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## **The role of political elites in nation-building in contemporary Ethiopia, 1960-2020**

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### **Citation**

Alene, G. A. (2024, May 28). *The role of political elites in nation-building in contemporary Ethiopia, 1960-2020*. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/3761715>

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# **The Role of Political Elites in Nation-Building in Contemporary Ethiopia, 1960-2020**

Gedu Andargachew Alene



# The Role of Political Elites in Nation-Building in Contemporary Ethiopia, 1960-2020

Proefschrift

ter verkrijging van  
de graad van doctor aan de Universiteit Leiden,  
op gezag van rector magnificus prof.dr.ir. H. Bijl,  
volgens besluit van het college voor promoties te verdedigen op dinsdag 28 mei  
2024 klokke 16:15 uur

door

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geboren te Ethiopië

in 1963

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## Dedication

For those who sacrificed to bring freedom and justice for Ethiopia.

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## Acknowledgments

First and foremost, I would like to acknowledge with deepest gratitude to my advisors, Professor Jon Abbink and Professor Madeleine Hosli for their encouragement, constructive comments, and guidance throughout this dissertation. For me, there was nothing more privileged and honourable than working with a professor like Professor Jon Abbink, who always gave inspirational guidance and invaluable support for my research paper since its inception, including shaping the research topic into a more meaningful way and throughout the writing up to the completion of the work.

My special appreciation goes to Dr. Yinebeb Nigatu for his unreserved support and encouragement from the beginning to the conclusion of this dissertation. Without his unwavering support, this research work would not have been realized. I would also like to express my gratitude to Dr. Yeshtila Wendmeneh for his important technical assistance throughout my research work, including the design of the research proposal, data collection, and reading and providing constructive comments and feedback.

I would also like to thank the Royal Netherlands Embassy in Addis Ababa for funding my PhD project, as without its financial support this research project could not have been materialized. I appreciate the individual scholars, politicians, and high-ranking military officers whom I interviewed, as well as my friends, colleagues, and various government institutions who have directly or indirectly supported me in different ways. In particular, I would like to express my sincere appreciation to Mekonnen Yelewumwesen, Yayeh Addis, Habtamu Melak, Dawit Mehari, Eskendr Alemayehu, Aytenew Endeshaw, Mamenie Endale, and many others whom I cannot mention here due to various reasons.

Last but not least, I want to express my heartfelt gratitude to my beloved wife, Eskedar Demise, and my daughters, Bethlehem and Mekdes, for their encouragement and dedication throughout my PhD project.

## Abbreviations and Acronyms

<i>Abiyotawi Seded</i>	‘Revolutionary Flame’ - one of the political organizations after the 1974 Ethiopian revolution
ADLI	Agricultural Development-Led Industrialization
ADP	Amhara Democratic Party
AESM	All-Ethiopian Student Movement
BGPDUF	Benishangul-Gumuz People’s Democratic Unity Front
CADU	Chilalo Agricultural Development Unit
COR	Council of Representatives (1991-1994)
CSOs	Civil Society Organizations
CUD	Coalition for Unity and Democracy
DA	Discourse Analysis
EDP	Ethiopian Democratic Party
EEBC	Eritrea-Ethiopia Boundary Commission
ENDF	Ethiopian National Defense Force
EPDM	Ethiopian Peoples Democratic Movement
EPLF	Eritrean Peoples Liberation Front
EPRP	Ethiopian Peoples Revolutionary Party
EPRDF	Ethiopian Peoples Revolutionary Democratic Front
ESM	Ethiopian Student Movement
Ge’ez	Ancient South Semitic language and still the Orthodox Ethiopian Church’s liturgical language
Ginbot 7	One of the opposition parties in exile, pre-2018
GPDM	Gambela Peoples Democratic Movement
GTP	‘Growth and Transformation Plan’
HNL	Harari National League
INSA	(Ethiopian) Information Network Security Agency
<i>Kibrä Nägäst</i> (‘Glory of the Kings’)	Religious-historical epic written in 1314-1322, used in imperial highland Ethiopia before 1974.
LAMC	Liability and Asset Management Corporation

MAAG	Military Assistance Advisory Group (USA)
MALERID	A smaller Marxist-Leninist revolutionary party/group in the early revolutionary period (1970s)
MEDREK	A post-2005 coalition of Ethiopian opposition parties
MEISON	Abbreviation in Amharic for the AESM
MeTEC	Metal and Technology Engineering Corporation
MoPE	Ministry of Public Enterprise
NCOs	Non-commissioned Officers
NDRP	National Democratic Revolutionary Programme (1976)
NGOs	Non- Governmental Organizations
NISS	National Information and Security Service
NMC	National Macroeconomic Committee
NNP	Nations, Nationalities and Peoples
ODP	Oromo Democratic Party
OLF	Oromo People's Liberation Front
ONLF	Ogaden National Liberation Front
OPDO	Oromo People's Democratic Organization
PASDEP	'Plan for Accelerated Sustainable Development to End Poverty'
PDOs	People's Democratic Organizations (post-1991)
PEHAA	Public Enterprises Holdings and Administration Agency
PMAC	Provisional Military Administrative Council
POMOA	Provisional Office for Mass Organizational Affairs
PP	Prosperity Party
SEPDM	Southern Ethiopia People's Democratic Movement
SDPRP	Sustainable Development Poverty Reduction Program
SOE	State-Owned Enterprises
TDR	Traditional Dispute Resolution
TPLF	Tigray People's Liberation Front
TGE	Transitional Government of Ethiopia

UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
WADU	Wolayta Agricultural Development Unit
WOZ League	‘Proletarians’ League’, one of the political organizations during the 1974 revolution period
Yekatit 66 School	Political training institute for middle-rank leaders (cadres) during the <i>Derg</i> regime

# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background of the Study

Nation-building is a normative and multidimensional concept encompassing different meanings for individuals and groups. Its normative nature implies that it promotes specific values and aspirations, while its multidimensionality highlights the interconnectedness of its various aspects. The diverse interpretations of nation-building arise from historical, cultural, and socio-economic contexts as well as from the perspectives of different stakeholders. Acknowledging and navigating these variations is crucial for fostering inclusive and effective nation-building processes that can accommodate a nation's constituents' diverse needs and aspirations (Dobbins *et al.*, 2007; Bendix, 2017). While often used interchangeably, "nation-building" and "state-building" are distinct concepts. Nation-building involves cultivating a shared national identity and social cohesion, fostering a sense of belonging among people, often with common cultural traits. It emphasizes shared (cultural) heritage, historical identity elements, symbols, and societal values.

In contrast, state-building focuses on establishing effective governmental institutions, legal frameworks, and public services for a wider political community. It aims at creating a functional state apparatus capable of governing, providing for citizens, and maintaining stability. While interconnected, understanding their differences is crucial to navigating the complexities of developing nations and states effectively (Von Bogdany *et al.*, 2005; Berger, 2006). The concept of nation-building involves establishing a sense of common identity across a designated territory, even amidst diverse ethnic and national groups (Deutsch & Foltz, 2010). This process fosters national integration through a blend of nationalism, urbanization, industrialization, and social transformation (Birch, 2012; Wimmer, 2018). On the other hand, state-building pertains to establishing political, economic, security, and social institutions to facilitate effective governance (Fukuyama, 2004).

Nation-building is a complicated and lengthy process that takes place over a period of time. It requires a series of negotiations and consensus-building among influential individuals and



groups that hold power and influence over the nation's development. Lindemann (2008, 2011) has noted that this process involves elite bargains, which include compromises and trade-offs to establish common goals, resolve conflicts, and create a shared vision for the nation. These elites strive to foster cohesion, inclusivity, and stability within the nation-building process by engaging in consensus-building. As Chandra (2001) noted, recognizing the significance of elite bargains and consensus-building sheds light on the intricate dynamics underpinning the long-term nature of nation-building efforts. Elites hold a crucial position in the nation-building process, as scholars such as Reinhard (1996) and Mylonas (2013) emphasized. The work of Higley and Burton (1989) further underscores that the direction and progress of nation-building in a country fundamentally hinge upon the elites' characteristics, competence, and composition. These individuals, who possess significant social, economic, and political power, influence the course of nation-building through their decisions, actions, and interactions. The nature of elites, including their values, motivations, and priorities, can shape the nation-building process's goals, strategies, and outcomes. Their ability to engage in inclusive and collaborative efforts, foster social cohesion, and address societal divisions is critical in achieving successful and sustainable nation-building endeavors. Acknowledging the central role of elites provides valuable insights into the dynamics and determinants of nation-building within a specific context. In practice, elites may adopt diverse strategies when dealing with ethnic, social, or regional groups perceived as not fully integrated within a country.

Consequently, the concept of nation-building has been conceptualized in different ways. It has been seen as a structural process stemming from top-to-bottom approaches that involve external actors collaborating closely with local elites. Alternatively, it has been understood as a bottom-up process emerging from negotiations and bargains among competing ethnic or ethnic-regional groups. However, it is crucial to note that nation-building can only be accomplished through internal efforts and leadership; it cannot be imposed from external sources (Mylonas, 2013). This highlights the importance of local ownership and agency in driving the nation-building process. While external actors may provide support and collaboration, the ultimate responsibility and direction lie with internal stakeholders, who must navigate the complexities of diverse identities and interests within the country.

The concept of nation-building in Africa was significant during decolonization in the 1950s and 1960s. African countries faced the challenge of forging national integration amidst diverse

and often divided societies characterized by multiple ethnic, religious, and racial divisions (Thies, 2007). In addition to the burden of colonial legacies, one of the key hurdles in the early decades of post-colonial Africa was the dearth of qualified political and power elites capable of navigating the complexities and reaching consensus among emerging but disparate intellectual, military, and traditional social groups. Consequently, the initial attempts at nation-building in post-colonial Africa proved unsuccessful, resulting in recurring identity crises and failed endeavors. The role of elites emerges as a significant determining factor in perpetuating the fragility and weakness of states in Sub-Saharan Africa (Mwakikagile, 2014). The absence of capable and inclusive elite leadership hindered the consolidation of national identities and the establishment of stable and cohesive states, exacerbating the challenges faced during nation-building.

Ethiopia, known as one of Africa's oldest independent states, is the second most populous country on the continent. It boasts a rich statehood tradition predating colonial history, a distinctive characteristic often highlighted in scholarly works (Teshale, 1995; Bahru, 2001). However, despite its long-standing tradition of statehood, Ethiopia has recently struggled to establish a viable and inclusive nation-state. While post-colonial literature, represented by scholars such as Young (1994) and Herbst (2014), argues that state fragility in Africa can be attributed to colonialism, this argument faces a challenge in the case of Ethiopia due to its status as the sole historically independent African state. The Ethiopian experience presents a unique and contentious scenario, prompting researchers to explore structural factors that have challenged the nation-building process (Teshale, 1996). The Ethiopian case thus calls for a deeper analysis to understand the complexities and dynamics that have hindered the creation of a cohesive and inclusive nation-state despite its long history of independence.

Like in many parts of Europe (e.g., Italy and Germany), modern state-building history in Ethiopia began at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century under emperor Menelik II (r.1889-1913). According to Alem (2004), three major political and social engineering efforts were subsequently tried in Ethiopia. The initial attempt occurred during the imperial era under Emperor Haile Selassie (r. 1930-74), who initiated a more focused nation-building process. The Emperor's nation-building branding in Ethiopia encompassed several key elements, based on a culturally infused Ethiopian nationalism that drew strength from the country's victory at the Battle of Adwa against the Italians in 1896 and the Patriots' resistance during the Italian occupation from 1935 to 1941. He emphasized Ethiopia's rich history and heritage, employing symbols and imagery associated with

its imperial past. To foster a sense of national identity, Haile Selassie employed various symbols, such as flags, a national anthem, postal stamps, and emblems, and emphasized a shared history, the Amharic language, Orthodox Christianity, and a unified school curriculum. He positioned Ethiopia as a leader in the pan-African movement, advocating for African unity and decolonization. Haile Selassie prioritized modernization and development, implementing policies to improve infrastructure and promote education and healthcare. He also emphasized preserving Ethiopia's diverse cultural heritage, fostering a sense of national identity and inclusivity. Through these efforts, Haile Selassie aimed at presenting Ethiopia as a proud, progressive and influential nation within Africa and on the world stage. He started the process of building the nation and branded it as "Ethiopianness" based on a culturally infused Ethiopian nationalism that drew strength from the country's victory at the Battle of Adwa against the Italians in 1896 and the Patriots' resistance during the Italian occupation from 1935 to 1941. The initial model of nation-building via "Ethiopianness" depended on cultural assimilation and a common national identity centered mainly on the Amharic language, the cultural values of certain highland peoples, and Orthodox Christian traditions. However, this model underwent dissolution following the 1974 revolution, marking a shift in Ethiopia's nation-building trajectory (Merera, 2003a; Alem, 2004; Teshale, 1995; Ottaway, 1990).

The military government of the *Derg* introduced a second socio-political engineering program of nation-building (1974–91) by abolishing the long-standing monarchical system, symbols, and institutions associated with the imperial regime. It attempted to address the newly named 'nationality question' and also promoted a 'land to the tiller' campaign, allegedly on behalf of the peasant majority. It meant the imperial order's downfall concerning a Marxist-Leninist state reconstruction program (Andargachew, 1993; Ottaway, 1990; Clapham, 1990). Unlike the imperial regime, the *Derg* allowed the practice of multilingualism or multiculturalism, e.g., via literacy campaigns in many languages. However, it retained several core elements of 'Ethiopianness' as a national, territorial identity already fostered by the imperial regime. Nevertheless, witnessing the long civil war and insurrections in 1974-1991, the nation-building effort under the *Derg* military regime was unsuccessful. It is a point of discussion whether this was primarily because of the strongly authoritarian and violent policies of the *Derg* or because of its failed 'nationalities' policy (derived from Soviet Communism).

The third attempt at socio-political engineering of nation-building was launched in 1991 by the new party assuming power and has been underway ever since. This was built around 'ethno-linguistic federalism' and multiculturalism as the overarching framework of nation-building, with 'revolutionary democracy' and later 'democratic developmentalism' as leading ideological tenets. The principle of ethnicity then became the framework of 'building correct nationalism' to solve so-called 'historical mistakes' (Fiseha, 2006; Alem, 2004; Abbink, 2009; Kidane, 1997).

In April 2018, a possible fourth scenario announced itself with a reform movement on the elite level and the ascent to power of a new Prime Minister, Abiy Ahmed, who emerged from within the then-ruling party. This led to significant political changes and the reformation in 2019 of the ruling EPRDF into a new party, the Prosperity Party. This emerging fourth period can only be treated cursorily in this thesis (See chapter eight).

Consequently, this study tries to investigate the role of elites in successive nation-building efforts in contemporary Ethiopia in the period 1960-2020, focusing on the analysis of the elite formation, elite circulation, elite behavior (coalescent or adversarial), elite structure, elite competitions, and elite bargaining (if any) regarding the construction of a shared national identity, a functional state and legal structure, and sustainable and inclusive economic growth- because equitable resource access/sharing by constituent groups or regions is essential for a nation's cohesiveness. The choice of 1960 as a cutting period for investigating the role of Ethiopian elites in nation-building is significant due to several key events. Before this time, traditional elites dominated under the long-standing monarchy. Still, the expansion of education post-World War II saw the emergence of an educated elite advocating for social justice. The attempted coup in 1960 underscored the growing tensions between these traditional and educated elites, reflecting broader political instability. Furthermore, 1960 marked the failure of Haile Selassie's modernization agenda, highlighting the disillusionment with existing power structures. By focusing on this pivotal year, researchers can analyze how these dynamics influenced Ethiopia's nation-building attempts amidst shifting power struggles and socio-political upheaval.

The researcher used the amalgam of 'circulation of elites' and 'inclusive elite bargain theory' as the study's conceptual framework, primarily developed around power structures, power relations, and modalities of wealth sharing in society. Such an analysis is essential to understand the structural base of nation-building endeavors. As stated above, the critical variables in the analysis framework were elite formation, circulation, behavior, structure, bargaining, and capture.

The researcher elucidated all these and other related variables through in-depth analyses in the following chapters.

## 1.2 Statement of the Problem

Ethiopia has a long-standing history (if not mythology, cf. Yonas 2022) of statehood and a record of several of the oldest civilizations worldwide. The state formation process in Ethiopia is quite different from that in other African states of today, which were mainly designed and implanted by the then-colonial masters. The state formation process in Ethiopia has followed its trajectories based on its long history, multiple cultures, and ancient traditions. One of Ethiopia's features as a non-colonial state is its preservation of cultural and linguistic diversity, not affected by colonialism. Like many other African countries, Ethiopia is still the home to diverse ethnic and various religious groups, beliefs, and traditions co-existing together. However, it has tried to address the resulting challenges based on its models rather than those of colonial regimes. As Birhanu Abegaz noted Ethiopia may appear *sui generis* in its long history of an earnest search for a viable nation-state.

Despite being one of the oldest states in Africa, Ethiopia is a classic example of a state still in quest of nation-building. Indeed, the notion of the Ethiopian state as the embodiment of a common political community tied in purpose, destiny, and unity is sometimes deeply contested and threatened. Divisions run deep on the conceptions and understandings of the country's political history in general and on the future course of the Ethiopian state among the country's political elites, in particular. Since the emergence of the modern Ethiopian state in around 1900 (from Emperor Menelik II's times), Ethiopian state formation has been struggling with the equally crucial political process of nation-building, as marked by the turbulent political events that began to unfold in 1960 (with the coup d'état attempted against the emperor).

What began as attempts to modernize the imperial regime of Emperor Haile Selassie I, initially coming from within the regime's functionaries, developed into a student movement demanding a change of the conservative political order. This movement, in turn, stimulated a revolt within the army in 1973-74 that led to a revolution 'from above' which toppled the imperial regime in mid-1974. Since the removal of the imperial government, the country has descended into an arena of contestation and violence in which old and newly emerging political elites engaged in political struggles and civil war for more than 30 years, supposedly to resolve the political

problems of the country but not attaining a shared, inclusive national vision. In the process, those who took state power in 1974 (first the *Derg* and Lt.-col. Mengistu Hailemariam's rule, from 1977 to 1991) and the TPLF/EPRDF's ethnic-nationalist rule (1991-2018) could not resolve the old political question correctly. The quest for nation-building has remained a rallying cry issue in the country's politics and a point of contention among the political elites. In various shades and versions, these elites advance antagonistic visions orientated towards their parochial positions, either in the 'pan-Ethiopian' or 'ethno-nationalist' inclinations. The researcher used these two labels for convenience; they were best seen as opposite points on a continuum.

The researcher hypothesized that the core problems of nation-building in Ethiopia were rooted in the need for meaningful, inclusive elite bargains among competing political, economic, and social forces. The recent war in northern Ethiopia (2020-2022) might be a case in point: based on authoritarian elite competition and disagreements on what kind of nation Ethiopia should be. The lack of inclusive elite bargains made the political transition difficult, becoming a significant predicament in the nation-building process since 1960. This challenge, on the one hand, is associated with the elite structure itself, and on the other hand, it is attributed to the nature and 'quality of the elites themselves. One of the dilemmas is the persistent circulation of elites with the change of regimes that complicate the elite bargain. As Pareto (1963) noted, the circulation of elites denotes replacing a ruling elite with upcoming new or emerging elites from the lower or side-lined strata, whereby a new elite overthrows the ruling elite through revolution or other regime change. Hence, the circulation of elites results in exclusionary elite bargaining practices.

The exclusionary elite bargain poses a significant challenge to nation-building, presenting several core problems. Firstly, a unifying ideology can help the development of a cohesive national identity. Secondly, divergent approaches to social integration can create fragmentation within society, further exacerbating the need for a shared national vision. Thirdly, failing to establish a functional state apparatus can lead to a lack of trust in government institutions and a further erosion of national unity. Finally, disagreements over national symbols and the country's shared history can create a sense of division and discord among the populace, making cultivating a sense of shared national identity challenging. These issues represent significant obstacles to the nation-building process, as they hinder the development of a cohesive and unified national identity.

It is necessary to conduct more research on elites' involvement in Ethiopia's nation-building process. Most existing research focuses on state-building and political transition in Ethiopia after

1974. However, a few works exploring elites' role in nation-building exist. For instance, Merera's (2003a) Ph.D. thesis, *Competing Ethnic Nationalisms and the Quest for Democracy, 1960-2000*, examined how the differing views of competing elites on nation-building affected the democratic transition in Ethiopia. Messay (2011) investigated the ideological conflicts among competing elites during and after the Ethiopian Revolution and their negative impact on the country's political course in his book *Ideology and Elite Conflicts: Autopsy of the Ethiopian Revolution*. Yeshtila *et al.*'s (2016) article, 'State-Society Relations in Post-1991 Ethiopia: A Political Economy Approach', analyzed the rural and urban elite divide and its impact on political deals in Ethiopia after 1991. Finally, J.N. Bach's paper (2014), 'EPRDF's Nation-Building: Tinkering with Conventions and Pragmatism', examined the conflict between pan-Ethiopianism and ethno-nationalism, using 'primordial' identities and its impact on nation-building in the post-1991 period. As one can see, literature explicitly focusing on the elites' role in Ethiopia's nation-building process is limited. This research project intends to fill this gap by analyzing and studying the role of the existing and emerging elites in nation-building practices, particularly since 1960. This study will contribute to new knowledge by analyzing elites' roles in nation-building and nation-destroying since 1960.

### 1.3 Research Objectives

#### 1.3.1 General Objective

This research project examines the political elites' role in Ethiopia's nation-building process under successive political regimes from 1960 to 2020.

#### 1.3.2 Specific Objectives

The specific objectives of this research project are to:

- Examine power elites' nature, character, and structure under successive regimes.
- Explain modalities of elite recruitment, promotion, and integration under these regimes.
- Illustrate the contradictory views of nation/state building projects under the three regimes since 1960.
- Investigate the significant drawbacks of nation/state building since 1960.
- Analyze the role of elites in nation/state (re)building and destruction since 1960.

## 1.4 Research Questions

The central question is, what has been the role of various Ethiopian political elites in defining, forging, or influencing the ideas and practices of 'nation-building' in Ethiopia? The sub-questions include:

1. How have the elites' nature, character, and structure affected nation-building?
2. Under successive regimes, What were the elite recruitment, promotion, and integration modalities?
3. Why did the contradictory views of nation-building under successive regimes make a 'political settlement' in Ethiopia cumbersome?
4. What have been the major obstacles and problems in state-building since 1960?
5. How can the role of elites in nation/state building or destroying processes be explained?

## 1.5 Significance of the Research

Over the last couple of decades, the topic of nation-building has remained high on the agenda of political elites in the country. The significance of undertaking this research first lies in thoroughly exploring elite action in a developing country's political nation-building and policy-making processes, a general sociological and historical interest topic. Secondly, the research is deemed significant due to the current political developments in Ethiopia that induced the ruling EPRDF party to reform and transform into the PP and the initial opening up of political space. The current dynamism in the country since 2018 recognizes the need for (re)building a state and a nation. Furthermore, the reforms also aimed to stimulate political dialogue on how the issue of state and nation-building can be realized. In this sense, this research's contribution is significant for the following specific reasons. First, its output will have a policy impact since the researcher is a member of the current power elite in contemporary Ethiopia. Using his connection with the incumbent power elite, he can disseminate and discuss the findings of this research. He may be able to influence other elites to put recommendations into practice. Second, it provides valuable information and knowledge on the nature of elites and their role in the nation-building process in Ethiopia. The research contributes new knowledge and fills gaps in the area. Third, it uncovers and documents elites' preferences and the dilemmas they encountered in elite bargaining.



Furthermore, the study can be used as a springboard for other researchers to do more research on the topic. The subject is even timely in the aftermath of the devastating regional war in northern Ethiopia during 2020-2022 and still ongoing armed conflicts in the Amhara Region in 2023-24.

## 1.6 Scope of the Research

The scope of the research delimits the boundary of the study in terms of time, spatial, and theme coverage. The scope is helpful to make the study manageable, feasible, and optimal. In terms of time, this study covered the crucial period from 1960-2020. In Ethiopian history, 1960 saw a departure in power struggles between the longstanding traditional political elite and the emerging educated elite, who questioned the legitimacy of the monarchy's system in the country. Thus, the study covered 60 years and explored the elite structure and power relations under three regimes. The scope of the period seemed broad and unmanageable, but to overcome this challenge, the researcher organized the study chronologically, focusing on certain analytical variables. Hence, the theme of this research is mainly uncovering the nature, character, and structure of the power elite in Ethiopia. Therefore, the study investigated the role of the political elite in the nation/state-building process under successive regimes.

