

The Ethiopian Diaspora and Homeland Conflict

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Globalization and increased human mobility has made politics increasingly transnational with non-resident groups such as diasporas playing increasingly important roles. The May 2005 elections demonstrate the influence of the Ethiopia diaspora, both in the decision by opposition parties to participate and then in the debates on whether the opposition should take up their seats in parliament.

Globalization has shaped how processes of migration, exile, and the formation of diaspora and other transnational networks operate. By decreasing communication and travel costs, globalization has made it easier for migrants to form networks that link geographically distant populations to social, political, and economic developments in the homeland. Those forced across borders by conflict or repression commonly have a specific set of traumatic memories and hence create specific types of “conflict-generated diasporas” that retain highly salient symbolic ties to the homeland. These diasporas are often mobilized and engaged in homeland politics in ways that shape processes of conflict and democratization.

Conflict-generated diasporas – with their origins in violent displacement and their identities linked to symbolically important territory – often play critical roles with regard to political struggles in the homeland. As recent economic research has noted, diaspora remittances often sustain parties engaged in civil war.² Other research notes that remittances are often critical to basic survival to the most vulnerable in conflict and postconflict contexts.³ Beyond resources, conflict-generated diasporas frequently have a particularly important role in framing conflict issues and defining what is politically acceptable. Diaspora groups created by conflict and sustained by traumatic memories tend to compromise less and therefore reinforce and exacerbate conflicts’ protractedness. In some cases, such as the Tamil, Armenian, or segments of the Ethiopian diasporas, this tendency to frame the homeland conflict in categorical, hard-line terms strengthens confrontational homeland leaders and organizations and undermines others seeking compromise. In other cases, diaspora groups have transformed themselves from supporters of militant elements to key partners with peacemakers, as seen in the Irish-American diaspora and the Good Friday agreements.⁴ Conflict-generated diasporas therefore are often key actors in homeland conflicts and may contribute either to increased polarization or new opportunities for peace.⁵

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² Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler, “Greed and Grievances in Civil War,” (Washington, D.C.: World Bank Policy Research Working Paper 2355, 2000), p. 26.

³ Patricia Weiss Fagan and Micah N. Bump, *Remittances in Conflict and Crisis: How Remittances Sustain Livelihoods in War, Crises, and Transitions to Peace* (New York: International Peace Academy Policy Paper, February 2006).

⁴ Feargal Cochrane, “Irish-America, the End of the IRA’s Armed Struggle and the Utility of ‘Soft Power,’” *Journal of Peace Research* 44:2 (2007): 215-231.

⁵ Wolfram Zunzer, *Diaspora Communities and Civil Conflict Transformation*, Berlin: Berghof

This paper will explore patterns of relationships between conflict-generated diasporas and homeland politics with particular reference to how conflicts are framed and the boundaries of legitimate political goals and strategies created and reinforced. It will use a case study of the Ethiopian diaspora in the United States to reflect the complexity of this community and the different ways that segments of the diaspora relate their identity to the homeland. The 2005 political opening and subsequent crisis in Ethiopia illustrates some of the ways this diaspora has shaped recent political developments.

Globalization and Conflict-Generated Diasporas

As the pace and scale of globalization has increased in recent years key political, economic, and social developments often take place outside a given state's sovereign territory. Conflict-generated diasporas are a particular category characterized by their displacement's source (violent, forced separation rather than relatively voluntary economic pursuits) and by the consequent nature of their homeland ties (identities emphasizing links to symbolically salient territory, ongoing political engagement).⁶ The trauma of violent displacement is vivid in the first generations' minds and is often kept alive in subsequent generations through commemorations and symbols. In fact, one function of conflict-generated diaspora networks is to ensure that displacement's original cause is remembered and the grievance passed on to the next generation. The central importance of conflict therefore shapes identities among certain conflict-generated diasporas in their new host country and serves as a focal point for community mobilization.

