

The national unity of a people should be viewed in the context of the historical development of its socio-economic formation. As stated in the introduction of this report in developing societies the process of the emergence of nations took place under colonial rule. Though colonialism played a catalyst role in the formation of nations, it did not smash the backward socio-economic fabric and transform them into developed industrial economies. Moreover, the structural changes brought about by colonialism did not affect all sections of the societies equally. This reflected in the different levels of nationalism of the people of the nation. Thus, the task of nation building which was left uncompleted by colonialism becomes the primary task of the political forces or organizations that lead the anti-colonial struggles or the post-colonial movements. In the final analysis, the nationalism of a political organization is judged by its competence, in assuming this responsibility.

Generally speaking, the Eritrean people comprise nine nationalities. Since these nationalities did not to the same extent fulfill the criteria of geographical unity, an integrated and developed economy and a common psychological make up, they could not in the conventional sense be called nationalists. And the religious factor which affects the spiritual and psychological make up complicated the issue. Similarly, since the common sentiments and structures of the nationalities was not properly developed, narrow tribal, clan, ethnic and religious sentiments used to prevail. Moreover, the influence of these narrow sentiments in the rural peripheries, where it was strong, differed from that in the urban areas where it was weak. In discussing the question of nationalities, their rights and their equality, we should take these facts into consideration.

The Tigrigna speaking nationality inhabiting the highlands of Eritrea was in comparison to other nationalities a cohesive section of Eritrean society. Besides one language, it shares a sedentary agricultural economic order, similar administrative laws and traditions and a similar psychological make up. Moreover, aside from a minority of Moslems, and despite differences on minor significance between the Orthodox, Catholics and protestant Churches members of this nationality are followers of one religious faith. The religious factor therefore, favors cohesion rather than division. Provincial and district differences exist, but, their influence is secondary. The highlands were also an area where colonialism had greater interest (mainly economic) and in which it built towns and expanded infrastructure, thereby dismantling the traditional socio-economic structure and exerting a relatively greater cultural influence. However, colonial influence did not affect all Tigrigna speakers to the same degree.

The Tigre speaking nationality spreads over the (then) provinces of Semhar, Sahel, parts of Senhit and Barka. In addition to their wide dispersal, some are sedentary, others nomadic; some farmers, the rest pastoralists, some are coastal people others not; most live in the

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lowlands, a few in the highlands. With the exception of a small minority of Christians, the Tigre are adherents to Islam. They are also closely tied together by common spiritual and cultural sentiments, even though their administrative laws affected by their economic formations differ slightly. The cultural level of the Tigre speaking people varies according to the degree of Italian colonial influence. Consequently, provincial sentiment predominates in the towns and adjacent areas, while tribal and clan ties and sentiments are stronger in the outlying areas.

The Bilen speaking nationality, which inhabits parts of (then) Senhit is bilingual because it is surrounded by the Tigre speaking people. Some of the Bilen also speak Tigrigna as a third language, influenced by their religion and location. The Bilen are sedentary and their means of livelihood is primarily agriculture. The Bilen are partly Moslem and partly Christian. This difference is however, overshadowed by their strong economic, ethnic and cultural ties. Since the moderate climate, fertility and strategic location of the areas they inhabit attracted Italian interest, the socio-economic structure as well as the culture of Bilen was greatly influenced by Italian colonialism. Among the Bilen, regional sentiments prevail over tribal and clan attachments.

The Afar speaking people that inhabit the (then) Damkalia region constitute a nationality with geographic unity. Except for those practicing agriculture in restricted localities, most of the Afar are nomadic pastoralists, while those inhabiting the Red Sea coast depend on fishing and commerce. Among the Afar, who are all Moslems and have common administrative laws and practices, nationality sentiments are strong. But so too are tribal and clan attachments. Thus, both sentiments are found overlapping in many of their traits.

Even though the Italian colonialists were attracted by the economic potential of Dankalia and the strategic importance along the sea, they found its climate inhospitable, and their influence was restricted to the vicinity of Assab. Aside from those inhabiting Assab and its environs, the only other section of the Afar nationality influenced by modern "civilization" were the inhabitants of northern Dankalia who maintained commercial and cultural ties with Massawa.