRA (1997: 57): “The student population...lacked political consciousness in the fifties and early sixties...” Between 1957 and 1960 conferences were held by students of the various colleges to establish a National Union of Students (GREENFIELD 1965: 365). For a study of the relationship between university education and politics, see BEYENE (1977).
4. For a brief discussion of the reaction of the students of UCAA to the *coup*, see MARCUS (1999: 11-12); GREENFIELD (1965: 404-406); CLAPHAM (1968: 496); TEKESTE (1990: 134, 150). On the growing students’ “propensity for political action”, see MARKAKIS (1975: 189), and on the evolution of the movement in the 1960s (*ibid.*: 358-360) and GILKES (1975: 248-250).
5. On the impact of the presence of African students, see GREENFIELD (1965: 366-369).
6. For a pioneering study of the student movement, see BALSVIK (1985). Her most recent work on the subject is BALSVIK (2003); see also HESS (1970: 164-177).
7. HESS (1970: 169) stressed the significance of the event thus: “The fashion show crisis itself served to indicate that politically motivated students...had developed the sophistication to turn an insignificant issue into a catalyst for the politics of confrontation typical of student dissent movements throughout the world.”

late seventies and throughout the eighties. As noted by an Ethiopian historian: "The Ethiopian Student Movement went through various phases of evolution, starting as a cultural and intellectual forum of an elite and growing into a mass revolutionary movement in the late 1960s and early 1970s" (Bahru 2000b: 222, 2002: 211).

Thereafter, publications and leaflets containing articles critical of the government and the university administration were openly and clandestinely printed and distributed by leaders of the student movement on behalf of the council (the University Students' Union of Addis Ababa, USUAA, founded in 1967). Long meetings were regularly held in the main campus at Siddist Kilo (the Christmas/Dining Hall) where at first issues, such as the improvement of amenities like the quality of food and better dormitories, and subsequently and increasingly broader national political, social and economic issues, were thoroughly debated. Fisseha (1984: 23) made the remark that "...the students have always been tolerant if the problems were related to food, housing, and health". Occasionally, these debates led to the bipolarization of the student body between an active and vocal minority, holding radical/leftist and uncompromising views, and a passive and not-so-politically articulate majority. There were also divisions among the staff members between those educated in the country and abroad or conflicts aggravated by personal animosities, and ideological and ethnic differences (Ottaway 1978: 114-115). These internal contradictions were not reconciled peacefully. "Dissenting opinions were treated with intolerance" (Bahru 2000b: 226). The politically moderate and cautious students were dubbed "saboteurs" by the radical elements because the former failed to abide by the resolutions, allegedly passed unanimously, calling for the boycott of classes and the staging of sit-in strikes and street demonstrations. Some also fell under the suspicion of being agents of university officials, who were invariably identified with the government, or in the pay of the latter. The climax of all this in-campus flurry of activities and protest campaigns were the street marches and demonstrations during which students shouted slogans like "Down with the government!" "Land to the tiller" and chanted songs in which they glorified the achievements of Ho Chi Minh, Mao Tse-tung and Che Guevara in nationalist and revolutionary movements, one of which ran as follows: "Fānno tasamārā, fānno tasamārā, enda Ho Chi Minh enda Che Guevara!" ["Oh, guerrillas, take to the bush! Oh, guerrillas, take to the bush like Ho Chi Minh, Mao Tse-tung and Che Guevara!"] This was the decade of pamphleteering and sloganeering, perhaps surpassed only by the slogan-mongering of the *Darg* period that was more inflammatory, abusive and laudatory: "Down with feudalism, capitalism and imperialism! Motherland or Death! Long live international proletarianism! Forward with the leadership of Mengistu Hailemariam! La lotta continua!"