## 1.7 Limitations of the Study

The fieldwork of this study spanned about a year and a half, during which the data were meticulously gathered from a diverse group of power elites who have governed the country under various regimes. Additionally, members of elite hierarchies from a broad spectrum of sectors, including but not limited to politics, academics, military, business, and tradition, were also consulted to ensure the study's comprehensiveness and inclusivity. One of the study's significant limitations was that it did not include the views of the power elite during the imperial regime because most of them were either deceased by natural causes or were assassinated due to the political repression of the *Derg* military government. The researcher overcame this challenge by conducting interviews with intellectuals and other elites who believed to be closely related, witnessing the nature and structure of elites under the imperial regime, and consulting several published memoirs of former top public figures and civil servants.

Another limitation of the study was that several respondents (potentially reliable and knowledgeable) often declined to concede interviews or deliberately omitted answering some of the questions as ‘disingenuous’ since political elite research is sensitive. To address this problem, the researcher repeatedly tried to (re)establish good rapport with the respondents and encourage them to share their views. Another serious problem while doing this research was confusion among respondents about some of the questions. Although the researcher tried to make the questions easy and understandable, the reliability problem could not be entirely overcome.

## 1.8 Ethical Considerations

In this research, the researcher followed the general ethical principles of informed consent, anonymity, voluntary participation, confidentiality, and privacy of the interviewees and resource persons. The researcher’s approach included other ethical and emotional considerations, such as respect for the views and personal attributes of those persons, groups, and entities encountered during the discussions and deliberations (see Bryman, 2015; Kimmel, 1988).



## CHAPTER TWO

### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

As stated in Chapter 1, the primary objective of this study is to examine the role of the elites in the nation-building efforts of various Ethiopian governments since 1960. To achieve this goal, this chapter aims at identifying and discussing essential concepts and theories that would serve as the foundation of the scientific inquiry on the subject under consideration. The discussion started with a thorough analysis of the most crucial concepts relevant to this study, such as elite formation (recruitment, placement, and empowerment), elite circulation (configurations and replacement), elite bargain (compromise and political settlement), nation-building, and the elites' role in the nation-building process. The review of relevant literature also covered pertinent theoretical notions like structure vs. agency, social networks, classical and modern, and Marxist theories of elites to arrive at the core of the theoretical framework. These concepts and theories are discussed in detail below.

#### 2.1 Conceptual Review

##### 2.1.1 Elite and Elite Formation

*“A unified élite means the end of freedom. But when the élite's groups are not only distinct but become a disunity, it means the end of the state” (Raymond Aron, 1950: 143).*

The concept of elite applies to groupings of multiple natures and sizes, distinguishing a small number of commanding people but also to the most capable or exclusive groups or classes of society. The concept of ‘elite’ primarily identifies small groups who exert or retain considerable influence in various societal matters (Hartmann, 2015). Modern elite theory is derived from Pareto and Mosca (Zuckerman, 1977). Since its introduction, it has experienced several shifts, but many core arguments remain intact (cf. Kolegar, 1967). However, the power distribution pattern and the character of elites in societies have altered dramatically over time, as societies have become more differentiated and traditional orders have given way to authority derived from 'rational laws'

(Rothman, 2001). In line with this development, the nature and character of elites have profoundly changed. There are several ways to identify elites, such as their political, intellectual, business, military, or traditional affiliations.

Political elites are the ones who are actively involved in decision-making and the politics of the state. They are representative vessels for the politics and interests of particular social groups. Best *et al.* (2018: 3) define political elites as '...individual and small, relatively cohesive and stable groups with disproportionate power to continuously affect national and supranational political outcomes. Vergara (2013:33) describes them as a group of people, corporations, political parties, and other civil society organizations who manage and organize government and all the manifestations of political power. Higley (2008:3) explains elites as '...persons who, by their strategic locations in large or otherwise pivotal organizations and movements, can affect political outcomes regularly and substantially'. Parry (2005) has defined the elite as "small minorities who play an exceptionally influential part in the affairs of society in specific fields." Mills (1956) depicted them as "those who make decisions having major consequences, which can realize there will even if others resist, and who has the most of what there is to have money, power, and prestige." Mills (1956) and Domhoff (2017) have used the term 'power elite' to distinguish political elites who monopolize power and rule the country. Marx had classified them as the 'ruling class' in 1845, Pareto (1935) referred to them as the 'governing elite,' Hunter (1959) named them as 'top leaders', and Riesman (1961) denoted them as the 'veto group.'

Elite formation refers to the rise of specific social groups in the power structure and their role in politics and decision-making (Leftwich, 2010). It is a gradual and steady process that has undergone a range of interrelated sub-processes, such as elite identification, recruitment, integration, and configuration (Burton & Higley, 2001). The elite formation takes considerable time since it overtakes through layers of process. The elite formation begins with elite recruitment. Seligman (1964:618) defined elite recruitment as staffing for political positions. The elite recruitment pattern both reflects and affects society. It expresses the overall value system of the society and its degree of cohesiveness and differentiations, the modality and type of representativeness, the basis of social stratification, the structure of political power, and the economic scheme of resource allocation (Le Vine, 1968).

The tradition of elite recruitment differs from country to country. Most countries' primary agencies of elite recruitment and formation are higher educational institutions, particularly elite

universities. UK, France, and the USA widely use some of their elite universities to recruit and integrate new elite members into their political system (Hartmann, 2007, p. 24; Williams & Filippakou, 2010; Gasman *et al.*, 2015). Political parties in countries like Germany and Norway are essential in recruiting new elites. In India, civil service exams are used for recruitment, while in countries like Japan, the bureaucratic structure is crucial for recruiting elites. The modalities and incentives of elite recruitment determine elites' character and qualities. The recruitment modalities in most countries rely on the merit and excellence of elites. However, in a few countries, recruitment depends on hereditary roots or the connection of elites with the power elite.

Elite integration is the next step in the elite formation process. It is *a sine qua non* for stable, reasonably peaceful political governance (Engelstad, 2018). It refers to a compromise on core values about the norms and rules of political behavior that involves an acceptance of opposition and the need for conflict regulation through peaceful negotiation. It implies an inclusive and integrated network of interactions in which most elite members participate and decide on consensus (Higley & Burton, 2006). The integration of elites involves a precarious balance between unity and disunity at the apex of power (Engelstad, 2018, p. 439). The elite's integration has a dual structure: an essential and constitutive agreement, a kind of "constitution," and sets of interests tied to elite persons and factions' specific positions and sector locations (*ibid*).

Higley & Burton (2006). Higley *et al.*(1991)and Higley and Field (1980) have distinguished three types of elite behavior based on the pattern of elite integration: (1) consensually united, (2) ideologically united, and (3) disunited elites. Consensually united elites evolve from 'dense and interlocked networks of communication and influence'. Due to frequent interaction and interrelation, they tend to share common values and norms that enable them to develop regular behavior (Higley *et al.*, 1991). Consensually united elites accept and use political bargains as sole methods of operation (Higley & Burton, 2006, p. 11). The consensus on shared values does not necessarily mean agreement on all issues but rather on the game rules. In other words, elites must agree to disagree(Engelstad, 2010, p. 70). Consensually united elites precondition democracy (Higley & Burton 2006: 2).

Ideologically united elites are governed by a highly centralized chain of command and united by a distinct ideology (*ibid*.12). Such structures are typical of periodically stable but unrepresentative systems, such as totalitarian or authoritarian political systems (*ibid*). Disunited elites share neither dense communication networks nor any fundamental agreement on the political

norms of behavior. These weakly integrated elites always form unstable regimes that can be representative to varying degrees (*ibid*:19). There are two types of elite integration: vertical and horizontal (Kaina, 2009: 409, cited in Osei 2014: 506). As Higley and Burton (2006) described, a horizontally integrated elite structure fosters harmony among elites and helps them speak a 'common language' (Kaina, *ibid*: 408). This type of elite integration enhances effective political decision-making but may, at the same time, widen the gap between political representatives and the electorate. On the other hand, vertical integration makes elites more representative and accountable to their voters but could hinder political compromises and effective decision-making (*ibid*). Both dimensions are indispensable for the functioning of systems (Schmidt, 2004).

### 2.1.2 Elite Configuration and the Power Structure

According to Dogan (2003), a configuration is an arrangement, structure, composition, or shape that refers to a sequentially connected set of individuals or items. According to Field *et al.* (1990, 153-154), the configuration in the elite study refers to the relative size and position of different elites (power elites, bureaucrats, the corporate elite, technocrats/managerial elite, cultural elite, religious elite, and military elite) in the constellation of power. The elite configuration represents the community's internal structure and social, economic, cultural, and political linkages. Society's evolving configuration is more a product of uneven power dynamics. It is limited to parties significantly influencing local political and economic processes. Elite, whether aware of it or not, have improved their ability to focus their thoughts and actions on their interests due to the entire process. As a result, the elite are more interested in pursuing their interests to seize the resources than fighting for the interests of the public at large (Adam & Tomšič, 2002; Higley & Bayulgen, 2003).

The foundation of elite power is essential capital and superiority, which enables the elite to project power, including elite positions, such as economic, political, social, cultural, religious, and military skills and competencies, and power or influence capable of engendering adherence to individuals or groups among others in society, including the object of obedience (Keller, 2017). Politics, bureaucracy, economics, culture, religion, and other spheres of influence make up the elite group in general. Differences in elite rank do not cause gaps among the elite; instead, the closeness of aims to fulfill expectations fosters effective collaboration among the elite. Elite relationships of diverse social levels are constantly entwined (Dagnaud & Mehl, 1983).

Elite relationships might be horizontal or vertical (Reed, 2012). When elites are on an equal social level, they form horizontal relationships with one another. For example, when political elites interact with other political elites, bureaucratic elites interact with bureaucratic elites, religious elites interact with religious elites, and so on (Campati, 2021), and each elite has connections with one another and can cooperate to advance their interests. On the other hand, vertical relations form between the elite and the sub-elite, who share the same goals and interests but have a higher social status or are rulers. For example, the wealthy elite must collaborate with the more politically influential elite or align their business interests to ensure their plans are executed as intended, and vice versa (Johnson, 2018).

Asymmetrical exchanges between power elites define power relationships or the power structure. It also embodies extensive and intricate patronage networks and practices, psychological tendencies, and a governance style that relies on guile, persuasion, resolve, and force (Higley & Pakulski, 2012). It enables a single group of influential individuals to exert more significant influence and control over the actions of other elites. The two primary ways that power relations manifest are through dominance and influence. When the knowledge that can alter or affect the choices and preferences of other elites is under the control of the power elites, influence happens.

Meanwhile, dominance happens when one elite group controls another's behavior by offering or withholding some benefits or harms (Knoke, 1993). Dominations contain four sub-forms that correlate to four different elite types, as shown in the figure (Scott, 2008). Elites who can allocate resources include those who coerce or induce others to do something. The restrictions from allocating the resources used in force and manipulation gave coercers and inducers their power. Elites who were knowledgeable and commanding established their position of power regarding their control over a subject. The discursive construction of signaling and legitimizing principals and subalterns is the source of authority for experts and commanders (*ibid*).

Table 1: The type of elites in the power structure, adapted from Scott (2008: 32).

Type of Domination	Elite Type	
Allocative Domination	Coercive elite- 'Lions' (Force)	Inducing elite- 'forces' (manipulative)
Authoritative Domination	Commanding Elite- 'bears' (Legitimacy)	Expert elite 'owls' (Signification)



The resources they control can be used to identify coercive and inducing elites in purely formal terms. Those who have control over who has access to employ violent means have the power to compel people to act in ways that are contrary to their wishes, desires, and interests. Those with financial and industrial resources structured as economic capital can sway others' logical, self-interested calculations of their own or the group's gain (Scott, 2008).

Elites knowledgeable and in charge can be recognized by the symbols and social connotations they monopolize. Those who belong to the expert elite are those whose specialized technical knowledge is arranged into 'professional' structures and practices. For instance, lawyers, accountants, surgeons, and financial advisers may use their stated and well-acknowledged competence to persuade others. Those who genuinely hold the top administrative positions in organizational hierarchies of management and control are considered commanding elites. This typically manifests itself in modern society as bureaucracy, as Weber (1990) put it. Institutionally, such 'top' bureaucratic jobs have strategic importance for a certain organization or type of association (*ibid*).

### 2.1.3 Elite Circulation

According to Zartman (1974), political elite circulation refers to the ongoing interaction between existing elites and the context that generates and absorbs new elites or aspirants to variable degrees. On the other hand, elite reproduction, which is the recurrence of elite members drawn from the same or comparable social groups, opposes elite circulation and circularity. Reproduction in politics refers to adding new elite members to the national executive circle without causing significant changes in values and interests. Scholars have examined various elite replacement modes during distinct phases of revolutionary change, including transitions to democracy and crises during democratization. According to Harold Lasswell, one of the pioneers of empirical political science, changes in the makeup and structure of the elites are necessary after a revolution or reform, as stated in his fundamental work (Lasswell & Lerner, 1965). This means there is a correlation between elites and leadership or between elites and regime continuity. The dominant theory of representative democracy's central tenet is the notion of a necessary alternation among elite groups. However, an orderly, smooth degree of elite circulation is also considered a fundamental prerequisite for democratic stability. Elite circulation and elite continuity are,

therefore, inextricably linked. In other words, studying the longitudinal patterns of elite transformation refers to keeping an eye on the normality of non-turbulent times, marking the differences, and accounting for them using several political, institutional, and cultural variables (Verzichelli, 2018). In order to study the patterns of elite transformation, it is important to observe normality during non-turbulent times, recognize differences, and account for them using political, institutional, and cultural variables (Verzichelli, 2018).

The argument for elite continuity, or lack of circulation, assumes that people or groups with comparable social and political backgrounds will (re-)appear in political executive posts. According to critical elite viewpoints, the pattern of elite reproduction results in the centralization and concentration of political power and roles in the hands of a small number of powerful and unresponsive individuals or groups. A decline in the use of equity principles may be caused by the marginalization of weaker social groups in political results and processes. In other words, the numerous elite groups can unite at the national executive offices and transform their disparate interests into shared ones while purposefully restricting social participation in political processes, particularly at lower political levels. Such colliding may lead to the isolation of other social groups, significantly weaker classes, and status groups in society. Such marginalized social groups may resort to alternative strategies for claiming their rights.

#### 2.1.4 Elite Bargains

Elite bargains refer to discrete or a series of agreements that explicitly redefine the distribution of power and allocation of resources between select, high-profile groups in society. These groups play a crucial role in managing and shaping a country's politics, including managing violence and shaping post-war transitions. Scholars such as Lindemann (2011), Cheng *et al.* (2018), and the World Bank (2017) have discussed the concept of elite bargains.

The core agenda in elite bargains is a deal on 'rent sharing, agreement on the legitimate monopoly over violence or the right to violence, horizontal and vertical inclusions, resource sharing, a constitutional arrangement, the rules of the game form of political institutions, the shape of political-administrative boundaries, agreed national symbols, and readiness to deal with other outstanding political issues. Two types of elite bargains can be identified: exclusive and inclusive. In an exclusive elite bargain, the ruling party or government deals with specific political groups while excluding others from future negotiations.

Therefore, the ruling elite grants or denies access to the state apparatus and its resources to particular political forces. Exclusive elite negotiations fall short of addressing societal issues on a political and social level (Lindemann, 2010). An exclusive bargain frequently leads to conflict and gives political organizations an excuse to incite unrest and bloodshed.

On the other hand, inclusive elite bargaining involves assembling and involving all political forces within a sizable coalition. While defining incentives for significant political elites, it provides access to state resources (rent) and structures (jobs). To accommodate disagreements and avoid potential social disintegration, when an inclusive elite agreement is reached, it helps to avert possible confrontations and deter political violence (cp. Chandra, 2001). Civil wars and other crises were frequently averted because of inclusive elite bargains. A critical element that prevented a potential civil war was the distribution of employment and rent among opposing political forces. The rationale is that the division of labor between limited rival political factions frequently results in an ineffective government apparatus susceptible to elite and state takeover (Le Van, 2011).

#### 2.1.5 Nation-Building

The terms 'state-building' and 'nation-building' have caused much confusion in academic circles, with some scholars using them interchangeably despite their distinct meanings. Generally, 'state-building' refers to establishing state institutions to create a functioning government, often involving foreign intervention to rebuild infrastructure and institutions after conflicts like civil wars. On the other hand, 'nation-building' involves the development of a national identity specific to a state's territory. Most experts agree that a functioning state is necessary for a nation's growth, making state-building a crucial step for nation-building. While external actors are often credited with state-building, some argue that the development of a cultural nation is an internal process shaped within a society. Nation-building is the process of aligning the borders of the modern state and the national community's boundaries, ultimately leading to achieving national integration. This process is driven by various factors associated with 'modernity,' such as industrialization, urbanization, and social mobilization. Additionally, deliberate state policies aimed at promoting a sense of homogeneity in identity also play a role in nation-building, and these policies can evolve over time and under certain conditions. Nation-building can be influenced by both top-bottom processes, which may be impacted by factors outside the state's borders, as well as bottom-up activities that do not necessarily require state intervention (Mylonas, 2017).

Without the aid of fundamental notions, such as nation, national identity, nation-state, and nationalism, nation-building cannot be grasped. Numerous philosophers, academicians, and professionals have defined "nation" differently. These definitions range from essentialist ones that reify particular qualities as exclusively national ones (like done by the German late 18<sup>th</sup>-early 19<sup>th</sup> century thinkers J.G. von Herder and J.G. Fichte) to more constructivist ones that emphasize collective ascription as a crucial component for the existence of a nation (e.g., French 19<sup>th</sup>-century thinker Renan 1995, and more recently Anderson 1983). There is disagreement among researchers about whether national identity is a contemporary social construct or a natural result of millennia of development. Naturally, most nationalists take a primordial view of nationhood, but eminent thinkers also emphasize the ethnic roots of modern nationalism (Smith, 1986).

Scholars of modernization have pointed out the limitations of the primordial perspective (Gellner, 2006; Anderson, 1983; Laitin, 2007; Brubaker, 1996) and later by various constructivist strands. The idea that nations naturally developed from pre-modern 'ethnicities' often assumes commonalities that do not align with local circumstances. Additionally, constructivists agree with Renan's criticism that shared ethnic characteristics do not always imply a shared national identity or loyalty to a country. A primordial viewpoint that essentializes traits cannot help us understand identity change or the timing of national awakenings (Laitin, 2007). Most academics agree that nationalism-the "political principle which holds that the political and the national unit should be congruent"(Gellner 2006, see p.1)-is one of the most powerful ideologies in contemporary times, regardless of how one defines the nation and disagreements over its historical roots. A stateless national group differs from an ethnic group in that a nationalist ideology does not drive the former, precisely the notion that the world is divided into national entities (or "nation-states"), that the primary loyalty should be to the nation and not to the family, the kinship group, or some other local or supranational unit, accompanied by a claim to sovereignty over a territorially bounded homeland. Nationalism takes different forms depending on the position the group claiming sovereignty currently occupies over other groups (Hechter, 2000).

The 1950s and 1960s saw the emergence of nation-building as a crucial idea connected to modernization theory (Hippler, 2005). The phrase is ambiguous and has two primary meanings. It is, first and foremost, "a process of socio-political development, which ideally- usually over a longer historical period- allows initially loosely connected communities to become a common society with a corresponding nation-state" (Hippler, 2005: 6). As an alternative, nation-building is

seen as "a political goal, as well as a method for achieving specific political goals" Hippler (2005), argues that nation-building ultimately entails integrative ideologies that help to create a homogenous identity that complies with ethnic, religious, gender and cultural identities. For example, someone can be an Oromo but also be an Ethiopian, which they have in common with other non-Oromos.

While external actors can interfere in nation-building and make it easier or harder, they can never force it or stop it in opposition to the desires of the larger society. In the end, nations do not just 'exist' but develop through a challenging and unpredictable process, much like many other social phenomena. Furthermore, in most nations, the existence of a state came before that of a nation (Lemay-Hébert, 2009).

## 2.2 Brief Thematic Literature Review

### 2.2.1 African Power Elites and Their Role in Nation-Building

Nation-building in Africa has long been of concern to political science and African Studies scholars. For decades, the critical question in Africa has been how the postcolonial states could reconstitute themselves into a modern nation-state. This issue became pertinent in the context of recurrent state failure and collapse on the continent. The effects of nation-building on political and economic stability and the subsequent attempts at reform have been the subject of significant debate among competing elites and scholars. As the researcher noted elsewhere above, the elite plays a vital role in the nation-building process. The success and failure of nation-building depend on the qualities and composition of elites, whether governing or non-governing elites (Cohen, 1981). Lindemann (2011), Harvey (2014), and Rothschild (1995) argue that the lack of an inclusive elite bargain has exacerbated state fragility and nation-building crises in several African countries. They consider elite discord or failure the main obstacle to African nation-building processes. However, others (for instance, Von Doepp & Villalón, 2005; Englebert, 2002) contradict this argument, stating that the elite factor and the crises related to the state structure are the driving force behind recurring breakdowns in the nation-building process.

The literature on the nation-building nexus in Africa is relatively scarce. There are few published books on the role of elites in the nation-building process. The following essential titles are important for understanding the nature of the African states and their persistent crisis: Bayart's

well-known *The State in Africa: the Politics of Belly* (1993) and his co-written *The Criminalization of the African State* (1999); Chabal & Daloz's *Africa Works: Disorder as Political Instrument* (1999), and Chabal's earlier work *Power in Africa* (1992) elucidate the nature of the postcolonial state in Francophone Africa. Englebert's *Africa: Unity, Sovereignty, and Sorrow* (2009) and Young's 'The African Colonial State in Comparative Perspective' (1994) provide detailed accounts and analyses of the postcolonial nature of Anglophone states and their successive efforts in nation-building. Jackson and Rothberg's paper (1982a) and their book (1982b) illuminate the character of African elites. Furthermore, Mamdani (1996), Boone (2003), and Hyden (2006) have contributed various studies related to elites, citizens, and subjects in Africa. Lal (1986), Darbon (1990), and Frimpong-Asah (1991) introduced the concept of a predatory state, which is about the nature of elites and their respective interest in the economy of African states. All these works refer to state-building challenges in Africa.

There are few specific works on nation-building and the role of elites in the process. Some pioneering studies were Coleman *et al.* (1964), *Political Parties and National Integration in Tropical Africa*, arguing that political parties were leading actors in integrating a diverse society into a unified nationhood. Thomas (2002) authored a book called *Nation-Building, Propaganda, and Literature in Francophone Africa* that explores the nation-building experience of French-speaking Africa, making language and literature his focal point of the study. Simpson (2008) contributed to the edited book *Language and National Identity in Africa*, claiming that language is crucial in constructing a common identity in multi-ethnic and multi-cultural societies. More recently, Emerson (2017) wrote a chapter on African nation-building. He restated the older theory that the effort of nation-building in Africa was threatened by the problem of 'tribalism.' He argues that we have a multiplicity of overlapping and competing political communities that still need to establish a compelling political identity in Africa. However, most of the existing literature concentrates on the nation-building experience of South Africa. We have comparatively few references on the rest of Sub-Saharan Africa. Besides books, some crucial articles are written on African political elites and their role in nation-building. Emerson (1961) wrote about crucial problems involved in African nation-building, and Lemarchand (1972) contributed to 'Political Clientelism and Ethnicity in Tropical Africa: Competing Solidarities in Nation-Building'. Both authors argued that ethnicity and primordial identities were 'major problems' of African nation-building. Bandyopadhyay and Green (2013) recently produced a seminal article entitled 'Nation

building and Conflict in Modern Africa,' which provided an in-depth analysis of selected countries' nation-building experiences. Nevertheless, there are still limitations in the quantity, quality, and scope of scholarly work on the role of elites in nation-building in Africa.

### 2.2.2 Elites and Nation-building in Ethiopia

The failure of the nation-building project in Ethiopia has been partly attributed to an absence of inclusive elite bargains related to a lack of political settlement and consensus among competing elites (Merera, 2003b). As noted above, Ethiopia has experimented with three different nation-building projects with divergent ideologies and political systems in five decades. The change in political systems over the years has impacted the country's political settlement, resource allocation, economic development, and political stability. The failed elite bargain prompted a fundamental political change in 1974, 1991, and 2017-18. Though nation-building has been considered a serious challenge since 1960 in Ethiopian politics, little focused research was conducted in the area. It might be asked why central attention should be given to 'nation-building' in the country while the effort has notably failed. However, the paradox is that in various shapes and guises, the different regimes/ruling elites have claimed time and again to be concerned about 'the nation,' 'national unity,' 'national resources,' the state, etc., thereby showing that they deemed to control of the national state machinery as well as national legitimacy' as essential for building and maintaining their power and privilege.