Some have suggested that globalization and the development of "diasporic identities" would make territory and boundaries less salient as political, social, and economic life becomes deterritorialized.⁷ Appadurai, for example, writes that "the landscapes of group identity – the ethnoscapas – around the world are no longer tightly territorialized, spatially bounded, historically self-conscious, or culturally homogenous."⁸ Rather than seeking to build a deterritorialized transnational community, however, many diaspora groups retain and amplify attachment to their identity's territorial aspect even if they are physically distant or unlikely even to visit that territory. A sense of solidarity and attachment to a particular locality can generate a common identity without propinquity, where territorially defined community and spatial proximity are decoupled without diminishing the salience of territoriality. Political actors and processes may be transnational but issues often remain territorial.

Occasional Paper no. 26, September 2004; A. A. Mohamoud, *Mobilising African Diaspora for the Promotion of Peace in Africa* (Amsterdam: African Diaspora Policy Center, May 2005); Gregory Kent, "Organised Diaspora Networks and Homeland Peacebuilding: The Bosnian World Diaspora Network as a Potential Development Actor," *Conflict, Security, and Development* 6:3 (October 2006): 449-469.

⁶ Terrence Lyons, "Diasporas and Homeland Conflict," in Miles Kahler and Barbara Walter, eds., *Globalization, Territoriality, and Conflict* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006). For different perspectives on defining diasporas see William Safran, "Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myth of Homeland and Return," *Diaspora* 1:1 (1991): 89-99; Gabriel Sheffer, *Diaspora Politics: At Home Abroad* (Cambridge University Press, 2003); Robin Cohen, *Global Diaspora: An Introduction* (London: University College London, 1997).

⁷ Östen Wahlbeck, *Kurdish Diasporas: A Comparative Study of Kurdish Refugee Communities* (Hampshire: Macmillan, 1999), p. 27.

⁸ Arjun Appadurai, "Global Ethnoscapas: Notes and Queries for a Transnational Anthropology," in Richard G. Fox, ed., *Recapturing Anthropology* (Santa Fe: School of American Research Press, 1991), p. 191.

Diaspora websites and publications emphasize the symbols of the nation state – maps, flags, symbolic geographic features, or indigenous plants and animals. Often the language of exile emphasizes the links to homeland as a very much earthly place by speaking of the “original soil” and the need to maintain “roots” in times of dispersal.⁹ As day-to-day activities focus on the new place of residence and as a consequence the instrumental value of territory diminishes, the homeland’s symbolic value increases. Since symbolic attachment is paramount to these communities, many conflict-generated diasporas oppose bargains that trade off some portion of the sacred homeland for some other goal or powersharing arrangements that will undermine their claims to legitimate ownership.

Diasporas in general develop social networks both to retain identity and to promote community self-help programs for finding jobs, housing, and managing immigration issues in their new host countries. They often form religious communities, schools to maintain homeland languages and cultural practices among children, and other social clubs to celebrate religious holidays or to mark other symbolically important dates. These social networks often are used to mobilize the diaspora in support of a party engaged in homeland conflict. Annual events such as the Ethiopian soccer tournament in North America bring thousands together not only to compete and socialize but also to talk politics.

Several recent studies have focused on the question of diaspora funding for homeland insurgencies and recent concerns regarding terrorist group financing have raised this issue’s policy importance. The Tamil diaspora provides critical funding to the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam and the links between diaspora fundraising and conflict have been noted with regard to the Kurdish Workers Party, the Provisional Irish Republican Army, and political and military movements in the Balkans.¹⁰ Diaspora networks often lobby host countries for diplomatic support, promote public education and public relations, and organize demonstrations that promote their cause and keep it on the international agenda.¹¹

Financing insurgents and lobbying host governments are not the only ways that diasporas relate to homeland politics. In cases where authoritarian regimes limit political mobilization and speech it is often within the broader body politic, including the diaspora communities, where political debates occur, platforms developed, and leadership established. These ideas and social capital – “social remittances” – flow back to the homeland and often play significant roles.¹² In many cases of authoritarianism and conflict, lack of freedom in the homeland limits space for political discussions and diaspora debates fill the vacuum and supply many of the ideas and models for action adopted by the homeland opposition. Diaspora networks therefore can serve as gatekeepers for political debates and shape which political ideas are considered legitimate in the homeland.