The late sixties and early seventies were also a period of ideologically-informed discussions of political issues such as the national question with reference to self-determination and secession, a timely subject connected to

the armed struggle in Eritrea. "Marxism-Leninism was embraced as a creed rather than as a system of thought to help interpret the Ethiopian reality. Slogans came to be mistaken for theory" (Bahru 2000b: 226; Andargachew 1993: 29-30)⁸. There were many peaceful demonstrations that sometimes degenerated into violent clashes between the students, on the one hand, and regular army and police forces, on the other, often provoked by the latter who entered the university campus to disperse students' meetings and prevent them from staging protest marches in the streets of the capital. This inevitably led to mass and indiscriminate arrests and imprisonment—and killing—of student activists like Wālalleñ Makonnen, shot dead in the course of an attempted plane hijack, and Telāhun Gezāw, president of the student union and brother-in-law of Prince Makonnen Haile Sellassie, who was by all accounts murdered by government security agents on the night of 28 December 1969⁹. The government's refusal to allow students to take custody of the corpse of the slain activist became the *cause célèbre* for another round of violent confrontation between the students and security forces, leading to the closure of the university. According to Andargachew (1993: 136): "The events of December 1969 [following the murder of Telāhun]... indicated to the students a change in government policy towards them: a change away from a paternalistic approach by the King to a heavy-handed policy intended to crush the movement." After a lapse of days and sometimes weeks, the government would announce an amnesty and the reopening of the university, and students would gradually return to classes. Since the government controlled the media, it had the decisive advantage of presenting its own version of the causes for student unrest and of justifying to the public the ways with which it handled the ensuing crisis. Students were accused of having acted on instructions from some invisible domestic or foreign forces of subversion, and of posing a threat to the unity and security of the country. Generally, the official view was that the movement, which it always referred to as "student disturbances", was instigated by a handful of students¹⁰.

This complex process of student protest and government repression, characterised by a sequence of often predictable episodes¹¹, became an annual political ritual to which the ordinary residents of the city grew accustomed and looked forward. As Clapham noted: "The years from then [1960] until the revolution were punctuated by student strikes and demonstrations, the occasional closure of the university or police invasion of the

8. On the ideological rift within the Ethiopian student movement, both abroad and in the country, see ANDARGACHEW (1993: 137-155).

9. 10 December 1969, according to BERHANOU (1998: 209).

10. For a similar attitude, see AMUTABI (2002: 159). This was also noted by HESS (1970: 171): "At first the government placed the blame for student agitation on a handful of students allegedly duped by foreign agents..."

11. HESS (1970: 168): "Each spring since 1967 the student movement has challenged the government; each year student demonstrations have increased in their outspoken criticism of the government."

campus, and other indications of dissent” (Clapham 1988: 33). The cumulative effect of this overt challenge to, and defiance of, the imperial order was the political awakening of the general public and high-school students of Addis Ababa, and those of the provincial towns, who took a keen interest in, and sympathised and fraternized with, the growing militancy of the students. In the public mind the good intentions and peaceful posture of the students stood out in sharp contrast to the aggressiveness, ruthless repression and brutality of the police and security forces. Whenever there were no student protests against deteriorating economic conditions and injustice, people often asked the following questions: “What has happened to university students? Have they been bought off by the government? Have they given up the struggle?” This was because they looked up to the students as the natural defenders of their rights and freedom. It is thus plausible to argue that the students articulated the grievances and aspirations of the masses, and that the student movement was, in the absence of political parties, the sole outlet for the discontent of the people.

Students’ activism was sometimes, however, dependent on the level of their academic progress in the university. The degree of their militancy was generally inversely proportional to the length of their stay in campus. First-year students were potentially the most active and formed the main constituency of the union leaders, especially during election campaigns. They were liable to be influenced easily by their rhetoric and charisma, although this was tempered by the fear of “Christmas graduation”, a euphemism for end-of-semester dismissal. Subsequent to their promotion to the senior classes at which point they were absorbed by the chores of academia (regular attendance of lectures, writing of term papers, completion of reading assignments, etc.), their enthusiasm for political activism diminished progressively. Those in their final year of studies (except the union leaders) were eager to graduate and get into life outside of the campus, and since participation in political activities was an impediment to employment opportunities and career advancement, most tended to avoid direct involvement in, and be identified with, the whole student movement.

The first half of the third decade—the 1970s—marked the climax of the student movement in terms of ideological focus (a strong commitment to, and belief in, Marxism and Leninism with increasingly Stalinist and Maoist overtones) and strategic option (adoption of popular armed struggle). As rightly argued by Bahru (2002: 211), the student movement can be said to have marked a radical departure from the reformist tradition of political opposition espoused by the Ethiopian intellectuals of the early twentieth century¹² in terms of its ideological content, breadth of vision, appeal to wider sections of society, and favourable international context in which it emerged and flourished.

12. BALSVIK (1994: 82) speaks of a reformist phase in the student movement in the early 1960s. She argues that only in 1965 did the movement assume its radical character (p. 83).