Some inspiring early works, e.g., by D. Levine (1974) in his *Greater Ethiopia. The Evolution of Multi-ethnic Society* gave an illuminating, though much discussed, historical picture of how the social fabric of the Ethiopian nation emerged in the aftermath of imperial state building. Merera Gudina, in his Ph.D. thesis, *Ethiopia: Competing ethnic nationalisms and the quest for democracy, 1960-2000* (2003a), explored the three different nation-building efforts under successive regimes, focusing on attempted 'democratic transition' as the primary variable of his study. His 2003 article 'The Elite and the Quest for Peace, democracy, and Development in Ethiopia' further investigates the contending roles of ethno-elites in the quest for democracy in the political transition. Tibebe, in his fascinating book *The Making of Modern Ethiopia: 1896- 1974* (1995), conversed about the nation and state-building practices in the pre-1974 period, emphasizing the imperial government experience. Another noted scholar, J. Markakis, wrote and published various books and articles on the subject, the two most important of which are *Ethiopia:*

*Anatomy of a Traditional Polity* (1974) on the imperial system and *Ethiopia: The Last Two Frontiers* (2011) on the later EPRDF period. In both works, Markakis provided a detailed analysis of the challenges of nation-building under two very different regimes. Recently, Lyons published *The Puzzle of Ethiopian Politics* (2019), stressing the post-1991 political dynamics and contradictions, drawing attention to the leftist origin of the ruling party EPRDF, advocated centralization and hierarchical rule, versus the newly created federal institutions that emphasized the autonomy of regions under ethnic federalism and a concessional democracy arrangement.

Most of the literature above dealt with state building. However, it gave little attention to the specific role of elites in nation-building processes. This project will mainly focus on elites and their respective roles in nation-building processes since 1960 and attempt to shed light on core factors behind the unsuccessful efforts of nation-building based on primary conceptual and descriptive analysis of elite bargaining and elite consensus.

### 2.2.3 Conceptualizing Political Elites and Nation-building in Africa and Ethiopia

As noted above, political elites are small groups with power and influence over others in society (Parry, 2005). They play a key role in decision-making and are instrumental in any country's nation-building processes. Political elites also play an important role in unifying diverse, multilingual, and multicultural societies into integrated and cohesive societies by creating acceptable ideology, shared identity and values, common national symbols, and functional state apparatus (Higley & Moore, 2010; Parry, 2005).

The formation and structure of the African ruling elites were primarily associated with the colonial legacy and the postcolonial military development (Diop, 2021: 2). In the wake of the decolonization process, several African countries witnessed the rise and dominance of new ruling elites, particularly an emerging intelligentsia group, who were supporters of the pan- African idea (Kofi, 1972-73; Karinge, 2013). The study of African political elites was sporadic and unsystematic until the 1970s. Since then, scholars began to investigate the composition and behavior of political elites more methodically to understand if those factors could explain successful or failed nation/state-building efforts or transitions toward democracy (e.g., Higley and Gunther 1992). Prominent scholars proposed that the success of nation-building and the attempted transition to democracy is related to elite bargains and their consensus to political settlement (e.g., O'Donnell *et al.* 1986; López-Pintor, 1987). For O'Donnell *et al.* (1986), elite members' decisions,



political skills, and leadership were as crucial as the country's level of development, political system, and social structure to explain the regime's nature. Several scholars attribute the success of the nation and state-building to the quality and composition of elites. This thought was dominant in Africa during the 1980s and 1990s with the publications above of scholarly work by Jackson and Rosberg (1982), Bayart (1993), Bayart *et al.* (1999), Chabal (1992), and Chabal & Daloz (1999). These works give a glimpse into the nature and character of African elites, who, according to these authors, are usually self-centered, poorly educated, and, in the worst-case scenario, predators that use state power for their purposes. This character of elites makes deals to conclude bargains problematic. Consequently, 'elite capture' became a common phenomenon in most postcolonial African states since governments came under the control and influence of the big men (Dutta, 2009).

Unlike other African countries, elite formation and structure in Ethiopia were not linked to a colonial history but more to a perennial struggle among local elites fighting each other to control access to state power and claims over other regions (Messay, 2011; Teshale, 1995; Merera, 2003b). Since modern state formation in Ethiopia at the end of the 19th century, the imperial-feudalist elites played a critical role in the mainstream of politics. Until the downfall of Emperor Haile Selassie's government, the elites predominantly comprised the traditional elites, particularly the land-holding elites and church elites (Messay, 2008). The expansion of modern education during Haile Selassie I's reigns gradually created an educated elite, which increased its influence in the government machinery and bureaucracy. The sharp rise of the educated elite tremendously reduced the impact of the church elites, who used to perform routine activities in conjunction with the imperial government. The growing role of the educated elite sparked fierce resistance against the imperial government, first through the Ethiopian Student Movement (ESM) and later via different underground political movements, the military, and political parties like the leftist EPRP, AESM, and others (Messay, 2011). This ideological movement was the first 'dislocation' of elite consensus (Messay, 2008; Getachew, 2012). The emerging contradictions forced a meltdown of the centuries-old imperial system in 1974.

The political elites during the military regime of 1974-1991 were predominantly low-ranking officers from the military and the security apparatus (Abate 1984). The core of the elite constituted 103 lower/NCO officers, known as the *Derg* (Military Committee) (Andargachew, 1993; Ottaway, 1990; Addis, 1975). The *Derg* incorporated other top-and middle-ranking military

officers as affiliates to accomplish government administrative and bureaucratic tasks. The military elites, however, continued to encounter stiff resistance from the emerging educated elites, particularly from leaders and members of the Ethiopian Student Movement (ESM), the Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Party (EPRP), and the All-Ethiopian Socialist Movement (AESM) (Messay, 2011). These groups accused the military elites of 'hijacking the revolution and holding state power unlawfully' (Messay, 2008).

The resistance of the educated elites encountered a heavy-handed reaction from the military. In this power struggle, the military elites emerged as a triumphant force, eliminating the influential educated, business, and traditional elites through a state-led terror campaign known as the Red Terror (Abbink, 1995; Toggia, 2012; Wiebel, 2015). Most traditional institutions, including the Orthodox Church, were purposefully weakened. They were exposed to attack, being associated with the feudalist landlords and the imperial regime. The acts of the military regime thus uprooted the overall foundation of the elite structure that had been evolving after the Italian occupation (Messay, 2011). The *Derg* military elite, therefore, usurped and retained all political, economic, and military control and restructured itself in the process. Bureaucratic elites were allowed to run the government machinery under close military scrutiny (Abate, 1984). Earlier educated elites were either 'purged' (killed) or exiled. The political space, therefore, was shrunk by excluding political actors and forces, part of which later emerged as ethnic-based liberation movements. The limited space for political participation due to a lack of successful bargaining among competing elites negatively impacted the country's overall political development, political culture, and political transition (Messay, 2011).

In the post-1991 period, the military elites were substituted by ethno-elites from diverse ethnic and linguistic groups (Abbay, 2004; Abbink, 2006), although led by militarized insurgent movements, notably the TPLF. The new political order of 'revolutionary democracy' and 'ethnic-based federalism' granted political leverage and access to resources to emerging ethno-elites according to their demographic size, geographical location, and their respective 'historical role' in the country (Young, 1996; Kidane, 2007; Aalen, 2011). It again excluded the educated and business elites from bargaining and political settlement. The conflicts with educated and business elites persisted due to their marginalization from state power, resources, and freedom of action. Instead, as Yeshtila (2016) noted, the three-layered ethno-elites stratum- political elites known as cadre (governing elites), 'developmental investor' elites (ruling party-linked business economic

elites) and 'model farmer' elites (local elites)- evolved and were groomed to be the main actors in the political and economic life of the country. The ongoing contention between and among competing elites, as well as economic problems, political repression, and public revolts, triggered a political reform movement in 2017 that finally resulted in a change in leadership of the ruling party EPRDF to the reformist leader Abiy Ahmed, assuming power in April 2018. In 2019, this reform movement led to the EPRDF's metamorphosis and the birth of the Prosperity Party (PP).

#### 2.2.4 Conceptual-Analytical Framework of the Study

The researcher will argue that to gain a deeper understanding of the nation-building process in Ethiopia since 1960, a different conceptual approach related to elite studies is necessary. This approach should focus on elite formation, character, qualities, the circulation of elites, elite integration, and their role in nation-building. The nation-building process in Ethiopia since 1960 has been significantly impacted by a problematic circulation of elites, making the elite bargain complex and challenging. The lack of a political settlement led to a popular revolution in 1974, a prolonged civil war from 1974-1991, and an internal power struggle in 2017-18 for political reform among competing elites who mobilized their supporters along ethnic and ideological lines. These events have led to a circulation of elites, from traditional to military to ethno-elites, but have not resulted in a successful political settlement.

Elite circulation is a crucial analytical concept in understanding the elite structure (Casstevens, 1989). It helps to explore systematic transformations of the political elite via an accurate analysis of the historical process. So, elite circulation implies changing or replacing elites with others (Pakulski & Wasilewski, 2008). Different replacement modes exist (Pareto, 1961; Lopreato, 1973). The researcher hypothesizes that the pattern of circulation of elites dictates and determines the trend of elite bargaining that is instrumental for the political stability and prosperity of the country (Verzichelli, 2018).

On the other hand, the term "nation-building" describes the actions taken by core group governing elites toward non-core groups to control social order within state borders in a way that favors one national narrative over others. These regulations can take many forms, from assimilationist to exclusionary. Scholars develop different indicators/factors that determine the success and failure of nation-building (Bandyopadhyay & Green, 2013; Deutsch & Foltz, 2010; Wimmer, 2020). According to Wimmer (2018, 2022), three factors typically determine whether

nation-building is successful: namely, the emergence of a shared communication medium, the early development of voluntary organizations, and the rise of a state capable of providing public goods equitably across a territory. His work (2022) also contends that an inclusionary power configuration is also at the core.

In analyzing Ethiopia's nation-building efforts, the researcher has utilized Wimmer's (2018, 2022) framework, which outlines three essential factors for successful nation-building. Additionally, two more factors specific to Ethiopia's context-compelling ideology and national symbols have been considered. These five factors collectively serve as a valuable tool for examining the role of elites in promoting successful nation-building processes and fostering enduring political bonds across ethnic and ethnic-regional lines.

The first factor identified is the state's adequate provision of public goods to its citizens. This means that a functioning state must be able to provide essential services, such as infrastructure, healthcare, education, and security, to all citizens and social groups within its borders. When the state delivers these public goods equitably, it can contribute to a sense of shared identity and promote national cohesion. Public goods are essential for developing a nation since they are instrumental in developing a sense of belongingness. When citizens are satisfied with the public goods they get from the state, their loyalty and attachment to the state profoundly increase.

The second factor highlighted is education and linguistic homogeneity in the functioning of the state, e.g., on the level of communication. Education and language are essential components of nation-building as they shape the nation's intellectual and cultural development. In this regard, the ruling elite plays a vital role in promoting education and language by establishing schools and universities, supporting research, and promoting cultural events. The education and language policy either (or not) promote society's social cohesiveness and help develop a common or shared communication medium. Linguistic homogeneity on this level (one or more common languages) implies that the shared understanding of specific languages used for governance and administration facilitates communication and coordination among different ethnic or ethnic-regional groups. When there is linguistic unity in this sense, it becomes easier for diverse groups to interact and participate in the political processes of the nation-building project.

The third significant factor emphasized is voluntary organizations' proliferation and activities that transcend group boundaries. These organizations facilitate social cohesion and foster a sense of community among diverse groups. They are established by individuals or groups with

shared interests or objectives, such as political parties, non-governmental organizations, civic groups, clubs, and community associations. The ruling elite also play a crucial role in strengthening the foundations of voluntary associations, which contribute to the nation's progress. Citizens can articulate, aggregate, and advocate for their interests through these organizations. Voluntary associations have the potential to bridge ethnic or regional divides and promote interaction and collaboration through joint initiatives and cooperative efforts.

It is important to note that the researcher has yet to rigorously conduct quantitative tests to evaluate these factors' impact. Instead, the researcher has approached them descriptively, drawing on social-historical analysis, document/literature study, observation, and the researcher's experiences as an active politician in Ethiopia. This qualitative approach allows for a deeper understanding of the historical and social context in which nation-building processes unfold.

Furthermore, the researcher has also delved into two additional factors that play a role in the nation-building process. The first factor is 'ideology,' which encompasses the shared beliefs, values, and principles that shape the actions of the ruling elites and contribute to the nation's collective identity. A coherent and inclusive ideology can serve as a unifying framework for diverse groups to unite and establish a shared national identity. The ideology of the ruling elite has a significant impact on the direction of the nation. As ideology dictates the beliefs, values, and principles that guide the organization and actions of society, the ruling elite may adhere to a single ideology or multiple ideologies that influence their actions in different ways. For instance, if the elite class upholds democratic principles, they may focus on strengthening democratic institutions and promoting democratic values within the nation.

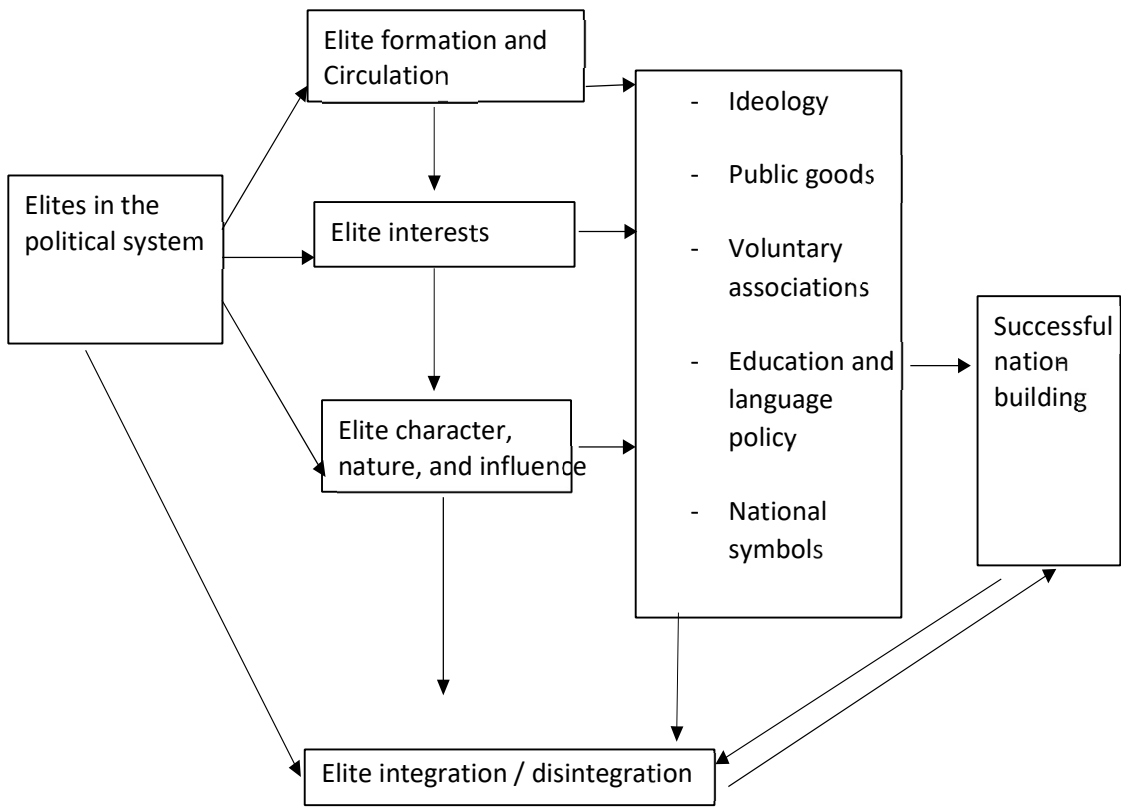
The researcher also delves into the elites' utilization of national symbols and historical references to cultivate a sense of national identity. These symbols encompass flags, anthems, pivotal historical events, and notable figures that hold significance in the nation's collective memory. By promoting and invoking these symbols, elites can instill a feeling of shared history, pride, and belonging among diverse ethnic or ethno-regional groups. It is important to note that the researcher has yet to rigorously conduct quantitative tests to evaluate these factors' impact. Instead, the researcher has descriptively approached them, drawing on social and historical analysis, document/literature study, observation, and the researcher's experiences as an active politician in Ethiopia. This qualitative approach allows for a deeper understanding of the historical and social context in which nation-building processes unfold.

Nation-building is a complex process often involving state-building, democratization, political transformation, and peacekeeping. Accommodating diverse interests and creating a shared identity can be challenging in a society with multiple cultures and languages. The elite play a crucial role in nation-building, as their nature and qualities can influence the process. Furthermore, the elite's actions can determine whether the playing field is inclusive or exclusive and whether it promotes integration or disintegration.

In addition to the factors mentioned above, the role of the elites in the nation-building process is crucial as they have the power, influence, and leadership role to shape and decide the direction and fate of the nation. The elites' role in nation-building can be seen from three main dimensions: elite formation, interest, and influence. The first dimension focuses on how elites are formed and what factors contribute to their emergence, such as wealth, education, family background, social networks, and political connections. Understanding the power structure and the political system's impact on elite formation is also essential. The second dimension is elite interests, examining the interests and goals of elites in the context of nation-building, including economic growth, political stability, social cohesion, and cultural preservation. Understanding their interests and motivations is crucial for shaping national policies and priorities. The third dimension is elite influence, examining how elites influence nation-building through political decision-making, resource allocation, and policy implementation. Understanding the mechanisms of elite influence is essential for assessing their impact on nation-building.

In summary, the elite class plays a vital role in nation-building, with their beliefs, provision of public services, education and language, voluntary participation, and national symbols all influencing their actions and decisions. By examining these factors, we can better understand the elite's impact on guiding a nation's trajectory and fostering its growth and advancement. In the diagram below (see Figure 1), the hypothesized linkages between these factors are illustrated without suggesting a tight causality. However, they significantly contribute to the outcomes of nation-building in any given country. Ultimately, these factors are contingent upon the power dynamics, the formation and turnover of the elite class, and the caliber and characteristics of the individuals within it.

Figure 1: General Conceptual Framework of the Study



## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

As stated previously, this study aims at investigating the elite's involvement in Ethiopia's nation-building efforts under different governments since 1960. This chapter outlined the research methodology used in the study, including the research techniques employed. The researcher explained the rationale behind choosing study areas, the research design, participant selection, the data collection process, and data analysis methods. Additionally, the researcher discussed the validation of research instruments and briefly addressed ethical considerations in the research process.

#### **3.1 The Study Area**

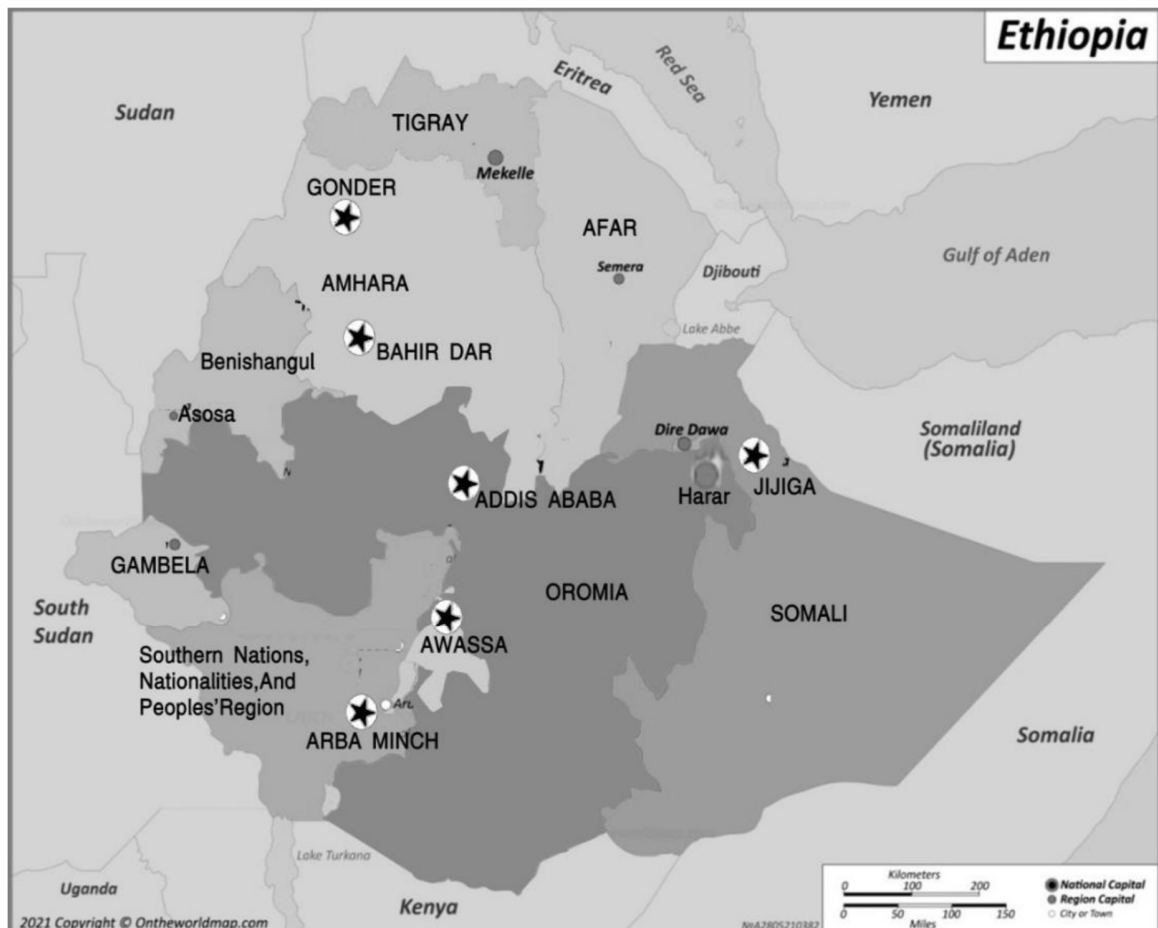
The research was carried out in six locations in Ethiopia (see the map in Figure 2): the primary urban areas where important governing and non-governing figures are active. They include the capital cities of the central ethno-regional states and homes of their political leaders: Addis Ababa, Bahir Dar, Gondar, Hawassa, Arba Minch, and Jijiga. These six urban centers were considered the heart of the country's politics. However, locations in other significant regions, such as Tigray, Benishangul-Gumuz, Gambela, Oromia, and Afar regional states, were not included. The researcher believed that relevant key respondents (members of the elite) could be found in the Amhara, Southern, and Somali Regional States, as well as in Addis Ababa City Administration, which is the capital of Ethiopia and a seat for the government of Oromia Regional State. Jijiga was included to gain insights from elites in a "peripheral" area. Although Meqele was initially intended to be part of the study from Tigray Regional State, fieldwork could not be carried out there due to the ongoing armed conflict since November 2020. Nonetheless, members of the elite from Tigray located elsewhere were included to provide their perspectives on the processes of nation-building and their respective roles in Ethiopia. Thus, most data were collected in Addis Ababa, home to



numerous influential elites from different ethnic backgrounds and the undisputed center of national politics and power.

**Figure 2:** Location of the study areas (indicated with a star).

Source: Ethiopian Mapping Agency



### 3.2 Philosophical Perspective and Positionality

The researcher began by discussing the study's approaches and the importance of qualitative and quantitative data collection methods. The debate over the value of each method is often tied to conflicting paradigms (Morgan, 2018; Gelo *et al.*, 2008). These paradigms shaped the research process based on assumptions about empirical data and explanatory procedures. Additionally, the researcher emphasized the importance of their paradigms in shaping the interpretation of the research at hand and highlighting its relevance to the project.

A paradigm is a dominant mode of scientific thinking and of interpreting reality. A worldview is informed by philosophical assumptions about the nature of social reality (ontology- that is, what do we believe about the nature of reality?), ways of knowing (epistemology- that is, how do we know what we know), ethics and value systems (axiology- that is, what do we believe is true) (Tuli, 2010; Willis, 2007; Patton, 2002). A paradigm shapes the nature of the study, helps frame leading research questions, and allows us to employ appropriate approaches to systematic inquiry (methodology–how we should study the world?). Ontology-underlying a worldview-relates to whether we believe one 'testable' reality exists or whether multiple, 'socially constructed' realities exist (Patton, 2002).

As noted in the literature review section, the concept of elites, precisely power elites, entails multiple meanings- no single definition of elite (Higley, 2018; Scott, 2008). The concept and significance of elites vary over time and across different countries (Best *et al.*, 2018). As a result, the study of elites is rooted in various interpretations and perspectives. While this study will not delve further into this debate, the researcher believes that a critical realist approach to society and politics (our primary focus) is most appropriate for this research. This perspective asserts that reality is socially constructed while recognizing that underlying structures and mechanisms shape social arrangements and understandings"(cf. Plant, 2001:4-5; see also Bhaskar, 2016; Archer *et al.*, 2016). The researcher seeks these 'structures and mechanisms' in Ethiopian history, politics, and law, which are described across three regimes since 1960. While the critical realist perspective provides inspiration and is attractive due to its effort to overcome the divide between positivist and constructivist approaches to socio-political reality, the researcher did not engage in a thorough and lengthy debate on this theoretical perspective<sup>1</sup>. Note that its initial emphasis on ontology suits the research approach and its subject, providing the basis for epistemological positioning.