⁹ Hamid Naficy, “The Poetics and Practice of Iranian Nostalgia in Exile,” *Diaspora* 1:3 (Winter 1991): 285-302.

¹⁰ Daniel L. Byman, Peter Chalk, Bruce Hoffman, William Rosenau, and David Brannan, *Trends in Outside Support for Insurgent Movements* (Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, 2001).

¹¹ Paul Hockenos, *Homeland Calling: Exile Patriotism and the Balkan Wars* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2003).

¹² Peggy Levitt, “Social Remittances: Migration-Driven, Local-Level Forms of Cultural Diffusion,” *International Migration Review* 32:4 (Winter 1998), p. 926.

Benedict Anderson once characterized diaspora groups as “long-distance nationalists” who are inherently unaccountable because they do not have to pay the price for the polarizing policies they support:

While technically a citizen of the state in which he comfortably lives, but to which he may feel little attachment, he finds it tempting to play identity politics by participating (via propaganda, money, weapons, any way but voting) in the conflicts of his imagined Heimat [homeland] – now only fax time away. But this citizenless participation is inevitably non-responsible – our hero will not have to answer for, or pay the price of, the long-distance politics he undertakes.¹³

One need not agree with this broad-brush criticism to accept that diasporas often frame conflict in the homeland in categorical, uncompromising terms. The diaspora point of view and the way it sets the terms of debate and strategy is quite powerful because exiles often have greater media access and the time, resources, and freedom to articulate and circulate a political agenda than actors in the conflicted homeland.

The cost of refusing compromise is often low (if the diaspora members are well-established in Europe, North America, or Australia) and the rewards from demonstrating steadfast commitment to the cause is high (in personal/psychological terms but also as a mechanism of social mobilization). Diaspora groups can complicate and aggravate political struggles within their homelands. As suggested by Maney, external supporters “not only can exacerbate problems encountered by domestic coalitions but can also introduce additional obstacles to the effective pursuit of social change.”¹⁴ One way to keep the past relevant is to keep alive the hope of returning, once conditions allow, even if this aspiration is remote.¹⁵ Characterizing the regime in the homeland as brutal provides a rationale to remaining outside of the homeland.

The Ethiopian Diaspora

Conflict-generated diasporas therefore relate to homeland politics and conflicts in specific ways and often play critical roles. Symbolically salient territory and justifications that support continued exile can lead to categorical perspectives on homeland conflict and overstated attacks of the regime in power. This point of view, in turn, frames the political debates in the homeland in ways that tend to reinforce those disinclined to seek compromise, thereby making constructive conflict resolution and political dialogue more difficult. An analysis of the case of the Ethiopian diaspora in North America will serve to illustrate some of these points. After providing a background sketch of the Ethiopian diaspora, the paper will consider its role both in the democratic opening of May 2005 and the subsequent violent demonstrations, arrests, and emphasis on armed struggle rather than electoral competition.

The overall Ethiopian community in the United States is estimated to total anywhere from 250,000 to 500,000 with a large concentration in the Washington metropolitan area. In the 1960s and early 1970s the United States had a significant population of Ethiopian students. In later years migrants have come in waves in response to violence or political repression in the homeland. The first wave of those associated with Emperor Haile Sellasie’s regime fled the Marxist military government known as the Derg in the

¹³ Benedict Anderson, “The New World Disorder,” *New Left Review* 193 (1992): 13.

¹⁴ Gregory M. Maney, “Transnational Mobilization and Civil Rights in Northern Ireland,” *Social Problems* 47:2 (2000), p. 153.

¹⁵ William Safran, “Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myth of Homeland and Return,” *Diaspora* 1:1 (1991): 89-99.

early 1970s. These were followed by leftist opponents such as supporters of the Ethiopian Peoples Revolutionary Party (EPRP) who fled the period of “Red Terror” in the mid- to late-1970s. The rule of the Derg saw protracted conflict against the Eritrean People’s Liberation Front as well as a series of nationally based insurgencies, including the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) and the Tigray People’s Liberation Front (TPLF) that eventually created the Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Party (EPRDF) and seized power from the Derg in 1991. Many in the diaspora opposed the Derg but also rejected the EPRDF’s plans to rebuild Ethiopia on the basis of ethnically defined regions and parties. Others disparaged the EPRDF as unsophisticated and under-educated bush fighters from rural Tigray, upstarts who should step aside so that those Amharic-speaking urban professionals in the diaspora could govern. As a result, the new EPRDF government faced hostility from leading members of the diaspora from the beginning.