The Movement during the *Darg* Period

While the contribution of the student movement to the fall of the *ancien régime* in 1974 was significant, although limited (Ottaway & Ottaway 1978: 35)¹³, it certainly played a decisive role in the radicalization and ideological orientation of the revolution of which young army officers later claimed to be the sole vanguards and leaders since they were the only corporate body capable (by virtue of their possession of the instruments of coercion) of setting the agenda for the future of the country¹⁴. The prevailing economic and social malaise, aggravated by the famine and the global energy crisis, and by the mutinies of army divisions stationed in sensitive regions (Borana [Sidamo] in the south and Eritrea in the north) combined to provide the complex backdrop to the revolutionary upsurge that finally swept away the monarchy and its institutions.

Student support for the revolutionary changes assured the new regime of the sympathy of a vocal constituency and gave it the time to consolidate its power. However, no sooner had the students expressed their solidarity than they began to challenge the military regime (the *Darg*) mainly on ideological grounds. They demanded the return of the soldiers to their barracks and called for the establishment of a people's government. This led to strained and bitter relations between them. Inspired by the old student demands, and in response to the long-standing grievances of the Ethiopian peasantry, the military government introduced two radical and far-reaching reforms: the dispossession of the landed gentry and distribution of confiscated lands among tenants, and the nationalization of urban real estate and private financial institutions. The whole country was seized with revolutionary fervour, and the government and its allies launched a campaign of vicious and arbitrary attacks on individuals, especially intellectuals, the propertied classes and former officials, who were branded as counter-revolutionaries or allies of opposition movements or agents of Western imperialism.

In 1974-1975 the government publicly announced the imminent implementation of the Development through Cooperation Campaign (*zamachā*), ostensibly designed to enable students to teach and politicize the peasants but widely seen as a politically-motivated ruse to get them out of the capital and the provincial towns, their principal centres of political agitation against the regime (Teferra 1997: 150; Markakis & Nega 1986: 133; Balsvik 1994: 94). (This is comparable to the resettlement programme of the 1980s that involved the forced transfer of people from the northern provinces which were not only the scenes of heavy fighting between government forces and

13. But BALSVIK (1985: xiii) holds a different view: "They [university students] became...a critical factor in the overthrow of the Haile Sellassie regime." See also FISSEHA (1984: 14).

14. On the contrary, BALSVIK (1994: 79) has argued that "...students were the only group whose behaviour conformed to an institutionalized pattern".

those of insurgency movements in Eritrea and Tegrāy, but also recruiting grounds for the latter).

The land reform proclamation was implemented primarily through the efforts of the students and teachers of AAU, and those of senior secondary schools, often at great cost to their lives. The university and all schools were closed for two solid years, thus arresting the process of the further development and expansion of higher education and leading to "...loss of the human, material, and financial resources that it [the university] had been accumulating during the previous decade" (Fisseha 1984: 39), and to the delay in the graduation of students, without any rewards or compensation. Those who had refused to take part in the campaign and held jobs during the campaign actually rejoined the schools and the university together with those who had loyally carried out their assignments, the only consolation for the latter being certificates which had absolutely no material or even nominal value.

Harassed by disgruntled and armed landlords, frustrated by the failure of local authorities to protect them, and inspired by the subversive ideas of the emergent insurgency movements, some of the participants of the *zamaicha* joined either urban-based opposition groups or those operating in the countryside. This forced the government to suspend the campaign and to terrorize the returnees and the civilian population until 1977-1978 when the war with Somalia broke out and the counter-insurgency offensives in Eritrea were intensified in subsequent years, and civilians, including students, were forcefully conscripted for military service.

For the student movement, the 1980s were a time of both political hibernation and modest recovery from the repression of the second half of the 1970s. While a few members of the academic and administrative staff of the University joined, or were recruited by, pro-government political groups and later the Workers' Party of Ethiopia (WPE), most abandoned active political opposition owing to the trauma of the "Red Terror"—the murderous, vindictive and ruthless campaign launched by the state against intellectuals and other civilians as a revenge for the assassination, by squads of the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party (EPRP), of the executive members of the urban neighbourhood associations (*qabalās*), particularly the so-called revolutionary guards or defence squads who were notorious for their unscrupulousness and swift administration of revolutionary justice against actual or potential dissidents. The campaign (Dawit 1989: 9-11, 31-34; Markakis & Nega 1986: 168-69) took the form of rounding up and shooting of thousands of people who were suspected of being sympathetic to, or of having read the literature produced by, that organization which was the strongest armed civilian opposition group at the time.