Epistemology delves into the nature of knowledge and truth, exploring questions such as the sources of knowledge and their reliability (Duberley *et al.*, 2012). Conversely, methodology outlines and supports the research process, detailing how the study could be conducted and the underlying rationale (Babbie, 2020). Selecting a methodology begins with identifying the research paradigm that informs the study. As a result, the methodological process was shaped by assumptions about reality, knowledge, and values, as well as the theoretical framework that guides understanding, interpretation, and the selection of literature and research practices for a specific

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<sup>1</sup> See for an interesting critical evaluation: Zhang 2023.

topic of study. The methodology serves as the intersection where assumptions about reality, knowledge, values, theory, and practice on a given topic converge (Willis, 2007).

The assumptions about the nature of elites, mainly how they are defined within a specific country, are fundamental to the approaches and methods used in studying them. The foundational beliefs about elites encompass various perspectives and signify the unequal distribution of power and resources (Hoffmann-Lange, 2007). The study's approach to knowledge is rooted in interpretation. In our case, the epistemological base of elite study is rooted in the assumption that reality needs to be interpreted. As Moyser and Wagstaffe (1987:1) stated, elite research "...suffers from argument and confusion over key terms, a relative dearth of testable hypotheses, a failure clearly to separate normative from empirical theory and, not least, the lack of a firm database in which the latter could be solidly grounded". Therefore, critical interpretation is the pertinent epistemological approach to grasping contending arguments, interpretations, and meanings of elites.

Methodologists like Semenova (2018) noted that a lack of consistent and applicable research methods in elite research has severely constrained its scientific study. The most common research method in elite studies is qualitative (Conti & O'Neil, 2007), but many researchers also use quantitative methodology. The reason for employing qualitative research relates to the ontological and epistemological assumptions which have been discussed earlier. The qualitative method helps to address the how and the why questions and enables a deeper understanding of experience, phenomena, and context. Qualitative research handles non-numerical information and 'phenomenological' interpretation, which inextricably ties with the human senses and subjectivity (Creswell & Clark, 2017). It is now more widely employed in elite research since it is flexible and can provide an in-depth understanding of elites' nature and character as they act, express, and present themselves. Within the overarching frame of qualitative research methods, according to Downing (2006), cited by Semenova (2018), elite research methods can be grouped into three major categories: (1) methods for explaining how institutions affect the behavior of elites, (2) methods for drawing inferences about political outcomes from the knowledge of elites' behavior, and (3) methods for analyzing the interactions of various elite groups.

As indicated by our reference to the critical realist perspective, the research paradigm of this project was rooted in a moderate constructivist paradigm due to its heavy reliance on interview data from elite participants. The constructivist paradigm views reality as primarily a social

construction, but it also recognizes the existence of structures and mechanisms within that reality. This philosophical paradigm is commonly associated with qualitative research, as it aims at understanding phenomena through the perspectives and experiences of the participants. Researchers in this paradigm construct meanings and interpretations from the phenomena under study, drawing from their experiences and those of the participants. They critically evaluate the information to determine the 'real facts' and may even engage as participant observers in natural settings to understand the situation at hand better.

The choice between a constructivist-oriented approach and a qualitative methodology depends on the research questions, study goals, and the nature of the investigated phenomena. As used here, a constructivist paradigm emphasizes exploring and understanding how individuals construct their realities through social and cultural interactions, including how they exercise (political) agency within broader structural settings. This approach recognizes that knowledge is not objective or universal but is constructed through subjective experiences and interpretations and is subject to criticism and development. Therefore, it is well-suited for studying complex social phenomena such as the role of elites in nation-building. Qualitative research methods for this study involved collecting data through open-ended interviews, participant observations, and document analysis, which were then analyzed through coding and thematic analysis. Therefore, if the research question and goals involve exploring complex social phenomena and aiming at understanding the subjective experiences of individuals, a constructivist paradigm and qualitative approaches are appropriate.

As a final note on personal positionality, the researcher's former political status as a well-acclaimed and renowned political figure in the contemporary political sphere of Ethiopia opened many doors for him. Hence, the researcher did not face major obstacles or refusals during data gathering and interviews. Most respondents, although not the current top leaders, were willing to answer the researcher's questions despite their political differences and perspectives, and they are at present, too. While conducting this research, the researcher gradually departed from active political engagements and developed an academic approach.

### 3.3 Research Methodology and Design

The choice between a constructivist-oriented approach and a qualitative methodology depends on the research questions, study goals, and nature of the phenomena to be studied. A

constructivist paradigm focuses on how individuals construct their realities through social and cultural interactions, including how they exercise agency within broader structural settings. This approach acknowledges that knowledge is not objective or universal, but it is shaped by subjective experiences and interpretations and is open to criticism and development. Therefore, it is well-suited for studying complex social phenomena, such as the role of elites in nation-building. The qualitative research methods used in this study were collecting data through open-ended interviews, participant observations, and document analysis, which were then analyzed through coding and thematic analysis. Therefore, if the research questions and goals involve exploring complex social phenomena and aiming at understanding the subjective experiences of individuals, a constructivist paradigm and qualitative research approaches are appropriate.

Research design, however, entails the overall strategy to combine different research components coherently and logically. It also implies an action plan linking methods to the outcomes (Creswell & Clark, 2017). This research took a qualitative and exploratory approach as the study's overall design. Qualitative research is a form of social inquiry that focuses on how people interpret and make sense of their experiences and the world in which they live through interviews, document analysis, and observation (Flick, 2018; Anzul *et al.*, 2003). The basis of qualitative research lies in interpretative approaches to social reality and the description of the lived experience (Willis, 2007). On the other hand, an exploratory research approach seeks to answer research questions that have yet to be studied in-depth or lack sufficient earlier studies to refer to or rely upon predicting outcomes. The focus is on gaining insights for later investigations undertaken when research problems are in the preliminary stage of investigation (Stebbins, 2001).

Qualitative research is a methodology that delves into individuals' subjective experiences, perceptions, and interpretations, providing an in-depth understanding of complex phenomena. Unlike quantitative research, which focuses on numerical data and statistical analysis, qualitative research aims to uncover the richness and depth of human experiences, allowing researchers to explore the intricacies of social interactions, behaviors, and meanings. One of the key strengths of qualitative research is its emphasis on participants' perspectives, enabling researchers to capture the nuances and complexities of human experiences. By immersing themselves in participants' lived experiences, researchers can gain insights into their unique viewpoints, beliefs, values, and motivations. This approach is particularly valuable when studying the political elite, as it allows

researchers to understand the subjective realities of individuals who wield considerable influence and power within political systems.

Qualitative research takes an inductive approach to knowledge generation, meaning that it begins with observations and specific instances and then works towards developing broader theories or understandings. This allows researchers to explore emergent themes, patterns, and relationships within their data rather than starting with preconceived hypotheses or theories. Various qualitative methods can be employed to study the political elite, each offering unique insights into power dynamics and decision-making processes. Narrative analysis, for example, focuses on political elite members' stories and personal accounts, revealing how they construct and communicate their identities, values, and priorities through storytelling. Content analysis, on the other hand, involves systematically analyzing texts or documents produced by political elites, such as speeches, policy documents, or media interviews, to uncover underlying themes, discourses, and power dynamics.

Discourse analysis examines the language and rhetoric used by political elite members to shape public discourse and influence perceptions. It highlights how language constructs and reinforces power relations, ideologies, and social norms within political contexts. Case studies offer in-depth examinations of specific individuals, groups, or events within the political elite, providing rich contextual insights into their decision-making processes, strategies, and interactions. Network analysis explores the relationships and connections between political elite members, mapping out social networks and power structures within political systems. It reveals how individuals or groups are interconnected, who holds key positions of influence, and how information, resources, and power flow within these networks.

Overall, qualitative research methods offer valuable tools for understanding power structure, resource distribution, and exercise of power by political elites. By delving into the subjective realities and lived experiences of political elite members, researchers can uncover political systems' underlying dynamics and contribute to a more nuanced understanding of governance, decision-making, and social change.

Our research method generally relies on qualitative studies using narrative and discourse analysis. It includes the researcher's involvement in identifying the meaning or relevance of phenomena (Silverman, 2020). Furthermore, the researcher gleans the meaning of events through interactions with others in social and cultural contexts. Research grounded in the constructivist

philosophical paradigm mostly begins with an open-ended inquiry through research questions. Tentative or valid conclusions are then constructed from the study's findings. Most researchers even formulate theories based on the study's results.

### 3.4 Getting Access to Elites

Access to elites, particularly the power elites, is formidable, making conducting elite research complicated. Most elites need to feel more comfortable giving interviews or engaging in discussion. The difficulties in conducting elite interviews also relate to sampling (designating who the elites are?), choosing venue and time, balancing power negotiations, self-presentation, constructing sound questions, getting answers, resisting manipulation, and establishing rapport (cf. Dexter, 1970; Hirsch, 1995; Mikecz, 2012; Ostrander, 1993).

Studying elites presents researchers with several challenges. In addition to the issues mentioned above, gatekeepers have difficulty shielding elites. Some elites are hard to identify and pinpoint, especially those no longer active in public life. Furthermore, in qualitative research, elites can be challenging to work with as they often control the interaction and exert influence or pressure on the researcher before fully cooperating. Some elites may also be hesitant to have their statements quoted or recorded. They can impose strict restrictions on the researcher, such as controlling access to documents or internal meetings or requiring strict confidentiality agreements.

Additionally, they may be reluctant to disclose certain information, particularly regarding less visible aspects of power. One way to address this issue is by assuring them that anonymity ought to be strictly maintained and that their elite status would be referred to in general terms (Littig, 2009). The researcher overcame the challenges by building a good rapport with the key respondents and study participants via repeated efforts. Rapport enabled us to obtain better and more reliable information. Hence, trust and understanding were built based on a good relationship over time (cf. Kezar, 2003). Besides, the researcher used his personal relationship and social capital in Ethiopia to access old and incumbent power elite members.

### 3.5 Research Methods

Qualitative research is often selected for power elite study because it provides in-depth insights and detailed understanding of the power elite's experiences, perspectives, and behaviors (Conti & O'Neil, 2007). Such a study requires an exploration of how social structures, power

relationships, and cultural dynamics influence the actions and decisions of the power elite, which cannot be achieved through quantitative research alone (Mason-Bish, 2019). Qualitative methods such as interviews, observation, and case studies are well-suited to capturing the complexity and nuance of power dynamics, social interactions, and cultural practices that underpin the workings of the power elite. Qualitative research is particularly useful in providing a rich and detailed exploration of the power elite, highlighting their beliefs, values, motivations, and impact on society (Denord *et al.*, 2020). Researching political power and elite involves studying the structures, processes, and individuals that shape political decision-making and governance. Several research methods can be used to investigate political power and the elite, but the researcher employed the following research methods in this study. These are:

### 3.5.1 Interviews

Interviewing individuals who hold political power or are part of the political elite can provide insights into their beliefs, values, and decision-making processes. Interviews play a pivotal role in the realm of social research, particularly in gathering qualitative data. They serve as a potent tool for delving into the intricate nuances of human experiences, perspectives, and behaviors. Whether conducted with influential figures or ordinary individuals, interviews offer researchers invaluable insights into various social phenomena. However, it is essential to acknowledge the distinct approaches required when dealing with elites versus the general populace, as outlined by scholars such as Richards (1996), Higley (1988), Aberbach & Rockman (2002), and Harvey (2011).

Researchers encounter unique challenges when interviewing elites, such as senior government officials or leaders within organizations. One of the primary hurdles lies in establishing trust. Elites often have more at stake and may be inclined to conceal certain information, making cultivating trust a critical aspect of data collection (Aberbach & Rockman, 2002; Harvey, 2011). Gaining access to these individuals in the first place can be arduous, requiring persistence and strategic networking (Lilleker, 2003; Van Audenhove & Donders, 2019). Ostrander (1993) emphasizes the importance of nurturing trust over time, suggesting that researchers should prioritize building rapport with elites from the outset. This continuous effort to establish a relationship lays the groundwork for meaningful dialogue and fosters an environment conducive to the candid sharing of insights.



Methodological challenges abound when employing qualitative techniques to explore elite perspectives through interviews. Conti & O’Neil (2007) point to the inherent subjectivity in such endeavors, underscoring the need for researchers to navigate this aspect skillfully. The willingness of elites to participate actively and engage in the research process significantly influences its success (Mikecz, 2012; Odendahl & Shaw, 2002). Moreover, interviewers must contend with the intricate web of interpersonal networks that often characterize elite circles, further complicating the research landscape.

Conducting interviews with elites demands meticulous planning, patience, and a nuanced understanding of the dynamics at play. By prioritizing establishing trust, maintaining ongoing rapport, and adeptly navigating methodological challenges, researchers can unlock invaluable insights into the world of those occupying positions of influence and power.

The researcher conducted a comprehensive series of elite interviews with key informants (respondents) drawn from diverse segments of elite society (See Annex 2). This included representatives from various spheres, such as ruling political elites, opposition party leaders, business magnates, military figures, intellectuals, and traditional tribal leaders. Forty-eight key respondents were engaged in this process, but not all were used and cited in this thesis. These in-depth interviews aimed to elicit detailed insights from the selected participants on specific issues of interest.

The preference for personal, in-depth interviews stems from their effectiveness in uncovering individual experiences, perceptions, and emotions related to the explored topics. This method allows for discovering new information and a deeper understanding of complex issues. Moreover, it facilitates an inductive approach to investigation, enabling researchers to immerse themselves in the real-world contexts of the subjects and generate rich narrative descriptions. In-depth interviews also provide a window into the interviewees’ thoughts and perspectives on particular phenomena. The overarching aim is to gather focused, detailed, and densely packed information by recounting narratives or stories, thereby capturing local histories and shared knowledge.

### 3.5.2 Document Analysis

Examining official documents, such as government reports, policy papers, and speeches, offers valuable insights into the priorities and agenda of political elites. This process, known as

document review, involves systematically collecting, documenting, analyzing, and interpreting existing data. Both primary and secondary data were sourced from various archives and documents. The researcher utilized political memoirs, press archives, meeting minutes, and personal notes as primary data sources. Additionally, the study benefited significantly from a thorough review of secondary data from scientific publications such as books, articles, reports, and government white papers.

### 3.5.3 Observations

When circumstances permitted, the researcher observed political events, including legislative sessions, political rallies, and public meetings. This approach offers valuable insights into political power dynamics and real-time interactions among political elites.

## 3.6 Sampling Technique

This study employed purposive sampling to define the characteristics and scope of the research population. This method, a form of non-probability sampling, involves selecting sample members based on their expertise, knowledge, and relationships with the research topic (Etikan *et al.*, 2016). For this particular project, sample members, who were elites, were chosen based on their significant involvement in the nation-building process in Ethiopia, possessing relevant personal experiences and expertise as political actors, ideologues, party or movement leaders, or high-ranking officials. Snowball and quota sampling techniques were utilized to identify and locate elite members relevant to the study. Through the snowball technique, participants were asked to suggest other knowledgeable or influential individuals, while the quota technique ensured the inclusion of representatives from various elite hierarchies.

## 3.7 Sources of Data

As noted above, this study's data was collected from primary and secondary sources. A primary data source is a source in which the researcher collects firsthand data for specific purposes. In this study, the primary data were collected using tools such as interviewing the elite, reviewing documents, and making observations. On the other hand, secondary data was gathered from

various publications, including books, literature, documents, printed news articles, digital media content, and unpublished materials.

While conducting the interviews, the researcher adopted a flexible approach, primarily using open-ended questions to encourage key respondents to offer their unique perspectives. Although there were semi-structured question lists as a guide, the researcher also generated additional questions on the spot to delve deeper into the phenomena under discussion. At times, the researcher engaged in informal, unrecorded discussions to extract more comprehensive and accurate data from respondents that further helped to substantiate the idea raised. The practice of 'triangulation' played a crucial role in ensuring the accuracy and credibility of the findings. This practice involves leveraging multiple data sources and analyzing methods such as interviews, observations, document analysis, narrative analysis, discourse analysis, content analysis, and networking analysis.

### 3.8 Data Analysis

The study employed inductive data analysis methods to explore thoroughly the collected data concerning the research questions and hypotheses. By applying logical data analysis techniques, the study aimed at extracting key findings and insights from the gathered data. This approach facilitated systematically examining the information to uncover underlying patterns and relationships.

Qualitative data analysis techniques were utilized, including content analysis, discourse analysis, narrative analysis, and thematic analysis. Content analysis played a pivotal role in categorizing and simplifying the qualitative data obtained from personal interviews, allowing for a focused exploration of the research questions. Discourse analysis was employed to delve into the arguments and perspectives of elites within the context of nation-building, shedding light on their ideologies and viewpoints. Thematic analysis assisted in identifying recurring patterns and themes across the dataset and offering more profound insights into the dynamics at play.

Additionally, historical analysis was conducted using official government documents and archival materials to enrich the understanding of the nation-building process from the perspective of elites. This comprehensive approach to qualitative data analysis ensured a nuanced examination of the data, enhancing the validity and depth of the study's findings.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE FORMATION AND EVOLUTION OF ELITES IN ETHIOPIA

#### 4.1 The Development of the Ethiopian Polity

Due to its long political traditions, religious cultures, and literary heritage, Ethiopia is enduringly fascinating to researchers. It is popularly seen as a land of former kingdoms, like Axum and ‘Abyssinia,’ where powerful kings and queens claimed to have origins in Biblical times and were once governed by fortresses they built at the top of mountains. The Ethiopian ‘polity’ has undergone many phases, and its current form results from radical historical changes. Understanding its historical outlines is necessary for assessing the role of elites in the country’s political and societal formation.

The term ‘polity’ denotes a state or organized society that is a political body or has a distinct political identity (Corry, 2010). Additionally, it indicates a collection of individuals with a common identity who can mobilize resources and are subject to institutionalized social relations (Ferguson *et al.*, 2000). There are discourses and various explanations by different scholars and elite groups regarding the nature of the Ethiopian polity and its development, including Conti Rossini’s 1928 familiar expression of it being a museum of peoples, the Levine ‘Greater Ethiopia’ thesis (Levine, 2000), Teshale’s ‘*Tabot/Ge’ez civilization*’ (Teshale, 1995), the Sorenson notion of ‘imagining Ethiopia’ (Sorenson, 1993), Markakis’ explanation of the dichotomy of the two (last) frontiers (Markakis, 2011), and the current opposing viewpoints of ethno-elites and ‘pan-Ethiopianists’.

Levine’s (1974) framework of understanding Ethiopian polity attempts to explain the multi-ethnic nature of Ethiopian polity. In his book (1974), Levine claimed that Ethiopia was one of the few traditional African polities that maintained its sovereignty due to internal, structural traits, including institutional structures, social patterns, and cultural codes. How did these several phenomena work together to result in the continued sovereignty of Ethiopia and its lengthy existence as a state? Levine (1974) said that this was because bigger ethnic groups tended to share

ideas about the supernatural, ritual behavior, food attitudes, features of social organization, and practices relating to personal status, language, and other things. The Ethiopian polity, which was for him characterized by certain political-cultural ‘paradigms’ such as ‘the Amhara thesis,’ the ‘Oromo antithesis,’ and the ‘Ethiopian synthesis,’ was the (idealized) result of these intensive contacts and interrelations between these broad ethno-geographical traditions (Amhara and Oromo).

Teshale, in his seminal work, *The Making of Modern Ethiopia: 1896-1974*, illuminated Ethiopia's social and political history and offered a unique understanding of its nature. It significantly impacted Ethiopianist discourse by elaborating on four new concepts: the *Geber* system, *Tabot* Christianity, the Aksumite paradigm, and the Ge'ez civilization. He sought a social-cultural reconstruction of contemporary Ethiopian social history and showed the skillful use of the Amharic language. His work covered the time from the Battle of Adwa (1896) to Haile Selassie's end-of-reign period in 1974. It tackled key factors that shaped contemporary Ethiopia, including class and national tensions, Western paradigms from without, Orientalist Semiticist discourse, and civilization from the inside. He also explained how the world-system perspective, which places Ethiopia in the periphery of the capitalist world economy, is crucial for locating the framework of historical processes that transformed Ethiopia from a long-standing autonomous civilization and state formation into a peripheral region of the capitalist world economy.

Ethiopia is indeed a multicultural and multilingual nation. For centuries, numerous ethnocultural traditions coexisted and communicated in Ethiopia, creating a distinctive amalgam of variety in terms of cultures, languages, and political units. In contrast to other African states, whose social and cultural fabric changed due to the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century colonization, Ethiopia retained such different cultures and languages in a more durable form (Teshale, 2009).

Sorenson (1993) ultimately rejected Levine's Greater Ethiopia concept and explored how images are made, histories are constructed, and identities are formed in Ethiopia. For instance, he claimed that the war for Eritrea's independence and the ethno-regional liberation movements demonstrated the emergence of counter-hegemonic identities, such as those of the Eritreans, Tigrayans, and Oromo people, which inherently challenged the idea of Ethiopianness and the Ethiopian polity as well as the narrative of the extended statehood. According to Sorenson, Haile Selassie, the last Ethiopian emperor and an Ethiopian nationalist, created the myth of the country's antiquity as a means of hegemonic control, and he contended that contradictory and mistaken

statements were made about Ethiopia in Western discourse. Sorenson provides extensive data and analyses of the detrimental effects of suppressing group identities as they are felt regarding the nation's territorial integrity. However, several significant mistakes and omissions frequently overshadow the book's positive aspects. Here are a few illustrations. Oddly, there needs to be consideration of various modes of legitimacy, such as traditional charismatic authority, the decrease in these kinds of authority, and how such decline provokes crises in a book that promises to deal with various representations of Ethiopia. Considering these developments, citizens, especially those from marginalized groups, doubted the government's ability to rule.

According to John Markakis (2011), a prominent scholar on Ethiopian politics for many years, ethnic animosities and the battle for power and resource control are formidable challenges to integrating the Ethiopian polity and developing a viable society. He claims that the monumental task of fusing a multicultural empire into a contemporary modern nation-state still needs to be completed. A process that has been ongoing for over a century remains unfinished, and its eventual triumph is far from certain. For him, to get the intended result, two significant challenges must be overcome, and two boundaries must be crossed. The first is the power monopoly passed down from the empire's founders and has been ferociously protected ever since by Tigray and Amhara elites, members of the governing class with 'Abyssinian' ancestry, to other people in general and elites in particular. He claimed that elites from Tigray and Amhara dominated the other groups/elites of other people/regions while keeping them out of positions of power, leading to political unrest and armed conflict. The second frontier is that of the lands on the 'periphery' of the state, where the integration processes have yet to reach and resistance to it is highest. Once this frontier is overcome, the state will only have the secure borders that a mature nation-state requires.

There are other discourses regarding the history of the Ethiopian polity (Yusuf, 2009). According to some academics, Ethiopia's history dates back three millennia from the Axumite Empire to today. Others dispute this claim and contend that the development of Ethiopia's polity only started in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century episode of Emperor Menelik's creation of the modern state. Today's elites are commonly divided by argument and debate into two main groups: the Pan-Ethiopianists and the 'ethno-nationalists' (Merera, 2003a).

The pan-Ethiopianists (see Alem, 2003) argued in favor of the long tradition of statehood, which transcends more than two thousand years. They strongly argue that the origin of the Ethiopian polity can be traced back to the Axumite kingdom around the end of the first century

BC. This state included what are today known as Eritrea and northern Ethiopia. The Axum kingdom made Christianity its official religion in 325 AD, at the height of King Ezana's power. Axum is said to have been at its height between the fourth and sixth century when it expanded its territory beyond the Red Sea into parts of today's Yemen. Orthodox Christianity was the primary ideological basis of the Axumite Kingdom. Until the 1974 revolution, which permanently destroyed the royal system in Ethiopia, the Orthodox Church and the monarchy had remained interwoven. Although the formal ties between the church and the state were cut after the revolution, they were never broken, and the church continues to be a significant part of Ethiopia's state.