The Ethiopian diaspora community in North America has a wide range of organizations and newspapers, maintains dozens of websites, e-mail lists and influential blogs, broadcasts a number of weekly radio and cable television shows, and has a strong influence on the strategies and tactics of political actors back in Ethiopia. Most diaspora organizations and media focus on cultural, professional, and economic self-help initiatives rather than partisan politics. A number of Ethiopian Orthodox churches have been established across North America and publications like the “Ethiopian Yellow Pages” help Ethiopian-owned businesses and professionals to support one another.¹⁶ The Ethiopian Sports Federation on North America has a soccer league with 25 teams and an annual tournament that draws tens of thousands and is an opportunity to renew old friendships, build solidarity, and listen to major diaspora musicians. Professional associations such as the Ethiopian North American Health Professionals Association engage in distance education, specialized training for Ethiopian medical professionals, visiting surgical teams, collection of medical books and equipment, and financial support in response to the health care crisis in Ethiopia.¹⁷ Many of the social and professional organizations contribute to the web of relationships and social capital that in turn are used by more political organizations to mobilize the community to support various movements engaged in political struggles in the homeland.

It is impossible to characterize the diverse population and wide range of identities within the Ethiopian diaspora fully or accurately. The diaspora is by no means unified. Some favor the incumbent EPRDF government, others a range of opposition political parties, and still others support movements such as the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) that seeks self-determination for the Oromo people. Given the official embassy’s active engagement and profile, those who support the government have less need to establish diaspora organizations or media, leaving these organizations more in the hands of opposition leaders.

Ethiopian political leaders, including those in the government as well as those in the opposition, regularly send delegations to brief their respective communities in North America and to solicit political and financial support. The Ethiopian Ministry of Foreign Affairs has a General Directorate in charge of Ethiopian Expatriate Affairs, includes a regular “Diaspora Forum” column in the ministry’s monthly newsletter. Major opposition parties in Ethiopia such as the Coalition for Unity and Development (CUD) and the OLF have organized branches in North America that mobilize supporters, raise

¹⁶ See www.ethioyellowpages.com.

¹⁷ See www.enahpa.org.

money, publish newspapers and internet sites, and lobby on behalf of their organizations.

The Ethiopian diasporas are key players in homeland conflicts, in part because they provide key financial support but also because they frame the conflicts through their control over media outlets and other institutions where political strategies are debated and leaderships and strategies legitimized. The limits on political activities within Ethiopia have displaced political debate and mobilization onto transnational actors and processes such as the diaspora networks. Due to the nature of their attachment to the homeland, many in the diaspora have framed the conflicts categorically and have supported the most militant, uncompromising leaders back home. The Ethiopian diaspora therefore has the capacity to make conflict resolution more difficult and the conflict more protracted.

The Ethiopian Diaspora and the Political Opportunity and Crisis of 2005

The importance of links between the Ethiopian diaspora and politics in Ethiopia was made dramatically clear in 2005. A series of incidents since the 1991, however, suggest that these roles are not new. When the opposition Southern Coalition entertained the idea of engaging with the EPRDF regime and competing in the 1995 elections, the diaspora was sharply critical and labeled Beyene Petros, the coalition's leader, as a traitor. Unable to ignore this pressure, the Southern Coalition ultimately boycotted the elections.¹⁸ When splits within the Tigray People's Liberation Front erupted in March 2001, both factions immediately sent high-level delegations to the United States to shape how the diaspora understood the intraparty conflict and to build support for their respective factions.¹⁹ Many of the most vigorous and dedicated supporters of Oromo self-determination and the OLF are in the diaspora. These supporters have insisted on uncompromising and unqualified demands – liberation of all Oromia by military means – and have supported OLF military leaders who pursue this agenda rather than other Oromo leaders such as those in the Oromo National Congress or Oromo Federal Democratic Movement prepared to engage in political competition with the incumbent regime.