University staff and students had become by this time politically impotent, the former after the banning of the Ethiopian University Teachers' Association. This was partly because of the burden of Marxist-Leninist literature that had to be incorporated into the curriculum and to be mastered

and presented to a largely passive audience forced to attend weekly political discussion forums, partly because of fear of ruthless counter-measures, and partly because of heavy teaching loads and the arduous task of revising the curriculum in order to bring it in line with the state ideology—all of which left the staff with little or no time to engage in political protests. They also faced acute economic hardships due to a low salary scale, progressive taxation on income, the rising cost of living, and the intractable shortage of housing (the first and last problems have been partially dealt with recently through a salary adjustment scheme and a monthly housing allowance).

Perhaps the most remarkable achievement of AAU during the trying decade of the eighties was the successful launching (with impressive results) of the post-graduate programme, both at the M.A./M.Sc. level in 1979 and the Ph. D. in 1987, by a few departments (including that of history). This went some way in partially solving the chronic problem of the shortage of trained and qualified manpower. Paradoxically, however, it also led to a brain drain (Dejene 2000: 1-19; Seyoum 1992: 27-46, 2000: 20-30; Solomon 2002: 52-55) that is common to all sub-Saharan African universities and whose principal beneficiaries were the Western countries. As noted by two African scholars (Nyamnjoh & Jua 2002: 15): “Thus the very Western countries that charged African states exorbitant rates to train their students now benefited from the expertise of these young African intellectuals almost free of charge.” Quite a large number of young faculty who were sent to Europe, and particularly to the United States, for advanced studies never returned home¹⁵. Consequently, the rate of staff attrition was so devastating that some departments were left only with the chairpersons and some senior academic staff members approaching the age of retirement, although their contracts were kept renewed.

The Movement since 1991

The last decade of the twentieth century proved even more turbulent than the earlier ones since it saw some revival of activism inspired by the trend towards political pluralism and economic liberalism. In the early period following the overthrow of the military dictatorship, the relations between the University and the new government were characterised by a great deal of uncertainty and ambivalence. Theoretically, there was ample scope for mutual understanding and smooth encounter between some of the academic staff of the University and the political leadership owing to a shared experience as students and dissidents inspired by radical ideologies. However, there was a perception held by the latter that the University had identified

15. “Between 1980 and 1990 West Africa overtook North Africa [in the number of students in the us], although Egypt remained in first place, followed by Nigeria and Ethiopia...” (Zezele 2002: 12).

itself too closely with the *Darg* (especially during its last years of rule when some of the staff had been recruited as members of the WPE) and would therefore be potentially disloyal to the regime. In 1990-1991 University students responded favourably to the government's call for volunteers to fight on the side of the army against the forces of the insurgency movements (including the Tigray People's Liberation Front, TPLF) advancing towards the capital. A second factor for the cool relations between the University and the state was perhaps the tactlessness with which the latter articulated its attitudes towards, and views on, the University and its future role by combining a mild threat with vituperative language: the University was described as a fortress of elitist arrogance. Relations were normalized after a brief spell of sharp reprimand, conducted through the media, because the need for good governance and legitimising and exercising political power required tolerance of, and the stabilization of relations with, an important constituency represented by the University. However, circumstances and conditions for the reactivation of the undercurrent of tension between the academic institution and the political establishment were not lacking. There were several student demonstrations against some aspects of the new government's ethnically-based politics and policies (Konings 2002: 179-204), although, as Merera (2002: 37) rightly put it: "The general discourse on the politics of ethnicity and nationalism in Ethiopia" originated from the national question that was first raised and analysed by the Ethiopian student movement in the late sixties and seventies.

On 4 January 1993 government forces clashed with University students¹⁶ demonstrating against the proposed visit to Eritrea of the UN Secretary-General prior to the referendum and its eventual independence¹⁷. This led to the arrest of students and the temporary closure of the University, reminiscent of the early seventies. Also in the same year a large number of staff (42) were summarily fired, although for most of them, their sudden discharge turned out to be a blessing in disguise (and a source of envy for those who remained) since they ended up being employed abroad or by international non-governmental organizations at salaries which reputedly made a mockery of the meagre pay which they used to receive as university employees¹⁸.