Besides Orthodox Christianity, the nature of the Ethiopian polity is also shaped by Islam, which was introduced to the kingdom in the 7<sup>th</sup> century (cp. Abbink, 1998). Islam spread along the Red Sea's coastal areas, and many Muslims (*ibid.*) inhabited its shores and the adjacent hinterland areas. The rise of Islam and its influence on trade routes, which were among the primary economic resources of the kingdom, made the Axum dynasty susceptible to adversaries' manipulation and resulted in its gradual decline of political and economic power (Trimingham, 2007). Since the late 9<sup>th</sup> century, the successor dynasty of the *Zagwe*, centered on Lalibela, ruled Ethiopia until 1270. The eleven monolithic rock-hewn churches in Lalibela, each named after one of their kings, are a testament to their heritage. The kingdom laid out its political blueprint for Ethiopian polity until its succession by another dynasty, the 'Solomonic', which played a pivotal role in constructing the Ethiopian state and creating long-lasting, successful imperial rule through the succession of several kings (Nebiyu, 2013). The Solomonic dynasty established a durable monarchic political system for about 800 years and significantly contributed to the development of Ethiopia's state tradition. However, in the span of this 800 year's reign, the Solomonic Dynasty experienced countless civil wars and conflicts from within the polity and incursions from foreign powers such as Ottoman Turkey, Egypt, Great Britain (the Maqdala campaign of 1868), and Italy (1896). Despite facing internal and external pressures, the Ethiopian polity was sustained for eight centuries under the leadership of this Solomonic dynasty. The dynasty encountered three key events that seriously challenged and put its survival in question.

The first challenge was the uprising of the Muslim leader Ahmed Ibn Ibrahim (*Gragn Ahmed*), a formidable commander of the Adal sultanate, against the Christian kingdom in 1519, and his remarkable victory over King Lebna Dengel at the battle of Shimbra Kure in 1521 near what is now the city of Mojo (cp. Abbink, 1998). It was a turning point in the long reign of the

Solomonic dynasty. The King fled to the north and kept moving from one location to another to elude the sultanate's army for the next 13 years until his death, which occurred before the Portuguese military support that he had requested a year earlier arrived (Martin, 1974). Christians and Muslims experienced significant socio-economic decline and devastation due to the protracted civil war between the Christian ruler of the North and the Muslim Sultanate of the Southeast, based in Harar (Ahmed, 1992). Because of the war, Oromo forces could easily invade in the following decades and occupy most of the territories under the Muslim and Christian rulers' control (Merid, 1971).

The second challenge was, therefore, the Oromo movement, from the south in the regions between the Dawa and Genale rivers, encroaching on the territories that were formerly ruled by the Islamist sultanates in the southeast, known as modern Bale, Arssi, and Harerghe (Hassen, 2015). Due to this Oromo expansion in the East, the Adal sultanate was forced to confine its holdings to just the walled town of Harar. Similarly, the Oromo pushed northward and reduced the territory of the Christian kingdom (Hassen, 1990). The Oromo expansion into northern highland Christian areas previously under the emperor's control impacted many aspects of the areas' socioeconomic and political affairs and, thus, on the Ethiopian polity (cp. Bahru, 2013).

The third significant event was the conversion of emperor Susenyos (r. 1599–1625) to Catholicism. His action damaged the Solomonic dynasty's fundamental foundation, built on the cornerstone of Orthodox Christianity. The Emperor's conversion caused a political and social crisis that lasted for generations and significantly harmed the dynasty's foundation in the years to come. The 'Era of Princes' (*Zemene Mesafint*) is an example that would not have been possible if Emperor Susenyos had not been converted to Catholicism. For nearly a hundred years (1769 to 1855) of the Era of Princes, the nation was divided between warlords and regional nobility without a functioning central government. This again broke the foundation of the polity and exposed the country to long and endless civil wars by creating a dichotomy of center and periphery relations. The Centre emerged weak, while the periphery often emerged as a contestant of power competing with the Center. Markakis, in his seminal work (2011), explains the dichotomy as the two frontiers'.

The center-periphery dichotomy is essential to analyze Ethiopia's political history (Bach, 2016). According to the influential essay by Edward Shils (1961:117-30), the core of society is made up of the areas 'over which authority is possessed' while the periphery is made up of 'the



hinterland'. According to Lijphart (1989), this paradigm for plural societies implies that a center must have political dominance. The center-periphery cleavage, manifesting itself in various forms, has affected the political landscape of Ethiopia with variable intensity since the 'Era of Princes' (cp. Sherman, 1979). This cleavage continued manifesting in Ethiopian politics for hundreds of years. During the imperial era, the primary source of conflict was the endless rivalry between the monarchy in the center and the regional nobility. With the overthrow of the monarchy in 1974, the ethno-nationalist 'liberation movements' replaced the nobility as regional forces (Woldemariam, 2011). Following the demise of the *Derg* in 1991, the ethno-nationalist liberation movements conquered the Center. This cleavage, in effect, has continued with distinctive features in post-1991 Ethiopia and has constituted the ethno-nationalist at the Center, other rival ethno-nationalist forces, and the pan-Ethiopian forces at the periphery. The center-periphery dichotomy has impacted the evolution and nature of the Ethiopian elites under successive regimes, as illustrated in the next section.

## 4.2 The Evolution of the Ethiopian Elite

The development of Ethiopia's contemporary elite, both governing and non-governing, has been linked to several significant historical events in the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Merera, 2003a). The expansion of Menelik II to the South and Southwest parts of Ethiopia was one of these events. Several foot soldiers and devoted followers of the King were elevated to high positions in politics, military, education, commerce, and religion. Expanding to the south brought several notable political elites to prominence, such as *Ras Balcha Safo*, *Ras Gobena Dache*, *Ras Habtegiorgis Dinagde*, and many others. Most of these influential elite members were not members of the nobility; both proved themselves to be important political and military actors due to their merits (Clapham, 1969b).

The triumph of Adwa in 1896 was another significant occasion in the evolution of the power elites (Paulos & Metaferia, 2005). Like the expansion, it once more elevated several anonymous figures and low-ranking soldiers to the power structure. The battle of Adwa ended the Italian forces' advance and established Ethiopia as the only non-colonized nation in Africa (Jonas, 2011). As the researcher previously noted, some foot soldiers were promoted to higher government positions due to their contributions in battle. These new elites later climbed to top positions in

governing and non-governing spheres. The new emerging elites from various parts of the country were thus able to join the central power structure and become prominent figures. The composition of the country's elite was thus diversified, and a new and wider elite structure evolved.

The third event was the introduction of modern education, which was produced by the next generation of elites in several fields in 1908. Emperors Menilek II (r. 1889–1913) and, as noted, Haile Selassie I (r. 1930–74) introduced and expanded modern secondary education (cp. Markakis, 1973). He opened the first modern school, the *École Impériale Menelik*, in October 1908. This and other schools became elite recruitment pools by successfully training future administrators, clerks, and other key players in the growing bureaucracy (Demerew, 2022).

The Italian occupation, which lasted for five years (1936-1941), was the fourth significant turning point in the evolution of the Ethiopian elites. To undermine the power of the royal family and their supporters, the Italians created possibilities for various commoners to join the next generation of elites (Záhořík & Godesso, 2022). The Italians organized their enthusiastic supporters, who vehemently resisted the imperial administration along ethnic and religious lines (Ahmed, 2006). The last significant point was the opening of higher education and military institutions. Emperor Haile Selassie established Haile Selassie University in 1950 (after 1975, it was called Addis Ababa University). He also established other colleges and military academies after the 1950s. The opening and expansion of higher educational and military institutions significantly impacted the evolution of the new generation of the Ethiopian elite (Bishaw & Melesse, 2017). The elite structure of the nation, which has lasted for nearly eight centuries and beyond, was reconfigured because of these events. The expansion of education, especially the proliferation of elitist higher learning institutions, had a profound impact on the trajectory of Ethiopian politics for the next fifty years and beyond. The researcher briefly describes how Ethiopia's contemporary power, education, military, business, and traditional elites have evolved in the following section.

#### 4.2.1 The Power Elite

The term 'power elite,' in the view of Wright Mills, one of the earlier and most well-known elite theorists in the USA, refers to those who held prominent positions in a nation's three-pillar institutions (state security, economic, and political) (Mills, 1956). According to Powell (2007), the term also refers to a small number of individuals who hold disproportionate amounts of privilege,

wealth, power, and access to decision-makers in a political system. The "top positions" held by the power elite include those with the authority to direct the operations of significant political, economic, legal, educational, cultural, scientific, and civic institutions. Mills (1956) claimed that the governing/power elite (in the USA of the 1950s) comprised three groups of people: (1) the highest political leaders, such as the head of state or government, and a select group of important cabinet members and close advisers; (2) large business firm owners and CEO's; and (3) senior military officers. They occupy what Wright Mills refers to as society's highest command positions. They have great power over governmental, financial, educational, social, civic, and cultural institutions.

Therefore, the power elites are a tiny group of social class members with the authority to make important decisions impacting everyone's daily lives (Parry, 2005). The close cooperation of political, business, and military institutions has also increased the authority of the elite. A set of values, beliefs, and attitudes that influence the elite's impressions of government and prevent major divisions from emerging go beyond the fact that the elite share the same attitude, values, and culture depicted in their worldview. The elite share a common understanding of the fundamental principles governing how the government, economy, wealth distribution, and private economic power should function.

During the imperial time, the power elite claimed they were descendants of the Solomonic dynasty. The core power elite constitute those who claim they are direct descendants of the lion of Juda via the legend of Queen Sheba and her son Menelik (Heldman & Haile, 1987). The legend purported to explain how the Ethiopian ruling dynasty was descended from Solomon and through him from Abraham and the early patriarchs. The dynasty followed a succession of rulers from Yekunno Amlak circa 1270 AD to the last Emperor Haile-Selassie, who was deposed in 1974. This lasted for close to seven hundred years, making the dynasty one of the longest and oldest monarchies in the world. This Solomonic dynasty ruled Ethiopia from the 1270s to the 1970s, and the 14<sup>th</sup>-century religious epic work, the *Kibrä Nägäst* ('The Glory of the Kings'), famously tells of how the dynasty of Ethiopian kings descended from King Solomon himself (cp. Piovanelli, 2013). The descent from Solomon meant quite different things at different times, but the Solomonic succession remained in the Ethiopian cultural landscape for centuries. The monarchical system was governed by complex rules and norms embodied in the *Kibrä Nägäst*, giving an ideological charter for royal rule in Ethiopia since the end of the 6<sup>th</sup> century (see Budge, 2001).

Before the revolution of 1974, the power elite's inner circle comprised Solomonic families with ties to one another. The *Kibrä Nägäst* states that the heir to the throne is the current King or queen's first son or daughter (*ibid.*). The power elite comprised three layers: clergy, *Mekuannents* (knights), and *Mesafints* (nobles, 'princes'). Mesafints had a blood connection to the ruling monarch or dynasty and held their rights and privileges in an inherited capacity. They made up the power elite's inner circle and were few. Mekuannents rose to the pinnacle of the power elite's hierarchy due to their accomplishments, successes, and steadfast devotion to the King. Even though they had much power, the King had the prerogative to revoke any privileges or rights. Compared to the Mesafints, the size of this category was bigger. They served as leaders and administrators at various levels of the government and bureaucracy. The clergy were also members of the ruling class. They gave the monarch legitimacy and frequently used the third power level, mental control.

After the 1974 revolution, the structure of the power elite was uprooted and substituted by a new power elite who predominately came from different sections of the army. The revolution demolished the power structure of the monarch and brought the low-ranking military officers to higher positions of government power. About 120 members of the *Derg* originally made up the inner circle of the power elite (Abate, 1984).

The power elite from the army was replaced by ethno-elites from various ethnic groups in 1991 after the *Derg* dictatorship fell and the EPRDF came to power (Messay, 2003; Abbink, 2006). The inner circle of the power elite was made up of 36 core Executive members of the ruling party, the EPRDF, made up of four political organizations that each claimed to represent three dominant ethnic groups: Tigray, Oromo, Amhara as well as the minorities in Southern Ethiopia (Young, 1996)<sup>2</sup>. The Tigray, who were claimed to be represented in the TPLF, was the most powerful section of Ethiopia's post-1991 power elite, even if equal Executive membership was allotted to all coalition members within the EPRDF. They could control all key political, military, security, economic, and other sectors. After the 2018 political reforms, the EPRDF's old guard, primarily composed of TPLF members, was uprooted and replaced by a new group, predominantly Oromo

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<sup>2</sup> The four parties were the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), the Oromo People's Democratic Organization (OPDO), the Amhara National Democratic Movement (ANDM), and the Southern Ethiopian People's Democratic Movement (SEPDM).

and largely Protestant-Evangelical background power elite, led by PM Abiy Ahmed and the Prosperity Party (the new party since late 2019).

#### 4.2.2 The Military Elite

The term ‘military elite’ refers to the senior commanders in charge of the army's commands (Janowitz, 1957). The power elites frequently collaborate closely with the military elite, relying on the military to stay in power (cp. Kimenyi & Mbaku, 1996). The rise of the military elite in society is correlated with the evolution of military institutions and the war experiences of the nation (Barnett, 1967). The top military officers were promoted to prominence via their role in the command of war or as successful students at the military colleges. As anyone could learn from the experiences of various countries, military elites frequently transform themselves into power elites, either by forging alliances with the incumbent power elite or by toppling them. A tradition of military-civil relations guided the role and function of the military elites. In Ethiopia, the military elites have a long history of serving as custodians of the political system and protectors of the nation’s independence.

The military history of Ethiopia dates back to ancient times, and it is documented in the country's oldest records (see Ayenachew, 2014). Positioned between Africa and the Middle East, Ethiopia was frequently caught in the crossfire of Eastern and Western politics, facing foreign invasions and interference throughout its history (Dunn, 1994). Constant episodes of aggression compelled successive Ethiopian governments to develop strong armed forces. Among their notable triumphs, the Battle of Adwa in 1896 stands out, showcasing the Ethiopian armed forces' abilities and preserving the country's independence. Before that event, Ethiopian forces had successfully repelled invasions by the Ottoman Empire and Egyptian and Sudanese forces. During the Battle of Adwa, the Ethiopian army was led by esteemed military generals and commanders such as *Ras* Alula Engida ‘Abanega’, *Negus* Tekle Haimanot of Gojjam, Sebhat Aregawi, *Ras* Mekonnen, *Ras* Mengesha Yohannes, *Ras* Mikael of Wollo, *Ras* Mulugeta, *Ras* Gobena, *Ras* Tesemma, *Ras* Balcha, and others (Tsegaye, 1996). Their contributions fortified the strength and resilience of Ethiopia's armed forces.

During his regency from 1924 to 1930, Haile Selassie undertook significant measures to modernize the Ethiopian army. A crucial step in this process was establishing the imperial army guard called ‘*Kibur Zebegna*’ in 1917, as documented by Hess (1970). Several nations, namely

Belgium, Norway, France, Britain, and America, contributed to forming the modern army, providing advisory, training, and organizational support. As Markakis (1974) mentioned, Haile Selassie's initiative to develop a strong and modern army began in the 1930s by recruiting professional military officers. The foremost focus of Haile Selassie's efforts was the *Kibur Zebegna* elite force, created during his regency and trained initially by Belgian officers.

Additionally, the Emperor played a crucial role in establishing the Holeta Military Academy in 1933. This academy admitted talented students from Teferi Mekonnen, a secondary school founded by the emperor in 1925, as its inaugural cadet class. Halldin (1977) and Yohannis (1980) documented that the academy received assistance from Swedish military officers. Unfortunately, Emperor Haile Selassie's endeavors to establish a modern army were interrupted by the Italian occupation from 1936 to 1941.

After liberation in 1941, a reorganization of the army was resumed. The British, who had initially supported this effort in 1941, continued their assistance until 1951, playing a crucial role in restructuring the ground forces. Concurrently, the Emperor persisted in establishing a new prestigious military academy model led by Britain's Sandhurst Academy. With support obtained from the Indian government, he successfully established the Haile Selassie Military Academy in the city of Harar. Indian personnel served as instructors, mentors, and administrators in this new military institution, extending their support until 1969. During the early years of operation, the academy recruited the most talented secondary school graduates and first-year university students as inaugural cohorts of students.

Furthermore, the Emperor sought the collaboration of the Swedish government to revamp the Air Force. Swedish trainers were eventually provided to facilitate the establishment of an Air Force academy in Debre Zeit. Similarly, a naval branch was established in 1955 with assistance from the Norwegian government. Ethiopian cadets received their initial training in Norway and later embarked on British ships for further instruction (Markakis, 1974). Following the departure of the British from Ethiopia in 1951, American military advisors resumed their support for the imperial army (Agyeman-Duah, 1986).

The creation of modern military training facilities, widespread military recruitment, the inclusion of accomplishment and seniority standards in the selection process for military candidates have already started to change the makeup of the army officer. The traditional military officers were gradually replaced with new and well-trained military leaders. In 1970, the Holeta

Military School graduated its twenty-seventh batch, and the oldest post-war alums attained general rank. As noted, Holeta first recruited candidates from secondary school graduates and then, over time, started enrolling its students from the graduating class of primary schools and later from non-commissioned officers with little formal education but long service.

In contrast, the first recruits for the Harar military academy came from Addis Ababa University College's first-year class. Later, the academy recruited recent graduates from secondary schools who were offered a three-year course that included academic instruction. It makes the Harar Academy unique compared with Holeta in terms of recruits' educational level, study duration, training intensity, and instructors' quality. In 1960, Harar graduated its first batch of 35 officers. Before the attempted coup in December 1960, the graduates were sent to the army and bodyguard forces, where they later found themselves on opposing sides of the conflict. However, after the aborted coup, their assignment to the Imperial bodyguard was suspended, and they started to join various sections of the army.

The officers who graduated from these two military academies later engaged in a series of quarrels because the graduates of the Harar military academy believed that they were academically superior to and incomparable with cadets who graduated from the Holeta military academy and had only attended primary school. This argument became apparent following the revolution of 1974 when the military took control of the state. The leading *Derg* figures were predominately Holeta cadets, who gradually diminished the importance of Harar cadets in the military and eventually dissolved the military academy itself.

The military elites, who were the product of both military academies, gradually came to control the security and military apparatus of the state and manifested contrasting behavior in civil-military relations. The officers' corps' internal cohesion, therefore, was not high. The senior army officer demonstrated their fullest loyalty to the emperor. The lower-ranking officers show sympathy to the public. The patrimonial factor, which encouraged reliant relationships between lower-ranking officers and individual officers, impacted how army members were promoted. The recruitment standards and instruction at the two military training institutions serve as a proxy for variations in social origin, educational attainment, and professional training that separated the junior ranks, as was already mentioned. The majority of Holeta cadets were from rural backgrounds. The military academy graduates at Harar, a numerically small group, represent a distinctly modern element whose recruitment, training, and professional experience laid the

groundwork for increased solidarity and a social and political orientation they share with the younger Ethiopian intellectuals. These groups also include the Air Force officer contingent, which was educated in a different academy at Debre Zeit, established in 1947, that served as the base of the Air Force.

For the above reasons, the military elite in the army's top posts appeared weak. The caliber and proficiency of army commanders substantially declined with the closing of the Harar Military Academy. According to Erlich (1983), although the military emerged as a crucial force in the 1974 revolution and during the *Derg* regime, the rise of the EPRDF to power signified the end of the military's central role in the nation's politics. The professional army, which had been developed since the 1930s and had been in place for sixty years during the Emperor and *Derg* regimes, was disbanded by the EPRDF. In addition, the two coup attempts in 1960 and 1989 led to the assassination of highly qualified senior officials, greatly diminishing their influence in politics and the economy. According to one of the senior army generals:

*After 1991, Ethiopia's military high command was constructed by ethnic quota representation, with little or no military experience. The EPRDF shut down all military academies, including those in Hurso and Holeta. Army officers advance to higher positions based on field service rather than formal training. Former TPLF rebel commanders and fighters hold the most important military positions. The remaining positions were divided among officers from different ethnic groups (Respondent no. 46).*

According to the EPRDF supporters, the reorganization and reform of the army were done to configure the ethnic makeup of the army<sup>3</sup>. However, some academics, like Yonas (2022), disagreed with the EPRDF's assertion. They argued that the army was deliberately abolished to guarantee TPLF supremacy in national politics and prevent the creation of a national army.

As noted by Bahru (1998), comparing the military elites of other African countries, the military elites in Ethiopia before 1991 displayed their distinctive character. First, they had a strong sense of nationalism and were less susceptible to influence by outside forces. Second, the military elite in Ethiopia had much less access to resources and privileges than other African nations. The military had little economic influence and had no access to (economic/business) resources. Lastly, the military leadership had poor academic credentials, especially after 1991, and as a result, the military elites became weak and subject to the power elite.

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<sup>3</sup> Interview held with one of the ENDF senior officers, no. 13, 2022.



#### 4.2.3 The Educated Elite

The term "educated elite" describes those with extensive formal education-based training in various specializations. Additionally, it implies those with the greatest influence, talent, and abilities in society (Dennis *et al.*, 1977). The nation's educational policy and school system shape the nature and character of the educated elite and the development and expansion of the educated elite in tandem with the growth of modern education. The evolution of the educated elite in Ethiopia has experienced several turning points. The introduction and expansion of modern education in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century sidelined traditional education's long heritage and hegemony in producing an educated elite. The extent and quantity of modern education rose in Addis Ababa and other provincial towns, gradually diminishing the influence of church and Islam-related traditional schools (Alemayehu & Lasser, 2012). Second, scholarship opportunities abroad, mainly in Egypt, Lebanon, the United States, the United Kingdom, and other European countries, also played a vital role in creating the nuclei of the Ethiopian intellectuals. Third, colonial education, introduced under Italian rule, gave ordinary people access to a rudimentary education in the country. Even after the departure of the Italian forces from Ethiopia in 1941, the Italian legacy continued to stimulate several young Ethiopians into the educational system. Fourth, Haile Selassie University was founded in 1950. Later, it evolved into the focal point of the Ethiopian student movement, contributing to a fundamental transformation of the political and economic system. Finally, yet importantly, the improvement in educational accessibility put rural students in the political spotlight (Pankhurst, 2010; Pankhurst, 1972; Legesse, 1979).

According to Molla *et al.* (2022), traditional schooling has a long history in Ethiopia and is connected to Ethiopian Orthodox church services. Hess (1970) claimed that fundamental reading and writing skills were the focus of pre-modern education in Ethiopia, which was widely provided at provincial and local religious schools. The primary sources of literate culture in northern Ethiopia were the schools run by the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. The nobility and clergy taught their children to read and write there.

*One important institution in traditional society, the church, developed an elementary system of education that served not only the church's needs but also the cultural needs of society in general. As the custodian of Ethiopian historical and cultural traditions, the church infused both with a distinctly religious flavor* (Markakis, 1974:143).

According to Bahru (2013), the traditional educational system began to take shape after Christianity arrived in Ethiopia in the fourth century. The arrival of Middle Eastern monks in

Ethiopia in the fifth century led to the spread of Christianity. It also resulted in the development of Ethiopian literature, the establishment of monasteries and churches that served as the basis for religious and intellectual inquiry, and the creation of systems that allowed students to learn using a church approach. Likewise, the more specialized programs of Islamic thought were offered in a small number of Madrasa schools, which were concentrated in Muslim-heavy cities such as Asmara, Dessie, Addis Abeba, Jimma, and Harar. The Islamic educational system was run with the full assistance of Middle Eastern educational institutions. Al-Azhar University in Egypt made a substantial contribution to the growth of the Islamic educational system among Muslim students in Ethiopia, and its appeal to students from Harar and Wollo was particularly noteworthy (Markakis, 1974; Bahru, 2013).

According to Adejumobi (2007), formal education was limited to a religious instruction program run by the Ethiopian Orthodox Church up to the first half of the 20th century. These institutions were also in charge of educating people for positions in the clergy and other religious responsibilities. Children of the nobility and the sons of peasants connected to aristocratic families received religious education in the schools in the major cities of Amhara and Tigray. However, some Muslims had access to education through Islamic institutions.

When Addis Ababa took over as Ethiopia's political Centre at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a well-known, educated church elite relocated to gain respect from the Emperor and other members of the governing nobility as well as to maximize the advantages that would come with it, churches at Addis Ababa attracted educated people from Gondar and other northern cities, most churches educated elites congregated into the Raguel and Entoto Mariyam church. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the intellectual elites of the two faiths played a crucial role as the intellectual life foundation and a source of skilled labor for Ethiopia's bureaucracy. However, the nation's modernization demands could not be met by the ecclesiastical elite alone, and the indigenous knowledge was insufficient to adjust to and match the global circumstances (Bahru, 2002).

The advent of modern education in the turbulent latter years of Emperor Menelik's rule (1889–1913) signals the loss of traditional education's impact on the social and political structure of the nation. The pressure from the European powers, which had surrounded Ethiopia by a ring of colonies, necessitated the development of new talents that could meet the country's growing demand for modernity. This strain was not a passing issue but rather a constant threat. Menelik was put in a completely unheard-of predicament for a monarch of Ethiopia. His new city, Addis

Abeba, quickly grew packed with foreign embassies eager to bargain treaties, draw borders, forge business links, and win concessions (Markakis, 1974). The need for skilled individuals resulted from interactions with foreigners in many activities. Due to a lack of skilled labor, Menelik was forced to enlist the help of numerous foreigners as advisors, who helped him introduce innovations like a national currency, a state bank, a postal, telegraph, and telephone system, the construction of a railway, and the instruction of Ethiopian soldiers in the use of modern weapons.