The shift in strategy by key leaders in the diaspora to endorse and support participation in elections therefore was critical to the commitment by opposition parties to compete in 2005. In part as a result of this change of strategy by diaspora political organizations, the 2005 elections presented the Ethiopian people with a remarkable opportunity to express their political views by participating in a poll that for the first time in history offered them a meaningful choice. In contrast to elections in 1995 and 2000, opposition parties did not boycott the polls but instead competed vigorously across the most populous regions. Live televised debates on matters of public policy, opposition party access to state-owned media, and huge, peaceful rallies in the final week of campaigning made it clear that these elections would represent a decisive moment in Ethiopia's political development. The Ethiopian people seized this opportunity with great hope and turned out in overwhelming numbers to express their choice.

The two main opposition coalitions that participated in the May 2005 elections had clear roots in the diasporas of North America and Europe. The United Ethiopian Democratic Forces (UEDF) was created in 2003 at a convention held in the United

¹⁸ "Ethiopia: Negotiations in Washington," *Indian Ocean Newsletter* no. 658 (11 February 1995).

¹⁹ "Ethiopia: Diaspora Unconvinced and Angry," *Indian Ocean Newsletter* no. 953 (9 June 2001).

States and included diaspora-based parties such as the EPRP as well as parties based in the homeland such as the Oromo National Congress and the Southern Coalition. The Coalition for Unity and Democracy (CUD) also had links to powerful diaspora fundraisers and media outlets and included several prominent leaders who had been members of the diaspora, notably Berhanu Nega and Yacob Haile Mariam, both of whom had been university professors in the United States.

According to official results, the EPRDF and allied parties won 367 (67 percent) while the opposition took 172 seats (31 percent), with 109 going to the Coalition for Unity and Democracy (CUD). These official results represented a stunning setback for the ruling party. Many in the opposition, however, pressed further and insisted that they had irrefutable evidence that the EPRDF had lost the election and that massive fraud had taken place. Violence erupted following electoral protests in Addis Ababa in June 2006 and the summer and early fall 2006 saw a series of investigations of complaints, re-voting in some constituencies, donor-sponsored talks between the government and opposition, and continued controversy.

In this dangerous context the two opposition coalitions engaged in a lengthy and sometimes public series of consultations to plan their next steps. Some favored a strategy of taking up their seats in parliament and in the Addis Ababa regional government and using these positions to build a stronger opposition in preparation for local elections scheduled for 2006 and the next round of national elections in 2010. Escalating violence, these leaders argued, would only play into the hands of the EPRDF, which had overwhelming military dominance.

Others, however, argued that accepting results that they and their supporters believed were fraudulent would make a mockery of democracy and that the opposition should stick to its principles and boycott the parliament. The EPRDF's unilateral decision to change the rules of parliament to make a 51 percent majority necessary to place an item on the agenda (rather than the 20 signatures previously necessary) and new limits on the authority of the opposition-controlled Addis Ababa regional council reinforced the opposition's belief that the incumbent regime would never allow it to play a meaningful role. Some of the most vocal elements in the diaspora supported this position and accused those willing to participate in the parliament of betraying the cause.

It is impossible to assess the relative strengths of these contrasting points of view. What is clear is that the ultimate decision was the outcome of an extended and relatively open period of debate within the opposition, including those based within Ethiopia as well as those in the diaspora. Key opposition leaders traveled to Europe and North America at the same time public meetings were organized within core opposition constituencies such as Addis Ababa. In September 2005 some CUD leaders, such as Berhanu Nega and Lidetu Ayalew, were urging participation while others, notably Hailu Shewal, were announcing plans to boycott in front of diaspora audiences.²⁰ While the CUD's decision was made in Addis Ababa, important voices from the diaspora clearly had a role in shaping the outcome and tended to push for boycott rather than engagement on the terms offered by the ruling party. When parliament convened in

²⁰ See the comments by Hailu Shewal at American Enterprise Institute, Washington DC, September 16, 2005 available at <http://www.aei.org/events/filter.all.eventID.1204/transcript.asp>. The Ethiopian Review, an opposition website, attacked Berhanu and asked why he "wants to work with the murderous regime of Meles Zenawi." Ethiopian Review, "Berhanu Nega is Going Against the People's Desire," September 21, 2005, found at http://ethiopianreview.homestead.com/001OpinionSep21_2005.html.