16. The clashes were reported in *Ethiopian Herald* of 5, 13, 16, 19 January and 2, 3 February 1993.

17. For a discussion of the factors that might have influenced the students' position on Eritrea, see MELAKOU (1994: 73-75).

18. A 1997 comparative survey of the salaries of university academic staff of six sub-Saharan African countries placed Ethiopia third after South Africa and Zimbabwe with a per annum salary of US \$6,000 for a professor: SAKO (2002: 28). By contrast those of the University of Liberia were at the lowest rung of the salary scale: "The University of Liberia's annual salary for a university professor (\$856) is only 37.8 percent of a Ghanaian professor's salary, 18.9 percent of a Kenyan professor's, 5.6 percent of a Zimbabwean professor, and 4.5 percent of a South African professor's salary" (BARCLAY 2002: 44).

In March 1997 a large number of Amhara students of the University protested against the motives for, and consequences of, the redistribution of land in the Amhara regional state¹⁹, and submitted a petition to the prime minister's office; the demonstration was dispersed by riot police. It is interesting to note the following comment: "A spokesman of the [police] commission said it is surprising to see students go against the interest of farmers as opposed to the tradition of the student movement which staunchly fought raising high the motto 'Land to the Tiller'"²⁰.

On 10 April 2001 students handed in a written petition to the University administration to allow them to have their own independent press and union, and demanding the removal of security forces from the campus. When no response came from the University administration, they went on strike. The subsequent raiding of the campus by government forces, without the authorization of the highest state officials, was denounced by the University president and the Minister of Education. After the failure of the attempts at a negotiated settlement of the dispute, the conflict spilled over into central Addis Ababa resulting in the looting by the city's unemployed youths instead of shops and the sacking of government buildings. When the University was closed, many students withdrew and were readmitted after a year²¹.

Recent Developments

The establishment of regional colleges and universities (about half a dozen in all), although done rather hastily and without proper feasibility studies and adequate infrastructure and funding, can be considered as a major positive step taken by the current government. However, this has not yet eased the pressure and burden on AAU. The proliferation of private colleges has had, however, the effect of attracting some of the younger staff members of AAU since the new colleges offered better pay, leading to what one can call an 'internal brain drain'.

In 2002-2003 the number of the academic staff members of the University was 802 (38 professors, 131 associate professors, 212 assistant professors, 313 lecturers, 78 assistant lecturers and 35 graduate assistants). There were 23,060 students enrolled in the under-graduate regular day and evening, and in the post-graduate, programmes. Over the period of 22 years since 1981²², the number of students has more than doubled (with, however, no significant improvement and expansion of facilities necessary to accommodate them), whereas that of the academic staff has risen by a mere 200, a cogent demonstration of the impact of the brain drain and the urgency of not only retaining the existing staff members but also of recruiting new ones.

19. *Ethiopian Herald*, 22, 25 and 27 March 1997 (EGE 2002: 71-86).

20. *Ethiopian Herald*, 22, March 1997: 2.

21. *Ethiopian Herald*, 13, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28 and 29 April 2001.

22. See above.

There are several research institutes that are on a par with any other in Africa and indeed in the rest of the world. The major ones are the following:

1. The IES, with its rich library housing the largest collection in the world of books, periodicals, theses and archival material on microfilms relating to Ethiopia and the Horn, and a growing ethnographic museum. Established in 1963, it has been the premier centre of research and documentation in and on Ethiopia. It has hosted four of the fifteen international conferences of Ethiopian studies; the eleventh was held a week or so before the fall of the *Darg* in 1991, a tribute to both the perseverance of the organizers and the courage of the foreign participants. The IES has been publishing the *Journal of Ethiopian Studies* for several decades now and grants permits to researchers. Its library must extend its working days and opening hours to enable the academic staff, senior students, the general public and foreign researchers to have more access to books and journals.

2. The Institute of Development Research (IDR), founded in 1972. It has been conducting and promoting developmental research, teaching and researching on the social sciences with particular emphasis on rural development. Its main aims are: conducting a multi-disciplinary socio-economic research, exchange and disseminate research findings, develop teaching materials, contribute to human resources development through training, and provide consultancy services. It has a rich documentation centre and publishes the *Ethiopian Journal of Development Research*.