A few Ethiopians were sent or managed to travel overseas for their education during Menelik's rule, where they received a modern education and learned various languages. Most of them set out under the direction of missionaries, which was the most effective way to achieve their primary goal in that it educated the youth and facilitated baptism. The missionaries, who opened schools, chose the best pupils, and sent them overseas, particularly to Europe, were the key tactic, just like in other nations. Many Ethiopian students could take advantage of the missionaries' scholarship opportunities thanks to the competition between protestant and catholic missionaries. When they eventually returned to Ethiopia, these educated people started working for their country as delegates to other nations, advisors, and translators (Paulos, 2006).

Missionaries have continued to play a vital role in developing Ethiopian education to the point where they now own renowned institutions like the Josef and Nazareth schools in Addis Ababa. The government accepted responsibility for providing modern education to the nation's youth by the missionaries' footprints. Emperor Menelik set out to expand modern education following his Adwa triumph and the demarcation of Ethiopia's borders. He established the first public school in 1908 and named it Menelik II School. Young members from the nobility were chosen to attend, including two future emperors: *Dejazmach* Teferi Mekonnen, who would become Emperor Haile Selassie, and *Lij* Eyasu, who succeeded Menelik. Other graduates from this school rose to the top positions in governmental organizations, including that of Minister. Another school in Harar started operating at the same period. Others opened in Dessie and other big towns (Bahru, 2013).

The royal treasury funded the already mentioned Teferi Mekonnen School and one located in the palace grounds. The tight supervision of the emperor and his wife helped this school become prominent and successful in a short time. Additionally, the school had the backing of the local governors. It was created for the sons of the royal family and the nobles. However, there were also opportunities for common people, whom the provincial governors supported, to enroll in school.

Some six years later (1931), a school for females was founded, named after the emperor's wife, Menen. Regional nobility also established schools in several cities, which were opened to instruct youngsters in the peripheral areas (Markakis, 1974).

Furthermore, according to Spencer (1984), Haile Selassie speeded up the procedures for sending young Ethiopians to study abroad. Before 1936, the local school sent many talented students to Europe. The Emperor showed a keen interest in them and provided money from the throne to defray their expenses. He oversaw their selection, bid them goodbye as they left, and welcomed them when they arrived back. Thus, he forged a strong parental link with the first generation of educated contemporary Ethiopians, which benefitted him in the years following the war.

As Paulos (2006) explained, most of the first generation of educated Ethiopians came from upper and lower sections of society. They credited their later success to their hard work and royal favor. Those who belonged to this group survived the conflict and pledged their unwavering loyalty to the emperor in the following years. Haile Selassie counteracted the traditional elite's dominance by using this emerging educated group as a counterbalance against the rival traditional nobles.

Foreign missionaries were another group that started to get involved in education during the years leading up to World War I. Missionaries from many fields persisted obstinately in their attempts to establish themselves in Ethiopia despite the scornful attitude of Ethiopians in general and the Orthodox Church's aggressive rejection (cf. Böll, Kaplan & Martínez d'Alòs-Moner 2005; Messay, 1999; Fantahun 2017).

Modern education came to a halt due to the war and Italian occupation. Despite the occupation's short lifespan and minimal overall effects on the nation, its impact on education was profound and long-lasting. Foreign teachers left the country or were expelled, the meager collection of educational materials was scattered and destroyed, the nascent state education system was destroyed, students and teachers were dispersed, and the occupying army took over school buildings. Missionary schools also suffered, though not as severely. Losing a chunk of the tiny population of educated Ethiopians was particularly severe (Pankhurst, 1972).

All stories concur that the Italian fascists targeted this group for a particular cruel treatment to support their claim of a civilizing mission by eradicating any evidence in the nation. According to Pankhurst (1972), even though the actual death toll was low, it nonetheless represented a sizable

portion of the small group of educated Ethiopians before the conflict. The fact that education was interrupted for five years and only a few people who happened to be overseas could continue their studies is more noteworthy. This break was prolonged after liberation until the governmental apparatus looked the same and the schools reopened. The generational divide between those educated before and after the conflict became apparent in the ranks of the educated group. The second generation started to advance in the same structure in the 1950s, although the older group had risen quickly after liberation and attained the highest positions. The apparent contrasts in attitude between those two groups' age, status, and power make communication more difficult (Alemayehu & Lasser, 2012).

Some academics have divided the educated elite of Ethiopians into two main categories based on their perspectives on the pre-and post-Italian occupation periods. The pre-war educated elites were seen to be Menelik's and Haile Selassie's most enthusiastic supporters. Emperor Tewodros, a radical modernist who aimed to profoundly restructure society's social, political, and economic systems, inspired the post-war educated elites. On the other hand, historian Bahru (2002) highlighted three key groups/cohorts that shaped the development of the intellectual elite in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The first group sought to establish an organized government and justice system that would guarantee equality by applying the law and having a strong constitution. The second group was eager to end poverty in Ethiopia by giving peasants authority over their means of production and ownership of their goods, including an equitable taxation system that advocated giving back land to the tiller. The third group was concerned with ensuring justice and equality between national and religious groups.

In the 1950s, notable growth occurred in the number of Ethiopians with degrees in higher education. The hopes and aspirations of this group often included the benefits of modernity, such as democracy and higher living standards. In spite, some academics had said that Ethiopia's intelligentsia suffered because of the battle with Italian fascists when the fascists and the surviving elites wiped out a substantial number were sidelined as a result of political unrest and social unrest in the post-war period of its limited size, this group was more ethnically varied than their predecessors were (Teshale, 2008).

#### 4.2.4 The Business Elite

The term "business elite" refers to those people capable, wealthy, and influential in business: entrepreneurship and trading. Not all businesspeople were regarded as being among the elite- only those who were the most powerful. Despite being small, the business elites significantly impact society (Feldmann & Morgan, 2022). The formation of the business elite was most often linked to the power elite. The power elite was the one who helped most of the business elite to flourish in their commercial activities because of their interest and benefits. The business elite may have come from the military, the education system, the traditional background, or another source relying on their network skills to establish relationships with the power elites.

The development of Ethiopia's business elite was correlated with the expansion and growth of the private sector. Significant factors affected how quickly the business elite grew in Ethiopia. Several significant factors influenced the emergence of Ethiopia's business elite. First, the first generation of business elites, mostly caravan traders of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, evolved from a persistent struggle to control the long trade route promoting and facilitating Ethiopia's import and export trade. Access to a country's import and export markets and its economic links with other nations were the key interests of this group. The emergence of the second-generation business elites can be traced back to the growth of commerce and investment during the reign of the 20<sup>th</sup>-century emperor. This group comprises up-and-coming entrepreneurs and prominent business leaders who enjoy close ties to the emperor. Additionally, the liberalization of the economy during the post-1991 era under the EPRDF gave rise to a thriving business elite that is ethnically affiliated and has established a strong association with the power elite, particularly the ruling party (Bahru, 2002).

The first generation of business elites was in an intense struggle to control the trade routes. After the Battle of Embabo (in 1882), the principal trade route (that covered the west of the country via Gojjam, Gondar, Metemma/Sudan, or Gondar/Messawa) was replaced by the new trade route, which spanned from the Center to the East. The rise of the power elites from Shoa shifted the trade center to Addis Ababa, which extended to Djibouti. The powerful business elite who controlled the country's economy for a more extended period from Gojjam, Gondar, and Tigray gradually demised. In fact, besides the Battle of Embabo, the shift of Ethiopia's sea outlet to Djibouti also played a significant part in the rise of the eastern trade route. Harar and Dire Dawa emerged as critical business and import-export centers after the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The eastern trade route that linked

Addis Ababa to Djibouti via the railway thus became the import and export hub of the country (Bahru, 2002).

The Adwa victory also immensely influenced Ethiopia's international trade links and the rise of business elites. The colonial forces surrounding Ethiopia were eager to integrate the region through trade and commerce relations. They opened consulates and commerce liaison offices in nearby locations. British consulates were close to British territories such as Gambela, Gore, Metu, Harar, and Dangila to facilitate economic relations with Sudan, Kenya, Somaliland, southwest Ethiopia, and the East. On the other side, with their consulates in Adwa, Gondar, and Dessie, the Italians attempted to link the northern part of Ethiopia with their Eritrean colony. The main commerce route through the railway Addis-Djibouti was already under French control. The Germans and Americans, who lacked colonies in the area, concentrated on controlling trade in the hinterland. All these factors impacted the evolution of business elites in Ethiopia.

In contrast to earlier centuries, the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century saw foreigners in charge of trade in Ethiopia, facilitated by Emperor Menelik. Many foreigners started enterprises in Ethiopia because of the Adwa victory. Until the Italian takeover, businesses from France predominated, starting with the railway joint venture between Ethiopia and Djibouti. Then, Indians took a role as well. Greeks and Armenians dominated all commercial activities in the country's southwest. Local businesspeople needed to be more significant. There were substantial numbers of Arab businessmen, especially Yemenis, involved in small businesses in various big cities (Pankhurst, 2004).

The Ethiopians' involvement in commerce activity was limited to regional trade. On the other hand, the business elites connected to the heart of the governing class were able to exert influence over significant corporations. These individuals gradually became the core of the local business elites. They created cooperative ventures with foreigners. As an illustration, Indians and Emperor Menelik collaborated to construct Addis Ababa's first hotel. The hotel was run by Empress Taytu, who gave it her name. In addition to her involvement in the hotel business, Taytu was also interested in setting up a trade association for agribusiness and agriculture with a well-known aristocracy. *Ras* Teferi Mekonnen created a business with international investors to establish a fruit farm in Yerer and got involved in other companies. *Ras* Hailu Tekle-Haymanot of Gojjam was active in the entertainment transportation industry. *Ras* Desta Damtew established successful business firms in water supply, some examples of joint venture business (Bahru, 2002).

Following Italy's defeat at the Battle of Adwa, Europeans became interested in the concessions business at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. They hoped to utilize resources through long-term deals with the Ethiopian government. However, many of these deals were unsuccessful. Only a few contracts were signed, including the French and British railway agreement and the creation of the Habesha Bank. Despite the emergence of numerous cities after the Italian occupation, the rural economy continued predominating, and the country remained agrarian. A large majority of people worked in agriculture, contributing 60% of the nation's wealth, and 90% of the increase in exports came from coffee. Next to this, cereals were the most common product sold in the local market, followed by beans and oil seeds. The importance of agriculture to the national economy has made land tenure and ownership a major political issue in Ethiopia, even today (Bahru, 2002).

The rise of Addis Ababa as the country's capital and market hub encouraged the growth of local trade. The new class of business elites, primarily entrepreneurs, had evolved in local business and gradually replaced foreigners in domestic and global business. One of the turning points in the growth of local business was the establishment of *Merkato*, the large open-air market in Addis Ababa, as the primary market for wholesalers and retailers. Merkato prompted the rise of local entrepreneurs who could compete and gradually displaced foreigners, mainly Yemenis, from retail businesses by the Gurage. However, foreigners continued to own import/export companies and significant businesses.

As Bahru (2002) explained, the Italians may have taught the ruling class members how to build government-affiliated firms and dominate the export market during their occupation. The establishment of the government-affiliated national companies, the trade and transport association, the coffee board, the meat board, and other businesses allowed cereals to be exported to the European market. The government promoted trade to boost revenues, primarily through customs duties. The rise of industries in the 1940s and onwards was attributed mainly to the industries created by the Italians during the occupation and government initiatives to entice investors to invest in the industry. These industries include cement, textile, oil processing, flour mills, and electric power supply for Addis Ababa from the Aba Samuel Dam. The government policy was import substitution, which aimed at replacing products like textiles, beverages, and others with local products. Following the adoption of this policy, Meta Abo Brewery, St. George's Brewery, Pepsi Cola and Coca-Cola factories were built. More significantly, in the 1950s, the HVA, a Dutch



company, established a big sugar production factory in Wonji in the Awash Valley. Some 50% of the existing manufacturing industry was concentrated around Addis Ababa, and the rest were in the major towns of Asmara and Dire Dawa.

*During this time, foreigners primarily owned the industry, and the economy relied heavily on loans. The slow growth of the economy and its structure had a significant impact on the development of the business elites. However, this period also saw the emergence of successful local business entrepreneurs in various sectors such as hotels, agriculture, and wholesale. Despite the slow growth, the private sector began to play a crucial role in the national economy during imperial rule. Unfortunately, the emerging private sector was hindered when the Derg military regime introduced 'Ethiopian Socialism' in 1974, which was hostile to the private sector and imposed restrictions on business activities. As a result, many business elites were exiled or faced dire consequences under military rule, significantly affecting their role in the country's political economy (Respondent no. 7, 2022).*

The post-1991 period ushered in a new era for private business in Ethiopia. Following the liberalization of the economy, the private sector rebounded, and a new generation of business elite was born with new features. The new business elite groups were affiliated with the ethnicity and political party of the ruling elite. Thus, ethnic-affiliated business elites emerged, flourished, and controlled the business sector. In the regions, the ethnic-affiliated business elite started to control the local economy. The ruling party-affiliated business elites at the Centre controlled the import and export business. The ruling elite encouraged business elites from their ethnic group to get financial resources from banks, win government contracts, and get large tracts of land for their business. Most of these new business elites benefited from the so-called privatization of the key economic sectors. They were allowed to transfer public properties at cheaper prices and amass significant amounts of wealth within a brief period. Sadly, the older, established private entrepreneurs and genuine business elites lost space and gradually faded away. One of the unique aspects of the post-1991 business elite was their absolute loyalty to the power elite and the alliance they created with them. The business elites, therefore, were subordinate and subservient to the power elite.

#### 4.2.5 The 'Traditional' Elites

The traditional elites hold positions of authority and enjoy power based on authority and influence derived from customs, religion, traditions, and social position. The traditional elites often built up their influence from their social positions in society, ethnic or tribal connections, and

wealth. Traditional elites are important to society's daily operations. Most traditional elites have significant positions in domains like religion (Bottomore, 2006). Before the 1974 revolution, the traditional, land-based elites comprised the inner circle of the political ruling elite. Paulos (1976) argued that the traditional elites acted as a conduit connecting the state and society and as a source of legitimacy for imperial rule. However, their influence and involvement in the nation's social, political, and economic concerns significantly decreased during the *Derg* dictatorship. They were somewhat revived under the EPRDF era, with restricted significance, but after the 2018 political reforms, they could more fully restore their role and influence. The two most significant traditional elites are leaders of traditional institutions for conflict resolution and the top leaders of the major religions, particularly Orthodox Christianity, Protestantism-Evangelism, and Islam.

The Ethiopian Orthodox church once possessed substantial landed estates, exercised significant influence at the local level, and occasionally made essential decisions regarding Ethiopian politics because of its role as a uniting factor. The church has generally been one of Ethiopian society's conservative forces and continued to have a great deal of respect. However, from the Middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century onward, the relationship between the church and the state drastically worsened as the latter was occasionally seen as a barrier to modernization efforts. Even though numerous initiatives to revive the church were attempted, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church no longer serves as the focal point for national unity as it once did. This is especially true in contemporary pluralist Ethiopia.

Religious elites from the three main religions struggled under the *Derg* but regained some influence and adherence after 1991. They assumed significant power and influenced more on a par with the power elite, especially upper-echelon leaders. Additionally, they still hold significant authority and influence at the local level because most of the population is religious. Also, traditional cultural leaders among various ethnic groups were part of the traditional elites. As Ethiopia is a multicultural country, many traditional institutions, notably in the countryside, are still ingrained in the social fabric. Most of these exist alongside regular government officials and organizations and have different functions. They developed and practiced sophisticated systems, regulations, and procedures to control the use and protection of local natural resources and resolve disputes at various levels. Such traditional leaders and institutions are often more widely accepted in the community than the formal local government bodies. While they do not exclude membership of local leaders in one of Ethiopia's three major religious traditions, this duality has occasionally

led to competition and conflict between traditional and state political elites. Examples of traditional institutions include the *Gaada* in Oromia, the *Shimagilles* or *Yeatbia Dagna* in Amhara Region, the *Baito*, *Gereb*, and *Ribke-ka* in Tigray, the *Madda* in Afar, the *Afocha* in Harari, the *Xeer* in Somalia, the *Yejoka* in Gurage, the *Kokota* in Kambata, the *Godan* and *Songo* in Sidama, the *Chimata* in Wolaitta, or the *Wogaa Era* in Gamo (Endalew, 2014). Such traditional institutions and their leaders gained more influence after 1991 under the regime of ‘ethnic federalism.’

#### 4.3 The Nature and Character of the Ethiopian Elites

Ethiopia’s aristocracy in the 1960s was a hybrid of traditional and modernist liberal rule. The traditional elites in the church and nobility desired to preserve the status quo. On the other hand, the newly rising modernist elites want to use a Western model to modernize Ethiopia. The Ethiopian elite exhibited different behaviors and natures from elites in other African nations. The nature and character of Ethiopian elites were influenced by the following factors (Clapham, 1969a):

(1) *The Victory of Adwa and the Italian Occupation*- the Adwa victory and the anti-Italian occupation battle produced an elite generation with strong nationalistic and patriotic feelings before the 1974 revolution. This group's traditional aristocrats were primarily credited with having backgrounds in Orthodox Church education. They stood by the emperor and his throne with loyalty. In addition, they were renowned for their profound love of their homeland and respect for God. They were hesitant to implement any political and economic changes. Their devotion to the King and the throne outweighed their concern for their less fortunate peasants. Messay (2011) argued that they vehemently resisted any reform because they believed it would harm the monarch and the monarchy. Some radical elite members, such as Gebrehiwot Baykedagn, Tekle-Hawariat Woldemariam, and others, still supported reform. However, their voices were ignored in the circles of the ruling elites.

(2) Those with a background in modern Western education made up the second category of elites. Many of them completed their educational pursuits in North America and Europe. Despite their continued loyalty to the King, they were open to modernization and reform within the framework of monarchical governance. They considered Ethiopians to be in a humiliating position when compared to people in other African and Asian nations, and they sought to change. They even intend to organize the people in support of their goals. They lacked a structured organization

or a media outlet, so they could not express their social, economic, and political ambitions. Progressive elites' actions were not made possible by any political party or other form of organization. They held that reform should be implemented gradually through discussion, compromise, and negotiation with the ruling class (Messay, 2011).

(3) The elite third group comprised graduates and military officers from Ethiopia's first higher education institutions. Addis Ababa University served as the nucleus of these elite group formations. These groups sought to overthrow the monarchy and brought radical change. They called for equality for all Ethiopian citizens and land for the tiller. Their orientation was left-wing and socialistic. In contrast to earlier traditions, this elite group introduced a new culture and mindset. Even though they believe their goal is worthy, many academics and government officials disagree with how they achieved it. According to a former top official of the *Derg* Military Council:

*Elites' transplantation of foreign experiences without considering native circumstances has been a significant obstacle to Ethiopia's nation-building efforts. The imposition of ideologies from outside sources that are incompatible with local cultures, values, religious beliefs, and social standards has led to blatant conflicts within Ethiopian society. Despite the Ethiopian revolution's initial leftist ideology and the implementation of revolutionary ideas from other countries, it did not bring about significant socio-political change (Respondent no. 33, 2022).*

This group was tainted by extremism, which shows itself through killing rivals and competitors and a winner-take-all mentality. The name given to them was the '1960 generation'.

(4) The fourth group consists of the ethno-elite figures who rose to prominence in 1970 and 1980 as leaders of the ethno-regional liberation movements and who received help from Western states to undermine Ethiopian socialism. These elite groups, in contrast to their predecessors, show less feeling of nationalism and patriotism. They aimed to overthrow the fictitious Ethiopian empire and establish new ethnically based republics. After 1991, this faction took control over the state. They introduced ethnicity and ethnic federalism as the political system of post-1991 Ethiopia. These elite groups first put their loyalty to their respective ethnic groups.



## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **THE ELITE AND NATION-BUILDING UNDER THE IMPERIAL REGIME (1960-1974)**

#### **5.1 The Modernization Project: Plea for Social Transformation**

It is crucial to discuss the idea of modernization in general before discussing the modernization initiative of Emperor Haile Selassie. Modernization is evolving from a traditional, rural, agrarian society to an industrial, secular, urban society. Urbanization and industrialization are intimately related to modernization. As Gilman (2003) outlined, several modernization theorists have various definitions of modernity. The characteristics of modern society include a complicated division of labor, mobility, and control over nature, secularism, and cosmopolitanism. Basically, the term ‘modernization’ refers to a model of a progressive transition from a traditional to a modern society. Modernity implies social patterns resulting from industrialization, while modernization is the process of social change begun by industrialization (Shilliam, 2010).

Modernization theory is a body of thought that gained popularity in the 1950s and 1960s. It discusses the comprehensive challenges of economic and social development and formulates policies to aid in developing countries' economic and social transitions (Baber, 2001). Although the many elements of modernization theory were criticized from the start, their effect on policymaking persisted for a long time. By no means were the theories that attempted to explain the modernization process in the 1950s and 1960s a unified body of thought. Instead, it was made up of a diverse range of theories that came from different social scientific areas, as well as different schools of thought (Bernstein, 1971).

Modernization was a long quest of successive emperors of Ethiopia to consolidate their power via the adoption of arms and technology from Westerners. Historical records showed that Emperor Tewodros had a big ambition of modernization during his reign. However, he was not

successful (Levine, 2007). His modernization endeavors and those of his successors had not materialized due to a century-long internal and external war or fighting. The dream modernization effort, to some extent, had started during Emperor Menilek's rule (1889–1913). After the 1896 Battle of Adwa, the relative period of peace, the opening up of foreign relations following the Italian loss, and the arrival of an increasing number of foreign craftsmen created a conducive environment for modernization. However, this modernization process did not yet mature during his reign (Wolde-Giorgis, 2010). Emperor Haile Selassie was the one who introduced it as official state policy and as a tool in his nation-building strategy during his long reign from 1930 to 1974 (Keller, 1988).

A strong emphasis on modernization and nation-building marked Emperor Haile Selassie's reign. His early trip to Europe served as a source of inspiration for the reforms he later championed. He passionately promoted reforms, advocating for a political structure based on a constitution issued in 1931 and revised in 1955, leading to a more representative government despite its opposition. He oversaw the establishment of the nation's first parliament and the implementation of the Penal Code. The emperor was a staunch supporter of modern education and played a pivotal role in its development in Ethiopia. Under his leadership, he established the country's first universities, founded the first public schools, and enabled the emergence of a free press. Emperor Haile Selassie also oversaw the initiation and growth of Ethiopia's modern industrial sector, including the country's first hydroelectric power schemes, waterworks, and the first oil refinery in Assab. He built nationwide agricultural schools and research facilities to harness Ethiopia's natural resources fully (Vestal, 2011).

The drive for modernization stemmed from the increasing demands of the educated upper class and the influence of Italian occupation. The expansion of government bureaucracy and the establishment of modern political and economic institutions required many educated individuals. At first, the emperor relied on foreign experts who demanded high salaries. However, he eventually recognized the importance of replacing these experts with locally educated individuals, leading him to prioritize the expansion of modern education. Additionally, the Italian invasion significantly impacted the structure of the Ethiopian power elite. Many power elite members perished while resisting the Italian occupation or forged alliances with the Italians against the emperor. The Italians also exploited religious, ethnic, and regional divisions among different ethnic groups, using a divide-and-conquer approach to weaken the internal cohesion of the ruling

elite. Some scholars also argue that external factors, such as the global political economy order, drove modernization (one of the prominent scholars who responded to the researcher's interview) added that:

*Ethiopia has been encircled and permanently threatened by the colonial powers that occupied all its neighboring countries. The modernization endeavors implemented in the colonial countries significantly influenced Ethiopia to open its doors to modernity. Ethiopia's entry into the world economy through trade and economic ties necessitated the nation's modernization and competitiveness. This aspect also forced the emperor to welcome modernity besides his ambitions* (Interview with respondent no. 31, 2022).

Following the Italo-Ethiopian war, Emperor Haile Selassie worked to strengthen his authority by continuing his centralization efforts that had begun before the war. He was rebuilding the government after the conflict, which was crucial to achieving this goal. Without delay, he initiated the development of a modern civilian and military bureaucracy with the support of Western nations. According to Clapham (1969b), Haile Selassie's modernization efforts focused on two essential components for creating an effective central administration: financial resources and skilled personnel. The primary source of government revenue was customs duties, which the central government could easily collect at the point of entry without the political challenges of extracting resources from the peasantry and their overlords. By establishing a centralized customs administration, he diminished the ability of provincial governors to generate revenue from both foreign and domestic trade.