October, most UEDF members took their seats, while all but a handful of the CUD boycotted. The EPRDF responded by escalating the conflict, lifting parliamentary immunity for those who boycotted and alleging that top opposition leaders were engaging in treason.

On November 2 and 3 violence exploded across Addis Ababa as confrontations between generally young demonstrators and the Ethiopian military resulted in some 42 deaths. “This is not your run-of-the-mill demonstration. This is an Orange Revolution gone wrong,” Meles said, referring to the successful 2004 people’s power protests in Ukraine.²¹ The government responded by arresting most of the leadership of the CUD along with private newspaper editors and leaders of several civil society organizations. By bringing these charges against its leading critics, the EPRDF effectively criminalized dissent and sent an unmistakable message that effective opposition would not be tolerated. The *abertura* of 2005 had closed.

On December 19, Ethiopian prosecutors formally charged some 131 opposition politicians, journalists, and civil society leaders with crimes ranging from genocide to treason. In another indication of the influence of the diaspora, seventeen of those indicted were based abroad and included diaspora leaders in North America and Europe. Ethiopian businessmen, intellectuals, opposition party fund raisers, managers of critical websites, and several Voice of America Horn of Africa service reporters were indicted. Amnesty International suggests that “the charges are widely seen as a threat to silence other opposition supporters abroad.”²² The charges against the VOA reporters were dropped following pointed public criticism from Washington and several other diaspora leaders had the charges dismissed in April 2007.

The breakdown in the political process in 2005 left the two main opposition coalitions shattered and new divisions both within Ethiopia, in the diaspora, and between Ethiopia and the diaspora.²³ The top CUD leadership was in prison and the question of securing their release absorbed many in the opposition both in Ethiopia and the diaspora. Other elected opposition members of parliament (notably UEDP leader Lidetu who had been a major figure in the CUD) took up their seats but faced virulent criticism and physical threats from the diaspora and their own constituents in Ethiopia for breaking ranks with the imprisoned leaders. The vagaries of exile politics generated controversy over leadership of the North American branch and questions about who really spoke for the CUD remain.

The main UEDF leaders in Ethiopia took up their seats but have faced blistering attacks from influential diaspora leaders and organizations. The largely diaspora-based Executive Committee of the UEDF stripped Beyene Petros and Merera Gudina, the Coalition’s chairman and First Vice Chairman respectively, of their party positions in response to their decision to take their seats in parliament.²⁴ The divisions within UEDF have left those seeking a role within political institutions and electoral processes within Ethiopia isolated and unable to operate effectively.

The Ethiopian diaspora has become active in Ethiopian politics in new ways as a result of both the enthusiasm of the May 2005 election and the disillusionment and frustration of the aftermath. The 2005 crisis mobilized many in the diaspora to become

²¹ David Mageria, “Ethiopian Protestors Face Treason Charge,” Reuters, November 10, 2005.

²² Amnesty International, “Ethiopia: Prisoners of Conscience on Trial for Treason: Opposition Party Leaders, Human Rights Defenders, and Journalists,” London, May 2006.

²³ “Confusion among the Opposition,” *Indian Ocean Newsletter* no. 1164, January 14, 2006.

²⁴ United Ethiopian Democratic Forces Press Release, October 24, 2005; “UEDF Goes Underground,” *Indian Ocean Newsletter* no. 1165, January 21, 2006.

engaged in new ways in homeland politics through fundraising, lobbying, and engaging in political debates. The diaspora has been very effective in raising money and using the internet to mobilize an effective advocacy network that has organized demonstrations and lobbied members of the U.S. Congress, State Department, and World Bank. Organizations such as the Ethiopian Americans Council maintained pressure for passage of the Ethiopia Freedom, Democracy, and Human Rights Act of 2006.²⁵ Diaspora leaders testified before congress, circulated petitions in support of the legislation, and encouraged Ethiopian-Americans to write to their members of Congress. Similar activities took place in Europe, with a particular focus on the European Union. The internet helped link disparate activities and protests around the world into a global campaign.