3. The Institute of Pathobiology (IBP), established in 1966. The main objectives of IBP are, among other things, conducting research in applied biological and/or biomedical as well as animal health and pathological sciences, and providing training in the fields of applied biology to science and medical students, and to research assistants.

4. The Institute of Educational Research (IER), originally set up in 1968, runs several educational programmes and provides services including research, consultancies, testing and conferences. It publishes the *Ethiopian Journal of Education*. The IER has units for Research Projects and Training; Publications, Public Relations and Dissemination; Tests and Measurements Services; and a Pedagogical Centre for Higher Education.

Constraints²³

The major ones are the following:

1. The failure to reinstitute the charter (originally granted in 1954) that was revoked when the *Darg* came to power, and the granting of administrative and financial autonomy. The Ministry of Finance allocates the University's annual budget but is also in charge of its accounts, and this does not admit of any discretion and flexibility. Although the budget has been steadily

23. For a brief discussion see BAHRU (2000a) and WEIKER (1962).

increasing (except for the years 1974-1976), it has not been sufficient to cover the cost of new equipment and provide funding for staff and student research, and to meet the ever-increasing demand for the purchase and acquisition of books and academic journals.

2. The pace of infrastructural improvement and expansion (new classrooms and offices), especially in the main campus, has been too slow to cope with the phenomenal increase in the number of both under- and post-graduate students. There is a serious shortage of resources for contingencies. For example, the University found itself completely helpless in the face of the recent (March-July 2003) partial disruption of electricity that affected the country. Every Tuesday²⁴ was a black day both literally and figuratively: the computers were down, evening classes had to be cancelled or rearranged, and some of the administrative and secretarial staff took the day off as an unofficial holiday, but for the teaching staff who had classes in the evening, it meant a desperate, and often unsuccessful, search for time and extra rooms to give makeup classes because the courses had to be covered by hook or crook. The lack of alternative sources of power, such as a generator, further aggravated the problem that persisted until mid-July when the supply of electricity was fully restored.

3. Occasional conflicts and misunderstanding between students/academic staff, and the university administration and the government, should be resolved through negotiations—away from confrontation to a dialogue and constructive engagement, and from mutual suspicion to genuine trust or what Kasozi called “positive state intervention” or “benevolent influence” (Kasozi 2002: 133). The active participation of the university community in national affairs, and in policy formulation and implementation, should be sought and encouraged by organizing workshops to discuss issues affecting the society in order to reach a consensus like the initiative taken by the government in the summer of 2002 (a three-week seminar attended by all academic staff members and presided over by the Prime Minister, fully televised, and characterised by an open and free exchange of ideas and views).

4. The overhauling of the system of incentives and staff remuneration and promotion policy (Sako 2002: 28), and of evaluation of performance, provision of housing and other benefits²⁵, revision of the retirement and pension schemes to enable the staff to render longer services, drastic reduction in the teaching loads so that there is more time (even if there is not much funding) for research and publication—all these measures are long overdue and need to be addressed urgently and solutions sought without any further delay.

24. Beginning from the third week of May 2003, the blackout was briefly extended to include Friday as well.

25. A proposal for raising the salary scale and introducing a benefit scheme for the staff was made as early as 1970 by John Summerskill, planning officer of the University: see “A Blueprint for Development”, 5, 121.

5. The restructuring of the university administration, the teaching departments, research institutes and other units within the university system should be done through prior consultation and discussion with the staff, not by imposing a blueprint to be adopted within too short a time. There should be a continuous and constructive dialogue based on genuine partnership between the six stakeholders in higher education in the country: students, academic staff, the administration, the government, the private sector and the community at large.