The Ethiopian government's strategy for modernization emphasized rapid progress, limited interference, and minimal compromise. While centralization is crucial for modernization, authoritarianism can hinder progress, as Messay (1999) argued. He suggests that, since the end of the Italian occupation, appointments to government positions were based mainly on loyalty to the emperor rather than qualifications. As a result, individuals quickly rose through the ranks as the bureaucracy, military, and economy grew. Emperor Haile Selassie prioritized military advancement for his survival, leading to the recruitment of elites from the old nobility who embraced Western education and new ways of life. Despite these changes, traditional values of family loyalty and service over personal gain persisted.

According to Adejumobi (2007), Ethiopia was able to solidify its territory at the start of the 1960s thanks to a mix of governmental and economic centralization, diplomatic statecraft, and military modernization. The emperor also set out to secure his political system through a delicate



balancing act that involved holding on to the traditional elements of a bureaucratic empire while gradually assimilating into the global capitalist system. One of the interviewed oppositional political figures argues:

*The emperor created a functioning state bureaucracy that included nobility, modern elites, and traditional elites, particularly from the church circle. Thanks to his efforts to centralize authority and his ability to establish effective political, economic, diplomatic, and security institutions, he could subdue all of his enemies under his control (Interview with respondent no. 09, 2022).*

As noted by the opposition figure above, the need for a sizable number of elite members to manage the institutions increased due to the modern institutions' new restructuring and expansion. The Emperor personally spearheaded the construction of modern schools at all levels throughout the nation to fulfill the growing demand for human resources with an education, and he also provided financial support for hundreds of young men to study overseas. Ethiopian towns no longer resemble the garrison towns of fifty years ago due to the steady growth of urbanization and trade. Additionally, post-war Ethiopia had undergone significant changes to become a more modern state than it had been only a few decades earlier (Merera, 2003a).

Messay (1999) has argued that Haile Selassie's modernization efforts, compared to the Europeans' modernization process, were more successful because they had more resources and modern centralization techniques adopted from and supported by the West after its take-off. These techniques allowed Haile Selassie to use a relatively educated group first to tip the scales in his favor and then weaken the nobility. In response to the nobility's reactionary attitude, a perfect autocratic regime was therefore created, one that was even more brazen in its boasting of its modernizing goal. One of the scholars interviewed makes additional notes as follows:

*The story of modernization can be summed up by the progressive dominance of the central power over other forms of power, which led to the tight centralization of government and the subsequent decline of the aristocracy and regional power. In some ways, Emperor Haile Selassie's modernization policies were analogous to how Europe changed from feudalism to capitalism. The two contexts are similar in the development of a standing modern army, the foundation of a national market and taxation system, and the maintenance of feudal traits. However, the history of the European feudal class served as the impetus for developing the capitalist production and distribution system, in contrast to the Ethiopian feudal system (Interview with respondent no. 37, 2022).*

The Haile Selassie regime can be characterized as autocratic in its approach to modernization. Instead of focusing on empowering a specific class, Haile Selassie's absolutist rule

was more about asserting his dominance. His idea of modernization involved using contemporary tools to solidify his complete control over the aristocracy. However, this approach did not lead to significant or lasting modernization in society, as the focus was on using modern tools for non-modern purposes. Emperor Haile Selassie's main priority throughout his rule was maintaining stability under his political authority. He was the first to recognize the potential of modern means and institutions in furthering his power (Messay, 1999).

According to Robert Hess (1970), to bring stability to Ethiopia, Haile Selassie had to restrain the three traditional conservative forces that had brought the nation dangerously close to civil war, as they did in the nineteenth century. All bowed to the relentless political pressure from the center, including the church, local nobility, and the military. The Emperor paved the road for modernity and a united nation more than any prior Ethiopian monarch. The Emperor exercised state control over the conservative clergy through several tactics. One of the top opposition party leaders stated that:

*The monarch recognized the importance of having many educated and skilled professionals modernizing the nation. This drove the emperor's efforts to expand education throughout the country and send as many Ethiopians as possible on scholarships to study in the universities of the industrialized world. This opportunity was available to all Ethiopians, and as a result, many young Ethiopians, regardless of their social status, could study abroad and secure employment upon their return. Merit was the primary factor determining high-ranking government positions* (Interview with respondent no. 8, 2022).

As noted by this opposition political leader, the civil service was regarded as prestigious to work in because of the adoption of the merit system and the decent treatment of professionals. Similar circumstances existed in the national army, which utilized distinct, all-encompassing criteria for recruitment. Promotion and placement decisions were made based on merit for everyone, from low-ranking officers to high-ranking officers. Due to the rigid merit-based system, the national army gained respect from the general public, particularly among young people, and was able to develop military institutions staffed by highly competent personnel.

## 5.2 The Rise of the Educated Elite

In Chapter Four, it has been discussed how the West significantly influenced non-Western nations through modern education. Westerners utilized their curriculum to significantly impact non-Western societies, using the education system as a tool to propagate their culture and values.

This influence sparked various reactions from countries, from direct imitation to strategic adaptation. However, many of these nations eventually distanced themselves from Western influences. For example, traditional Ethiopia had a rich civilization with its advanced written language and body of literature, consisting of religious and historical works, until the spread of modern education in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. The introduction of Western-style education had a significant impact on traditional educational systems. It gained momentum in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century with the arrival of missionaries in Africa, who saw education as a means to spread their beliefs. Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Ethiopian government gradually took control of the missionary schools, recognizing the importance of modern education for developing skilled individuals and engaging in international business. Additionally, a select group of Ethiopians were sent abroad for advanced training, returning to become influential members of the country's intellectual class.

Andargachew (1993) discussed the emergence of the educated elite, noting that at the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the nobility recognized that their status was in flux due to modernization. The establishment of a modern civilian and military bureaucracy and its increasing reliance on this new educated class rather than the traditional elite was a significant factor in this shift. The development of this bureaucracy was greatly facilitated by modern education, with graduates of Menelik and mission schools, as well as other institutions, forming the initial cohort of educated elite. This emerging group, particularly those who had studied abroad, became known as "Japanizers" or "the young pioneer intellects of Ethiopia." The Japanizers were precursors to the progressive civilian elite of the 1960s and 1970s who supported Emperor Haile Selassie in his efforts to implement modernizing policies that were opposed by the traditional aristocracy.

A few militant aristocratic elites who survived the Italian occupation seem to have disagreed with the emperor on policy matters, and they fervently opposed the monarch's presence in Britain during the occupation. After the liberation, however, the emperor systematically undermined them by enlarging the size of educated elites. In fact, the education pursued by the emperor was very elitist. One of the well-known opposition leaders in a ministerial position claimed:

*The primary sources of knowledge and ideas that influenced countries in the early 1940s were the traditional elites, particularly the clergy. However, following the Italian invasion, the patriotic Ethiopian generation saw the value of modernity and education in safeguarding and advancing the country's interests. Political leaders all agreed that the country was humiliated by the gaps in modernity, which led to thousands of dollars being spent to send the young generation to study in Western colleges. The expansion of*

*education, including higher learning institutions, in the country was significant; as a result, the number of intellectuals who studied abroad and in the country's colleges and universities increased dramatically. Even educating Ethiopians abroad began during Menilik II, after the country's independence from Italian occupation" (Interview with respondent no. 8, 2022).*

Another interviewee, a prominent business elite member, elaborated his view as follows:

*Since the 1940s, the empire has aggressively expanded and produced a sizable number of educated elites from both domestic and foreign institutions. The expansion of education to produce skilled workers for the sake of bolstering the monarchy system has unintentionally produced results that represent a threat to the rule. The educated elite occasionally became more numerous and were influenced by socialist ideology in the East and Western revolutions and civilization. This catalyzed organized anti-establishment political movements and was the beginning of the uprising that overthrew the royal regime and elevated the Derg regime to political authority (Interview with respondent no.11, 2022).*

In 1970, there were approximately 70,000 students in secondary schools, while in 1974, there were 6,000 students in universities and an additional 2,000 studying abroad. The influence of the emerging educated elites led to the civilian sector, the primary employer for high school and university graduates, beginning to modernize. By 1974, 6,000 university graduates and 20,000 high school graduates worked in government service. Most of the remaining civil servants, who totaled nearly 100,000, were educated in primary schools and churches (Andargachew, 1993). One of the leading opposition leaders elaborated on the role of intellectuals from the 1950s and 1960s as follows:

*During the reign of Haile Selassie, educated elites were mainly at ease with the existing system. They were influenced by the historical context of patriotism and national pride connected with Adwa's victory and the victor's spirit of Italian occupation. In addition to fostering national pride, those patriotic intellectuals who received their education abroad were also genuinely influenced by Western modernization to strive for greater justice and freedom, better living conditions, and strong, legitimate governmental institutions worthy of Ethiopia's long history as an independent nation-state. However, as the number of educated youth increased and the variety of the workforce increased, the old system's capacity to accommodate these changes decreased, which led to frustration among the new intellectual groupings that were immersed in conflict with the old ruling elite. While the unemployment issue did not match the sincere aspirations of the newly emerging educated elites, it led to a self-interested mentality among them (Interview with respondent no. 4, 2023).*

Haile Selassie's modernization project aimed at developing education for both civilians and military officers. As we saw above, the goal was to create a modern, educated elite to modernize the state. The modernization project contained establishing modern training institutions for

military officers and civilians. Andargachew Tiruneh (1993:10) describes the circumstances as follows:

*More important to the decline of the state's dependency on the nobility was the creation of a modern army, which had been begun in the 1920s when Haile Selassie, the most powerful man in the government as regent and heir to the throne, pursued vigorously when he became Emperor (1930-1974). The first to be established was the royal bodyguard in the 1920s, with the help of a Belgian military mission. This was followed by establishing the Genet Military Academy of Holeta in 1934. After the occupation, the British helped organize and finance the army from 1941 to 1951. In the following years, American generosity in supporting the military capacity building was enormous regarding financing, technical training, and military equipment supplies.*

As stated, the Imperial Bodyguard was reconstituted with pre-Italian occupation graduates of the Holeta Academy. The Police College, also known as *Abadina*, was established in the 1940s, the Harar Military Academy in 1957, and the Air Force and Navy were greatly expanded after that. Foreign countries' support for the expansion of these training institutions was substantial.

According to Bahru (2008), the educated elite of the 1960s in Ethiopia, whose roots traced back to the intelligentsia that emerged during the reign of Emperors Menelik and Haile Selassie, was heavily influenced by the ideas of pre-Italian invasion intellectuals such as Gebre-Hiwot Baykedagn. He served as a role model for them, as he was deeply inspired by the desire for change initially ignited by Emperor Tewodros. This sentiment then evolved among 20<sup>th</sup>-century intellectuals, focusing on three main aspects: establishing a more structured government, the empowerment of rural Ethiopians through land ownership and agricultural development, and the promotion of justice and equality. Bahru (2008) argued that the monarchy's inability to suppress the radical student movement led by these intellectuals played a significant role in the eventual overthrow of the old royal system in Ethiopia.

### 5.3 Elite Recruitment, Placement, and Promotion

Emperor Haile Selassie's modernization efforts were interrupted by the Italian invasion in 1936, but they resumed after his restoration to power in 1941. Seeking to exert greater control over local governance, the emperor implemented a new centralized administration with the support of British and Ethiopian nationalist groups. He also aimed to strengthen the national government by appointing educated elites to key ministry positions with clear job descriptions to modernize and consolidate power (Paulos, 2011). In his influential book, Messay Kebede (1999) highlighted the

dual purpose of recruiting elites during Haile Selassie's reign, which began after the liberation in 1941. The first objective was establishing a loyal technocratic elite with modern education and the ability to manage the central bureaucracy and national army efficiently. The second objective was to weaken the most determined and powerful opponents of Haile Selassie's absolute power within the traditional nobility by employing a strategy of division and rule. Haile Selassie used a single selection-loyalty criterion to form his elite and diminish the influence of the traditional ruling class. This principle served as the basis for determining who would be included in the newly created elite class, allowing him to cleanse the existing traditional elite and strengthen his power base.

On the other hand, one of the former *Derg* government's higher officials argued that:

*Recruitment of the elite under the emperor's rule was a highly personalized process focused on individual merit. Recommendations from the emperor, close advisors, nobles, knights, and church leaders played a significant role in selecting elite members. Loyalty to the emperor and the abilities of the individuals were critical factors in the recruitment process. Many elite members were affiliated with Addis Ababa University and the Ethiopian Student Movement (ESM) during this time. The ESM members from the 1950s and 1960s were particularly influential in all regimes. They shaped the current political landscape by introducing foreign ideologies often clashing with Ethiopian society's social, political, and economic context (Interview with respondent no. 1, 2021).*

Another young scholar and diplomat complementing the above argument explicated that:

*During the emperor's reign, a merit-based hiring system was implemented, selecting individuals from aristocratic and regular families based on their intellectual capabilities. However, due to limited access to education, especially in rural areas, merit-based opportunities were available for young intellectuals regardless of their social status (Interview with Respondent no. 2, 2022).*

In fact, another interviewee (Respondent no. 9, 2022) argued against the above view:

*All regimes exhibited similar traits in recruiting, placing, promoting, and demoting elites based on ideological allegiance. The practice of appointing individuals to positions of power based on their political loyalty to the party and, to some extent, their allegiance to the leadership has endured as a prevalent political custom. For example, Emperor Haile Selassie drew from his networks in Harerghe and Shewa to fill key positions around him.*

And another well-known business elite member noted that:

*The elite's recruitment, replacement, and advancement heavily depended on trust and kinship connections. Personal relationships and ideological allegiances were valued more than knowledge and skills. While this practice is deeply rooted in Ethiopian politics and ideology, it also holds to a certain extent in foreign politics (Respondent no. 5, 2022).*

To facilitate nation-building, the existing knowledge, skills, and values must be bridged. However, no established method for identifying and integrating the old and new elites existed, leading to the replacement of the old elites with the newly emerged ones. Some scholars interviewed argued that elite recruitment during the emperor's reign involved a combination of merit and loyalty.

*During the emperor's reign, the recruiting and promotion processes were mainly merit-based. Regardless of their background, everyone could reach the top of the administration if they had the necessary skills and were willing to work for the current dictatorship. Although loyalty was a key factor, the system favored professional competence (Respondent no. 6, 2022).*

One interviewee noted that:

*The elite recruiting process was mostly merit-based and reasonably inclusive during the emperor's reign. Only urban districts and aristocracy families could study abroad and receive a superior education. However, some schools in remote areas provided rural pupils with limited opportunities to compete at the national level so that they would be treated based on their abilities (Respondent no. 10, 2022).*

The above respondent further articulated that the three regimes shared a common approach to recruiting, placing, and promoting elites centered on political loyalty to specific leaders rather than the state as a whole. During the emperor's reign, elite recruitment also considered factors such as capability and placing competent intellectuals in high-ranking positions based on merit. This meritocratic approach led to relatively high standards among elites during this period. The former senior military officer, on the other hand, confirmed that the key recruitment and selection criteria were loyalty and personal connection to the throne:

*Regardless of the political elite's selection and positioning, the ruling class was inevitably to engage with religious, civic, and non-governmental groups, either directly or indirectly. Consequently, governments aimed to enlist the most talented individuals to enhance their legitimacy through widely respected and trusted figures. However, these recruits primarily intended to serve as a means for the established elites to communicate with the general population rather than to introduce independent ideas (Respondent no. 12, 2022).*

As elaborated by another interviewee:

*There was a consistent approach to ensuring elites' loyalty across different regimes regarding their recruitment, placement, and promotion. However, there were differences in how this approach was carried out. During Haile Selassie's rule, the number of educated elite individuals was relatively small, with no significant issues at the time. The system was accommodating and respectful towards educated elites, with loyalty to the system being a key criterion for advancement. While the dominant elites typically came from aristocratic*

*ruling-class families with better access to education abroad, the system also welcomed and supported those from ordinary backgrounds based on their intellectual capacity. The merit system was carefully considered in the recruitment, placement, and promotion process, allowing individuals from ordinary families to reach key ministerial and even prime ministerial positions. Haile Selassie actively sought out capable, educated elites and aimed to integrate traditional and other elites into various government positions to gain legitimacy among the conventional elite community (Respondent no. 14, 2022).*

During the monarchy, elite recruitment predominantly focused on the ruling class family. However, as education expanded, ordinary citizens also had the opportunity to enter the system. Students who gained exposure abroad brought back innovative ideas and experiences, leading to the formation of small underground groups. These groups, initially individual efforts, gradually began recruiting like-minded individuals, eventually evolving into underground political parties, primarily leftist, encompassing radical educated elites.

In summary, various strategies for elite recruitment were employed throughout different historical periods in Ethiopia. During Haile Selassie's imperial rule, the elite class comprised individuals from the nobility and ruling class. However, the demand for educated individuals grew following liberation from Italian rule, allowing commoners to ascend the power ladder. This shift opened educational opportunities for all Ethiopians, irrespective of their background. Thus, the elite comprised aristocrats and commoners, with recruitment based on loyalty and meritocracy. While political appointments were influenced by loyalty, regular citizens could attain elite positions based on professional qualifications. They integrated elites from diverse ethnic groups to manage diversity concerns and prevent fragmentation.

However, using personal connections and nepotism alongside loyalty and professional competence vetting resulted in internal conflict within the system. This conflict evolved into a class struggle between those seeking to maintain the status quo and those advocating for radical changes. Ultimately, the elite reformist faction turned against the monarchy due to its exclusionary recruitment policies. Despite some opportunities for ordinary citizens to attain high-ranking political positions, equal competition with ruling-class families for top positions was not provided.

### 5.3.1 Elite Placement

The elite placement under Emperor Haile Selassie was instituted to achieve his modernization project and consolidate his power. The major requirements for elite placement were



personal allegiance to the Emperor and individual competence. The power elite, who were appointed in the first decade following 1941, were mainly from noble families and had the highest level of trust. According to Hess (1970), describes the process of elite selection and placement as follows:

*Since the end of the Italian occupation, sixteen ministries of the government, the army, the judiciary, and the diplomatic corps have been staffed by men chosen for their loyalty to the Emperor and abilities. This new group of men rose rapidly after 1945, and the bureaucracy, the military, and the economy expanded; they grew in numbers. Until 1950, most of them were recruited from the old nobility, whose ranks they abandoned for new offices and a new way of life. This nobility, unchallenged until 1960, was exposed to Western education. At the same time, the old values of family loyalty, distaste for business, and private gain through public office have continued within this new setting (Hess, 1970p. 79).*

On the other hand, a senior diplomat from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs noted that:

*The elite formation post-occupation was related to the country's modernization project. The emperor was eager to massively educate the younger generation at local institutions and in Western universities to modernize the country (Respondent no. 16, 2022).*

All those interested in computing were eligible to be placed among the educated elite based on their professional qualifications. No matter the person's political stance or familial background, they might enter the civil service if they meet the requirements. In government institutions, there was a chance to advance to higher positions. There were high-ranking officials whose ancestry was commoner than that of the governing nobility, regardless of their political outlook and relationship to them.

Emperor Haile Selassie's regime took an enigmatic decision regarding elite placement. Members of the core power elites wished to keep the current royal system in place, although most emerging elites came from commoners. Given the sizable number of the elite with aristocratic and noble backgrounds, why was the monarch keen to offer ordinary people large-scale, merit-based educational opportunities? This was one of the perplexing questions in the circle of the traditional elites. Most of them were not happy with the emperor's decisions. Because they knew that the emperor's action ultimately replaced them with new and emerging elites, especially those who ascended from ordinary people.

The rivalry between the traditional conservative elites and the emerging progressive elites has intensified as both parties fight for dominance. This animosity has worsened internal conflicts

and led to disintegration within the power elite circle. The emerging elite have even promoted political and social reform, including calls for abolishing the monarchy.

As previously mentioned, the Emperor strongly emphasized utilizing educated elites to govern the country, prioritizing individual competence when making decisions about placement and promotion. This was achieved through careful relocation and rotation of elites from one position to another. There are differing opinions on Emperor Haile Selassie's approach to elite placement. The argument of one interviewee goes as follows:

*The Ethiopian power elite generally disliked Meritocracy. They sought to recruit elites who were ideologically and politically loyal exclusively. The ruling elites preferred opportunistic yes men over competent and confident professionals for crucial posts. The emperor handpicked devoted, close friends from Harerghe and Shewa for key positions. The competent intellectual elite who could take an independent stand was being shunned, harassed occasionally, and subjected to various sorts of humiliation (Respondent No. 9, 2022).*

The rivalry between the traditional conservative elites and the emerging progressive elites has escalated, leading to increased internal conflicts and disintegration within the power elite circle. The emerging elite has advocated for political and social reform, including calls for abolishing the monarchy. In line with this, the Emperor emphasized using educated elites to govern the country, prioritizing individual competence in placement and promotion decisions. This was achieved through strategic relocation and rotation of elites from one position to another, sparking differing opinions on Emperor Haile Selassie's approach to elite placement.

### 5.3.2 Elite Empowerment

Historians have widely agreed on the methods used by the regime to recruit, place, and release the educated elite (Bahru, 2002). Emperor Haile Selassie was particularly interested in empowering qualified professionals to fill government positions at the medium and high levels. These experts were expected to carry out their responsibilities with the emperor's consent and under the guidance of their superiors. While they had the authority to propose policies and implementation plans, they were required to obtain the emperor's approval before taking action. With his approval, individuals could implement their innovative ideas. Most of the politicians, academics, and military elites whose opinions I sought out concurred that the nation-building process was adversely affected by a power structure and elite empowerment based primarily on political loyalty. According to one seasoned diplomat and politician explanation:

*First off, because loyalty was the only factor considered during recruiting and placement, the system was susceptible to placing opportunists and inept people in high-level positions. All authority was concentrated in the hands of the emperor, which made the system resistant to change and to fresh concepts that would have assisted in transforming the institution, giving it responsibility and the capacity to meet new societal demands. The power elite in the military or civilian organizations did not want strong young professionals with the potential to provide services. They haven't had the chance to fully realize their potential (Respondent no. 29, 2022).*

Instead of prioritizing the nation's long-term goals, the ruling class focused on elite recruiting and short-term political goals to maintain the monarch's authority. The ruling class's short-term interests led to internal conflict between the old, conservative elite and the young, educated elite. The refusal to consider alternative perspectives and progressive ideas only added to the dissatisfaction, ultimately leading to disputes and instability.

#### 5.4 The Nature and Character of Elites during Haile Selassie's Reign

Emperor Haile Selassie's reign divided the elite into two categories. The first category consisted of the traditional elite, which included the head of the Orthodox Church, members of the old aristocracy and nobility, and the most dedicated and well-educated individuals in the civilian and military bureaucracies. They favored maintaining the status quo and believed that supporting the idea of imperial Ethiopia would benefit the general public. The second category comprised the newly educated elite, less loyal to the emperor and more dedicated to the Ethiopian state. They called for reforms to the land tenure system and limitations on the emperor's power through constitutional monarchy reforms. However, they could not create a strong enough platform to carry out their reform agenda, as they were neither united nor flexible in their approach. This lack of organization was also evident in elite members under subsequent regimes, such as the *Derg* since 1974. According to one senior former *Derg* official:

*The elites of Ethiopia are known for their dogmatic, unyielding behavior and incapacity to reach a consensus and negotiate a solution to their issues. We Ethiopians prefer to win every time we compete in a regular activity. We constantly strive to be better. We have a long history of strife and war because of this. I had forgotten how happily and amicably we had coexisted in recent history. Unless one side loses and the other wins, there is no reconciliation culture through give-and-take approaches. Therefore, the winner-take-all strategy was used to resolve the conflicts. This long heritage served as the foundation for even our national patriotism. Therefore, the elite's political career reflects these cultural values and norms. A good example is the "land to the tiller" question that occurred during*

*the Emperor Haile Selassie era. If the emperor had listened to the question and been open to conversation, he could have addressed the issues at their source and prevented the 1974 revolution. Partly due to our culture and partially due to the extreme socialist doctrine, the culture of intolerance among competing elites has grown stronger. It was about "my idea is a winner and better ideas than yours so I can control the power (Respondent no. 1, 2021).*

After Ethiopia's liberation from Italian rule, Haile Selassie's government faced challenges due to its transitional nature. The Emperor's attempt to separate the state and church sparked conflict between traditionalists and modern elites within the power structure. Traditionalists sought to maintain the union of church and state, with aristocrats and clergy playing a pivotal role in preserving the established order and promoting patriotism and national pride. On the other hand, modern elites pushed for political reform, seeking greater freedom, justice, improved living conditions, and legitimate governmental institutions. This power struggle ultimately led to the disintegration of the monarchy's rule.

## 5.5 The Power Structure and Elite Integration/Disintegration

Haile Selassie understood that his modernization and centralization agenda would only be successful with the support of capable and trained personnel in the administrative institutions. As the researcher repeatedly noted, many educated elite members were recruited as staff of these modern institutions to meet the rising demands of governance and power consolidation. The emperor made an enormous effort to integrate the new elite with the old/traditional one.