The EPRDF regime vigorously criticizes the diaspora's response to the post-election crisis and labels its opponents as "extremists." The June 2005 "Diaspora Forum" column published by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs characterized those in the diaspora campaigning to discredit the elections as "remnants of the Dergue" and "former Red Terror perpetrators" who are "fanning violence through demonstrations from Atlanta to Amsterdam from Canada to Brussels."²⁶ Consistent with a line of argumentation relating to "hate speech" that appeared toward the end of the campaign, the EPRDF leadership attempted to associate the opposition leadership participating in the electoral process in Ethiopia with elements within the diaspora associated with the abuses of Mengistu Haile Mariam's regime. Later in 2006 and 2007, the government blocked access to opposition websites and political blogs.²⁷

The Ethiopian diaspora therefore played a number of critical roles in the dramatic political events in 2005 and the ongoing crisis through early 2007. The diaspora's ability to frame political debates and act as gatekeeper for opposition strategies made diaspora support for engagement in electoral competition essential for the May 2005 elections. Both major opposition coalitions had links to the diaspora and relied upon supporters abroad for funds, publicity, and advice. Following the controversies and violence over the summer 2005, the diaspora contributed to the decision by the CUD party to boycott the parliament. The EPRDF identified diaspora "extremists" as responsible for much of the political crisis and indicted leading members of the diaspora and blocked access within Ethiopia to opposition blogs based abroad. Ethiopian politics in 2005 were contested by political actors that operated in both the homeland and within the diasporas.

Conclusion

Diaspora groups with their origins in conflict often cultivate a specific type of linkage where homeland territory takes on a high symbolic value and becomes a focal point for mobilization. As a result, diasporas often support militants engaged in homeland conflicts and tend to frame conflicts uncompromising and categorical ways that influence the political strategies of the parties back home. Parties directly engaged in the homeland's conflict depend on diaspora supporters for resources and access to

²⁵ <http://www.eacouncil.org/>

²⁶ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Diaspora Forum: Election and the Diaspora," June 2005, found at www.mfa.gov.et/Press_Section/Newsletters6/DiasporaForum.htm.

²⁷ Among the websites blocked, according to Reporters without Borders (www.rsf.org), were cyberethiopia.com, ethiopianreview.com, tensae.net, quatero.net, ethioforum.org, ethiopianpolitics.blogspot.com, enset.blogspot.com, ethiopundit.blogspot.com, seminawork.blogspot.com, and weichegud.blogspot.com.

international media, international organizations, and powerful host governments, thereby giving diaspora groups' influential roles in the adoption of strategies relating to conflict. The particular importance of symbolic territory and a conception of homeland to diaspora identities and their consequent framing of homeland conflict in categorical, uncompromising terms often prolong conflict. In some cases, as illustrated by the Irish-American case, diaspora groups can cultivate the capacity to promote peace rather than sustaining division.

The case of the Ethiopian diaspora in the United States reflects both the diversity of the community and the critical roles played by those who are most actively engaged in the political struggles in the homeland. Ethiopian politicians perceive the diaspora as a key source of resources, ideas, and leadership. Both the government and the opposition seek to build support within the diaspora and regularly send delegations to brief communities abroad and to use internet and other forms of media to promote their positions. The democratic opening and subsequent crisis in 2005 demonstrated the diasporas potential. The shift of tactics by key diaspora leaders from advocating electoral boycotts to supporting opposition participation was a necessary condition for the competitive elections of May 2005. Without the support of the diaspora key opposition leaders and parties within Ethiopia would not have participated. Following the contentious process of vote counting, allegations of fraud, violent demonstrations, and mass arrests of major opposition politicians and indictments of important diaspora leaders, the diaspora moved away from support for electoral politics and toward lobbying for international financial pressures or even strategies of armed struggle.

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