The relations between the University administration and the teaching staff should be motivated and inspired by a shared sense of responsibility, transparency and accountability, and by a common objective: the training and provision of highly-qualified manpower needed for national development. The prevailing mode and pattern of relations between the two partners should be reformed and replaced by one that is anchored on the recognition of the value of the input and views of the teaching staff for the formulation and practical application of both general policies and specific guidelines. On the one hand, when, for instance, proposals for the revision of, or change in, provisions of the legislation, or requests for funding, were submitted to the University's executive organs by the departments, after a thorough discussion among the staff and by the members of the respective academic commissions, it took ages before they received any response. On the other, when the higher authorities transmitted instructions about new rules, regulations and procedures, revision of curriculum or introduction of new courses, or a massive increase in the intake of students for the graduate programme, the departments were obliged to follow the instructions faithfully and implement the proposals within a period fixed by the authorities. This aroused deep resentment among the staff—a resentment which found no outlet because of the absence of an independent forum for articulating critical ideas, the fear of administrative sanctions and dismissal, and the risk that such reactions might be misconstrued as a cover for political insubordination and protest. However, the blame for the unforeseen and/or predicted adverse consequences arising from the order for the immediate implementation of the new directives (expressed figuratively in the Amharic phrase, *surri bāngat*, lit. compelling one to take off his trousers through the neck) was invariably put on the departments or their members.

At this critical juncture in its history, when it is embarking on the enormous task of introducing internal reforms, redefining its mission and building up a better image and profile in society, the University administration cannot afford to take decisions and actions affecting the fate of the academic community that might be construed as being prejudiced for or against one or the other of its constituencies: the students and the staff. It must regulate the relations between the two, and its own relations with them, in a manner that does not reflect partisanship or a desire to gain temporary and strategic advantages. It must strike a balance between its short—and long—term priorities, needs and objectives, and those of the nation, and defend the

University's credibility, and honour and have trust in the integrity of the staff. The continued loyalty and commitment of its staff depends not so much on the opportunities, benefits and rewards it offers (and sometimes withholds), nor on the length of service, but on the conducive working and teaching environment that it creates and sustains. The resources (though limited) and the competence for achieving this are readily available; the goodwill and the determination remain to be seen.

6. The initiative for revising the curricula, and determining the teaching and research capacity of departments, and the duration and conditions of study and work, should come from the departments themselves, not be dictated by others for reasons which are not usually explained sufficiently. The objective of introducing innovations, reforms and plans for expansion should be the enhancement of professional competence and academic excellence, and not solely the production of skilled manpower for absorption by the economic sector. As Kasozi (2002: 135) noted: "The delivery of higher education should not be determined entirely by, and left to, market forces"²⁶.

7. Security of tenure for the teaching staff should be guaranteed and protected by law. The present system of a contract signed by each staff member and subject to renewal every two years should be terminated.

8. Links and exchange programmes with African and other universities are essential for the maintenance of academic standards and the utilisation of external expertise, for the enrichment of teaching and research, and for the further expansion and development of higher education in general and the University in particular.

A Glimpse into the Academic Life of Instructors

The members of the teaching staff of the University have multiple duties, obligations and responsibilities that they are expected to carry out within a fixed time framework based on the official academic calendar: giving lectures, setting and invigilating mid-semester and final examinations, marking answer papers and other written assignments, and submitting the grades. There are several programmes which run simultaneously, overlap and even clash: regular day, evening, summer and post-graduate, the last fast expanding at a pace that is over-stretching existing and limited manpower and financial resources. The instructors also prepare lecture notes and teaching materials, work on the revision of the curricula, advise students and supervise the writing and evaluation of student research papers. Periodic—and sometimes prolonged—disruption of academic work (in times of crisis) and the multiplicity of official holidays and religious festivals reduce the duration of contact hours in the classrooms. Over the last three or so years, the second semester has had to be extended well into the summer because

26. See also SETARGEW (2003: 47 ff.).

the freshman programme started and ended later than the regular programme. There is therefore little or no time for the teaching staff to engage in research work, publish articles, or to write papers for conferences, causing a long delay in promotion. More importantly, they cannot cover the courses in time with negative implications for the professional competence of the students. The desperate attempt to salvage the situation by organizing makeup classes on weekends and weekdays is frustrated by the shortage of classrooms and facilities, not to speak of the reluctance of students to come for the lectures under various pretexts, the genuineness of which is difficult, if not impossible, to establish.

Student nagging of instructors for grades is a permanent cause of irritation that sometimes leads to acrimonious arguments and confrontation. It takes different forms: a polite plea for remarking of exam papers and a request for additional points by presenting personal excuses (illness at the time of the exam, death in the family and the risk of academic dismissal). The most desperate and aggressive ones leave a note threatening the lecturers, or verbally abuse and physically assault them.

Although pedagogically, it has its merits, the ruling introduced lately that obliges instructors to show corrected exam papers and grading scale to students even before grades are submitted has already faced a major practical problem: that of implementation due to the large number of students. It has also been abused by even those with better performance. Besides, the whole exercise has been time-consuming and highly emotionally charged, and has cast doubt on the moral integrity and professional competence of the instructors. In response the departments turned to largely objective questions, since there can be no argument about whether the answers to these are correct or incorrect. Pedagogically, objective exams do not test the power of the students' critical analysis, evaluation and interpretation of knowledge but mainly their ability for memorizing factual information, thus hampering the development of their skill in the writing and presenting of research papers.

Maintaining classroom discipline has also been a frustrating exercise. Some students are regularly absent and arrive late for lectures and engage in conversation in class. The instructor who tries to impose strict classroom discipline, takes regular attendance and is not lenient while marking exam papers is often the object of gossiping and sometimes a victim of deliberate under-evaluation of his performance by students, with the latter counting against his academic promotion. There have naturally been cases of staff dereliction, corruption, irresponsibility and negligence towards their duties, with negative consequences for the teaching-and-learning process.

The details of these and many other exceptional and occasional irregularities are too well known to require specific examples and documentation. It must, of course, be remembered that there are also a great many students who are conscientious, well-mannered, highly disciplined and diligent, and respectful towards their teachers. Teaching and advising them on academic

matters has always been a source of pride and inspiration. They have the potential of becoming the successors of the present generation of academics and University leaders.

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ABSTRACT

Established in 1950 on the initiative of the imperial government, the colleges constituting the University College of Addis Ababa (UCAA) were integrated in 1962 to form the Haile Sellassie I University (HSIU), later to be called Addis Ababa University (AAU). Throughout the 1970s (except 1974-1976), and especially in the 1980s, AAU expanded and diversified its academic programmes and the number of students rose dramatically despite the limited, and even stunted, growth in infrastructure, budgetary allocation and facilities. The rise, development and impact of the student movement

put HSIU/AAU under the national spotlight, gave an impetus to the process of the political and economic transformation of the country, and provided the ideological justification for, and direction of, that process from 1974 to the end of the century and beyond. The three Ethiopian regimes and the University (and high schools) students had differing—and often opposing—perceptions on, and attitudes towards, each other's position on important issues, based on political and ideological considerations and strategies. The study identifies the sources for some of the major constraints facing the University, and suggests ways of overcoming them. Despite the limited scope of the paper and the tentativeness of the conclusions, the broad themes and issues raised can provide the basis for further studies on the role, mission and challenges facing institutions of higher education in the twenty-first century.

RÉSUMÉ

L'Université d'Addis-Abeba. Cinquante-trois ans d'existence : une vue de l'intérieur. — Établis en 1950 à l'initiative du gouvernement impérial, les différents collèges qui constituaient le University College of Addis Ababa (UCAA) ont été intégrés en 1962 pour former la Haile Sellassie I University (HSIU), plus tard renommée Addis Ababa University (AAU). Dans les années 1970 (sauf de 1974 à 1976) et surtout dans les années 1980, l'AAU a étendu et diversifié ses programmes universitaires, et a vu le nombre de ses étudiants augmenter sensiblement en dépit des ressources insuffisantes et des faibles infrastructures. La montée en puissance et l'impact du mouvement étudiant a non seulement attiré l'attention de la nation sur la HSIU/AAU, mais a également donné de l'élan au processus de transformation économique et politique du pays. Le mouvement étudiant a, par ailleurs, fourni la justification idéologique et guidé la direction de ce processus de 1974 à la fin du siècle et au-delà. En fonction de leurs considérations et stratégies idéologiques, les trois régimes éthiopiens et les étudiants (et lycéens) avaient des conceptions et des attitudes différentes, voire opposées, sur les questions importantes. Cette étude identifie l'origine de quelques contraintes auxquelles l'Université fait face actuellement et suggère quelques manières de les surmonter. En dépit de la portée limitée de cet article et de l'aspect hypothétique de ses conclusions, les questions abordées ici peuvent offrir une base à de futures recherches sur le rôle et la mission des institutions d'enseignement supérieur au ^{xxi}e siècle ainsi que les défis auxquels elles sont confrontées.

Keywords/Mots-clés: Ethiopia, Addis Ababa, University, background and development, constraints, relations with the academic staff and the state, the student movement 1960-2001/*Éthiopie, université d'Addis-Abeba, développement, enseignants, mouvements étudiants.*