According to one of the renowned scholars that I interviewed:

*The emperor tried to balance the delicate power between the traditional and quickly growing modern elite. He attempted to integrate and unite these two elite groups using patriotism, loyalty to the throne, and religion (Orthodox Christianity) as tools. Furthermore, he proposed and used inter- and intra-marriage among family members of the traditional and new elite groups. He did his best for the power elite to establish strong familial relations (Respondent no. 4, 2022).*

Despite the emperor's cautious promotion of elite integration, as noted by the above interviewee, the desired synergy did not materialize. Haile Selassie's efforts to establish a modern elite led to growing conflict and disarray among the power elite. The emerging modern elite, often seen as a symbol of progress, portrayed traditional elites as obstacles to social transformation and symbols of Ethiopia's 'backwardness.' Merera (2003b) argued that the rapidly expanding educated

elite also faced significant internal conflicts and struggles over ideological differences and competing objectives.

Emperor Haile Selassie's modernization and centralization program missed the opportunity to modernize the aristocracy, unlike other nations such as Japan and several European countries. Instead of 'upgrading' the traditional elite to preserve the entire class, the emperor gradually removed the aristocracy from its social foundations in the provinces. He strengthened central power, replacing them with more modern-educated elite members. Feelings threatened by the rise of this new elite, the traditional elites were marginalized and instead of cooperating with the Emperor they hindered the modernization project. This bitter rivalry consumed the conventional elite in endless conflict, ultimately leading to the disintegration of this power elite. The Haile Selassie regime was eventually overthrown by an uncoordinated student movement and a few army garrison uprisings due to the disintegration of the elite and numerous contradictions within the imperial system.

## 5.6 Elite and Nation-building during the Imperial Regime

Before delving into the imperial administrations' nation-building efforts, the researcher must briefly overview standard terms such as "state-building" and "nation-building" and how they apply to my study. According to Francis Fukuyama (2014), state-building involves establishing functional, physical institutions such as armies, police forces, bureaucracies, ministries, and other agencies. This process requires recruiting and training personnel, assigning them to specific roles, allocating budgets, and establishing laws and regulations. In contrast, nation-building focuses on cultivating a collective national identity that fosters strong allegiance among individuals, transcending their loyalty to local tribes, villages, regions, or ethnic groups. Nation-building promotes a shared sense of identity and unity beyond narrower loyalties, creating a cohesive society. Unlike state building, nation-building involves creating intangible elements such as national symbols, shared historical narratives, and cultural reference points. State policies on language, religion, and education can shape national identities. Still, they can also be influenced from the ground up by poets, philosophers, religious leaders, novelists, musicians, and others who may not hold political power. The success of a state relies on effective nation-building, as the state relies on its citizens to be willing to defend it when necessary. Without a sense of worthiness in

the state, citizens will not be willing to make ultimate sacrifices. As discussed in the literature review in the second chapter of this dissertation, Hippler (2005) argued that the term nation-building encompasses various aspects of socio-political development, including bringing diverse communities together over time to form a cohesive nation-state. This process involves political, economic, social, cultural, and other dynamics to achieve unity and cohesion. Successful nation-building may encompass a range of elements and aspects, including economic and cultural integration, centralized political authority, regulatory oversight, military conquest, the cultivation of shared interests, the democratization of decision-making, and the establishment of unified citizenship. Additionally, nation-building is pursued as a political goal and a means to achieve specific political aims. Consequently, nation-building can function as a developmental or imperial strategy, contingent upon the prevailing political context and the actors involved. As Hippler (2005:7) asserted:

*Certain core elements are essential in all nation-building processes, without which the process could hardly proceed successfully over the long term. In most cases, these elements are closely interlinked: a unifying, persuasive ideology, social integration, and a functional state apparatus.*

However, according to numerous scholars, the concept of nation-building still needs to be discovered. Wimmer (2018) suggests that there is a general agreement that nation-building involves the development of national identity, where citizens begin to identify with a national community and prioritize loyalty to their fellow citizens over their ethnic, tribal, or religious affiliations. This process also involves political integration, where individuals shift their focus from regional or ethnic identities to primarily identifying as nation members. Wimmer (*ibid.*) further explains that nation-building is a dynamic process that aims to promote political inclusion through mutually beneficial interactions between the government and its citizens, ultimately leading to a sense of national identity and belonging within the imagined community of the nation.

Some ethno-nationalist scholars described the nation-building process during the Emperor's time as assimilationist. Thus, they thought Emperor Haile Selassie and the ruling elite tried to forge a single Ethiopian identity by utilizing the Amharic language, modern education, Orthodox Christianity, open inter-group marriage, and social mobility. This helped to integrate and transform diverse ethnic groups into a single, more common identity, now often referred to as "Ethiopianness." Taking into account major variables such as ideology, capacity to provide public

goods, voluntary associations, linguistic policy/communication, and national symbols, I made attempts to review the nation-building effort under Emperor Haile Selassie below.

#### 5.6.1 Monarchism as Unifying Factor of Nation-Building

Clapham (1969a) asserts that during the mid-twentieth century, Emperor Haile Selassie was the dominant figure in Ethiopia. Despite efforts by subsequent governments to erase his influence, he played a crucial role in shaping modern Ethiopia. He was synonymous with the country in the eyes of the international community. His legacy, though debated, continues to be significant. Emperor Haile Selassie navigated a delicate balance between traditionalism and modernism, stability and change, and direct and indirect control by upholding Ethiopia as a non-party state.

The “elect of God” was the title of the ideological foundation used by the monarchy as an integrative instrument and entailed a reference to the legitimacy of the regime as divinely ordained to unify the country. As stated in the 1955 constitution. “By virtue of His imperial blood, as well as by anointing which he received, the person of the Emperor is sacred, His dignity inviolable and his power indisputable” (Teshale, 1995, p. 105).

#### 5.6.2 Education and Language as Integrative Element of Nation-Building

The concept of a nation assumes that its citizens have common interests, goals, and preferences that lead them to want to be part of a political entity. National education has proven to be the most effective tool in nation-building, as it socializes citizens and shapes a nation's socioeconomic, technical, political, and cultural orientation. A nation's educational system significantly influences the development of that nation. There are various ways in which education is supported and/or intentionally used in nation-building. It shapes people's references by shaping or "indoctrinating" them or convincing those who disagree with the current administration that there is a place for them (Alesina, Giuliano, and Reich, 2021). To remain united, citizens must share enough values and preferences and communicate with each other. Homogeneity among people in their national perspective can be achieved through education, such as teaching a common language in schools, creating infrastructure for more accessible travel, promoting social mobility throughout the nation, establishing a fair and nationwide judicial system, and fostering an open

market economy. Democracies and dictatorships have different motivations for determining how much and by what means to homogenize the population (*ibid.*).

The role of the imperial educational system and its impact on nation-building is a topic of debate among Ethiopian academics. Many argue that traditional indigenous education during the imperial era did not evolve to meet modernization needs. As Messay (2006) suggested, the traditional Orthodox Church education, while contributing to a shared identity, was limited by its 'Ethio-centric' nature, which focused on local knowledge at the expense of global perspectives. The traditional education system has long been seen as a drawback of Ethiopia's education system. Mekasha (2005) also explored this theme, noting that many of the country's leading intellectuals had solid religious educational backgrounds and were involved in school administration and community life. However, there needs to be more literature that delves into the connection between traditional and modern education and their mutual impact.

The imperial Ethiopian government, following its independence, held a steadfast belief in the power of education to foster economic prosperity and bring about transformative social progress (Tekeste, 2006). In his public statements, the emperor emphasized that the primary goal of education in that era was to propel civilization forward and accelerate the modernization process. Haile Selassie, who served as a regent until 1930, emerged as a fervent advocate for education. He recognized its potential to modernize the nation and actively challenged the conservative elements within the ruling elite.

Several academics, such as Tekeste (2006), Messay (1999), and respondent no. 8, 2022, have argued that the imperial education system in the country, particularly from the 1940s to the end of the 1950s, was elitist. This was due to its availability only in metropolitan and semi-urban areas. Education was provided free of charge and offered easy access to employment opportunities until the newly established government institutions became fully staffed in the 1960s. Additionally, the subject of 'Ethical studies' was used as a tool for indoctrination and reinforcing the Emperor's hegemony. Many scholars, including Tekeste Negash, criticized the expansion and nature of education during Haile Selassie's reign. Tekeste (2006) further argued that the Emperor and his government may have believed they were laying the foundations for the country's modernization. Still, they needed to pay more attention to the communication gaps between generations that modern schools created. In practice, the Ethiopian government required a coherent strategy, as Messay (1999) has asserted that:



*On the severe material and human shortcomings was grafted an educational policy that lacked direction and national objectives. According to many scholars, the main reason for the lack of a national direction is to be found in the decisive role that foreign advisors, administrators, and teachers played in establishing and expanding Ethiopia's education system. The fact that the curriculum tended to reflect courses offered at all levels in Western countries was glaring proof of their harmful influence (Messay, 2006: 11)*

Based on a conversation with a political leader (respondent no. 8), the country's increased investment in education has increased unemployment among graduates and intellectuals. Moreover, students who have studied abroad and were influenced by Western society are discontent with their limited job prospects. Consequently, most unemployed young people are susceptible to spreading radical ideologies. Emperor Haile Selassie consistently positioned himself as a proactive champion of modern education, supporting his role through frequent school visits, award presentations, and highlighting the importance of education in development in his speeches. However, he never explicitly linked his educational policy to the goal of national development, possibly assuming that the country's modernization and socioeconomic growth would naturally ensue.

Tekeste explains the core problems of Ethiopian education curriculums during the imperial time in these words:

*The current curriculum was incapable of producing citizens who could interpret, enrich, and adapt the country's heritage to new needs and changing conditions. The curriculum might have been irrelevant, but all those who went through the system could still count on finding public employment with good remuneration (Tekeste, 2006, p.13).*

In his 2008 work, Messay points out a significant flaw in Ethiopian education policy - the "lack of national ideology." This flaw indicates that Emperor Haile Selassie's efforts to promote education were not effectively integrated into a comprehensive plan for national development. Despite his support and involvement in educational activities, there needed to be a more transparent and cohesive vision that would have aligned education with Ethiopia's broader development objectives. The absence of a national ideology led to fragmentation and inconsistency within the education system, hindered the effective utilization of resources, and created a gap between the skills taught and society's needs. Additionally, it contributed to the lack of a shared national identity among students and educators. A comprehensive plan and national ideology would have provided a guiding framework, fostering unity, pride, and a shared understanding of Ethiopia's goals. One of my interviewees argued that:

*Emperor Haile Selassie claimed that the goal of education during his reign was to generate skilled human resources that could manage the state bureaucracy and replace foreign experts in crucial professional positions with young, educated Ethiopians without sacrificing the quality of the services. However, he was building up his power base and consolidating power using the new elite group as his ardent supporters to underplay his rivals (Respondent no. 15, 2022).*

Following the country's liberation from Italian forces in the post-1941 period, the emperor faced a significant legitimacy crisis. Many traditional elites and war veterans were disillusioned by the emperor's flight to the UK and questioned his right to rule. In response to this growing crisis, the emperor implemented a modernization agenda that elevated the new elites and diminished the role of the traditional elite. He justified this by emphasizing the capabilities of educated Ethiopians to replace foreigners and effectively manage the bureaucracy.

During Emperor Haile Selassie's reign, Ethiopia's nation-building process mirrored that of other African governments by using language for societal cohesion. English was the primary language of instruction from junior secondary through higher education. At the same time, Amharic was the sole language used for educational purposes at lower levels of schooling and for administrative tasks nationwide. This strategic use of the Amharic language and education was a key component of Emperor Haile Selassie's efforts to unite the nation and cultivate a cohesive, educated national elite from all corners of Ethiopia. These initiatives were designed to strengthen relationships among Ethiopians, instill national pride and patriotism, and promote societal integration. The widespread implementation of Amharic-based education has played a crucial role in establishing Amharic as a language of communal communication across the nation. Additionally, the national anthem, flag, and Amharic language curriculum have all played pivotal roles in fostering student unity and nurturing a generation of patriotic Ethiopians.

In addition to the political and cultural aspects, Hippler (2005) and Fasika (2022) emphasized the importance of implementing practical measures to ensure successful societal integration. They highlighted the necessity of a national infrastructure for nation-building, including transportation and communication systems, economic development, and widespread mass media to foster national political and cultural dialogue.

Throughout history, Ethiopian rulers have grappled with various strategies to govern their diverse empire effectively. According to Hess (1970), one approach involved imposing Amhara culture, which cultivated personal loyalty to the emperor among the elites of different ethnic

groups. As a contemporary embodiment of the ancient African divine king, Haile Selassie embraced this tradition and enjoyed his role as a living myth. He purposefully emphasized the concept of Ethiopian identity, leading to Amharic becoming the predominant language spoken by nearly half of the Ethiopian population. This intentional language policy was part of a broader initiative known as "Ethiopianization" to unify the country.

During Emperor Tewodros's reign, the use of the Amharic language for state affairs began. Emperor Yohannes (r.1872-1889) continued to promote and utilize it to strengthen national unity with the support of the military, the church, and local elites. These emperors primarily used the language as *a lingua franca*, as it was widely understood throughout the empire, rather than as an ideological choice. Emperor Menelik's language policy after 1889 continued this trend and aimed to integrate local elites into the imperial power structure. However, Emperor Haile Selassie sought to expand Ethiopianization to include the general population in a broader cultural sense. Unlike his predecessors, Emperor Haile Selassie designated Amharic as the national language in the 1930 and 1955 constitutions and in directives of 1944 for the administration, the courts, and secondary and higher education. The primary motivation behind this decision was the government's goal of national unification and facilitating communication among diverse ethnic groups. One of the historians interviewed for this study described the emperor's decision to use Amharic as the sole language as follows:

*During their brief occupation, the Italians encouraged the use of multiple languages as a means of communication. They also caricatured the Amharic language as a symbol of cultural hegemony and an emblem of the ruling dynasty. To disprove this thought, the Emperor, after the liberation, promoted the Amharic language as the national language and forced even missionaries and other schools to use the language as a medium of instruction (Respondent no. 31, 2022).*

As mentioned above, Ethiopia is a multiethnic state, and the empire required a common language to unite the various ethnic groups. The interviewee also noted that the emperor's decision to make Amharic the sole language of the country was part of his nation-building agenda, aimed at creating a unified identity at the expense of multiculturalism. This decision also diminished the Italian legacy and its policy of promoting multiple identities.

### 5.6.3 Restoring a Functional State after Liberation and Public Goods Provision

Following Ethiopia's liberation from Italian rule in 1941, Emperor Haile Selassie embarked on a mission to reclaim control of the nation's territory, re-establish the state, and implement his socio-economic modernization program. As part of this larger agenda, the ministries underwent reorganization, expansion, and reform, and new laws were enacted to outline the responsibilities and authorities of each minister. The Emperor selected ministers and held them accountable for managing their respective departments. A Council of Ministers was established to advise the Emperor on state affairs, with collective accountability for decisions made within the council. Additionally, the position of prime minister was created to oversee the ministers, coordinate their activities, and convey the monarch's directives. The formal architecture of the ministerial organization delineated the divisions of authority, power, and responsibility between individual ministers, the council of ministers, and the prime minister. All three branches of government-held consultative authority, with each minister also responsible for running their department and implementing laws and directives issued by the Emperor.

According to Fukuyama (2014), modernization cannot be assumed to be an automatic outcome of progress in other areas; instead, it relies on the simultaneous advancement of political institutions, economic expansion, and social change. In order to transform the economy and sustain a growth trajectory, strong political institutions and a judicial system based on the rule of law are essential. These institutions are designed to prevent recurring domestic or regional conflicts and wars. Before a state can be subjected to legal or democratic limitations, it must first be established, which involves the formation of a bureaucracy and a centralized executive. This executive should be led by the dynamic and adaptable elite that can be held responsible for their actions.

Fukuyama (2014) succinctly pointed out that modern state-building requires the institutionalization and bureaucratization of the state. Institutionalization means effectively enforcing state authority over society through specially created political structures and organs, ensuring the state's capability to provide public goods to its citizens. This involves the development of functioning and enduring state and societal institutions that lead to coherence and harmony, as well as the construction and reinforcement of sustainable institutions. It also entails the setting up social, political, and economic institutions such as legislative, executive, and judicial arms. State institutionalization also involves functional accountability, a transparent auditing system for state transactions, and the flourishing of civic associations that serve as the voice of the citizens (*ibid*).

Following the monarchy's restoration, Ethiopia's ruling elite prioritized centralization, modernization, and integration. The centralization of government involved the creation of institutions that were subservient to the authority of the throne, a selective process aimed at promoting centralization and protecting the Emperor's paramount position. In Markakis' view (2012), Emperor Haile Selassie's modernization agenda after liberation aimed to minimize political change and protect the regime from the educated class's power-sharing demands. A significant propaganda campaign was launched to portray the Emperor as the driving force behind progress, aimed at quelling the educated elite's aspirations for power and ensuring the monarchy's survival. Cultural integration was also actively promoted through various institutionalized channels, with the Amharic language playing a pivotal role. The government viewed national integration as a natural result of centralization and modernization.

According to Margery Perham (1947:88-89), since returning to power, Haile Selassie focused on reestablishing and strengthening the institutionalization of the Ethiopian state. He achieved this by modifying the 1931 constitution, which defined the roles and responsibilities of ministers and established guidelines for their interactions within the government. Emperor Haile Selassie created a council of ministers as the highest executive body, led by himself or the prime minister in his absence, to ensure more effective governance. This council served as a platform for collective decision-making and advice on state matters, overseeing government departments and ministries. The prime minister acted as a direct subordinate to the Emperor, while each minister fulfilled specific duties under the prime minister's guidance. These reforms aimed to streamline the government's functioning, promote efficient administration, and foster comprehensive governance through collective expertise. These changes reflected Haile Selassie's commitment to a more structured and organized system of governance, facilitating clear lines of authority, accountability, and informed decision-making.

The role of the prime minister was to oversee the proper administration of ministers, coordinate their duties, and convey the Emperor's orders. Since 1961, the prime minister's power grew more robust due to several factors, including the increasing complexity of government functions, the aging of the Emperor, and the violent attempts to overthrow the monarchy in 1960. In addition to formal ministerial and council structures, there was also an informal Crown Council, comprised of influential ruling elite members next to the Emperor. This Council was an essential decision-making body during Emperor Haile Selassie's reign (Markakis, 1974).

However, the role of the Council of Ministers collectively and that of individual members of this council and other agencies were not empowered for critical decision-making. The throne made all decisions. The Emperor was the absolute decision-maker on nearly all state matters. Gebru Tareke, in his seminal work, explains it as follows:

*The modern cabinet, headed by the prime minister, was a pliable instrument for personal rule. The king of kings alone could appoint, promote, demote, transfer, suspend, or dismiss ministers, judges, generals, governors, mayors, directors, and commissioners. State servants, who obeyed him without question and with slavish devotions often crawling on the ground before him, could be dismissed for no cause and could not resign without permission. As a fount of justice, the Emperor alone could grant pardons and amnesties or commute penalties. Unsalaries, he knew no boundaries between the public treasury and his personal confers. Not even religious matters were outside his purview. Faithful in participating in essential festivities and arcane rituals, the emperor approved the decomposition of the patriarch, or the Holy Synod, of the Orthodox Church, the principal weapon of conformity, which became autocephalous in the early 1950s. His unremittingly autocratic reign lasted a little over four decades, with only a brief interruption (1935-1941) following the Italian invasion and subsequent collapse of the imperial state (Gebru T., 2009: 32).*

After the restoration of the parliament, the legislative body was formed with elected members chosen through universal adult suffrage. On the other hand, the Senate consisted of members of the nobility who were directly appointed by the Emperor. In addition to reinstating the parliament, the Emperor implemented numerous administrative reforms and decisions to establish an efficient bureaucracy. The government's administrative framework was expanded, and its influence at the local level was notably strengthened. One of the interviewees explained that:

*The main characteristics of the government of Haile Selassie were transformational. After the liberation, the emperor separated the church and state functions and set up a modern government bureaucracy. This attempt created tension within the ruling class between conservatives and modern elites. The modern state presupposes creating a secularized, non-personalized, meritocratic system of governance. Modernity brought bureaucratic centralization, whereby the dominant elite, with concentrated power, controls, steers, and exercise power (Respondent no. 4, 2022).*

As the interviewee highlighted, the emperor successfully established modern institutions and a large public administration structure. This included the creation of the Ethiopian Airline, Ethiopian Telecommunication, Ethiopian Post Authority, The Ethiopian Road Authority, and other significant public institutions. According to Markakis (1974), the first half of Haile Selassie's reign saw the emergence of several progressive trends of historical importance. These included the 'taming' of the nobility, centralization of the government system, modernization of the bureaucracy

and the army, introduction of modern education, recruitment of educated individuals into administration, and the promotion of a modernistic orientation in a profoundly traditional environment. These contributions are of lasting importance and can largely be attributed to the guidance and courage of the enlightened young ruler, who became the patron of the emerging progressive forces in his domain. It is also true that these forces played a vital role in consolidating the throne's position and, when managed shrewdly, gradually shaping the autocracy.

The attempts to make a political reform and to democratize the politics were minimal. Power was personalized under his centralization and his autocratic rule. One of the respondents in this study spoke in this respect and claimed:

*In Ethiopia, there was no attempt to create democratic rule during the emperor's time. In addition to the lack of experience with democratic culture, the formation of Ethiopian political parties happened mainly underground, which affected the transparency of discussions to resolve differences, and this has grown into an antidemocratic political culture (Respondent no. 15, 2022).*

#### 5.6.4 Building the Nation through Public Goods and Economic Development Efforts

Haile Selassie established the planning board, initially presiding over it, and the planning commission, which was later led by the Prime Minister, to guide the long-term integrated development of the nation. The Planning Commission, founded in 1956, developed and implemented three consecutive development plans. According to Fasika Sidelil (2022), Ethiopia's first development plan (1957–1961) aimed at creating a robust infrastructure network focusing on transportation, construction, and communications to promote integration between regions and the capital city of Addis Ababa. However, instead of improving the quality of life for the people, the main focus was on large urban centers and resource-rich areas.

Following infrastructural development, priority was given to industrialization, agricultural growth, and expanding social services such as education and healthcare. The plan's first five years saw budgetary allocations totaling birr 541 million, with 46% dedicated to infrastructure, 26% to industry, and 8% to agriculture. Despite achieving an estimated 3.7% GDP growth rate during this period, the plan faced challenges due to a lack of competent labor and government capacity. As a result, the objectives were not fully met. However, for a nation with limited planning and execution systems, the progress was hopeful. Throughout the five years, Ethiopia's GDP registered an average annual growth rate of 3.2%.

The initial five-year development plan laid the groundwork for the subsequent plan (1961-1967), drawing on the expertise gained during its implementation. The goals of the second plan closely mirrored those of the first, prioritizing the development of social and economic infrastructure such as roads, electricity, and telecommunications before focusing on industrial and commercial agriculture. Dessalegn Rahmato (2008) notes that the guiding principle of the five-year plans were to prioritize mechanization over smallholder agriculture despite its foundational role in the nation. The social sector also received minimal attention during the plan's first five years.

The infrastructure expansion was successful, with the manufacturing sector experiencing an impressive 16% average annual growth rate over five years. Large-scale commercial agriculture has also developed satisfactorily. However, most of the agriculture sector received little attention in the second five-year plan due to the success in other areas of the economy. Small-scale farming, which accounts for more than 99% of all agricultural land and more than 90% of all jobs in the country, saw an average annual growth rate of 2% to 2.5%. The average yearly growth rate of GDP throughout this planning period was 4.7%, with per capita income increasing by 2% annually. According to Bahru (1994), the imperial government's focus on agriculture was skewed towards large-scale commercial farmers due to the need for foreign cash and the class interests of the ruling elite.

The third five-year Development Plan (1968–1973) was designed to enhance productivity in the agricultural sector, as noted by Dessalegn (2008) and Fasika (2022). Unlike previous plans, this development plan focused on small-scale farmers and prioritized higher education. The goal of increasing small-scale farmer productivity was to provide them with the necessary resources to improve their capacity and the productivity of their land, including better animal and crop varieties, fertilizer, pesticides, and improved farm equipment. The plan also aimed to enhance market access and facilitate access to bank loans. It also sought to improve infrastructure in rural areas, including constructing roads and providing access to clean water.

A specialized initiative was created to improve the efficiency of small-scale farmers in areas with fertile soil and experienced agricultural workers, aiming to overcome the limitations of the previous development plan. In 1967, the Arsi province was given top priority for this initiative, with 400,000 farmers participating in CADU, supported by the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA), to improve production on 600,000 hectares of farmland. Similarly,



the WADU program was established in Wolayta in 1970 with the assistance of the World Bank. Subsequently, similar programs were expanded in Shewa (Adda) by USID and in Tigray (Shire) by the World Bank from 1972 to 1974. These pioneering efforts in small-scale agricultural development have produced encouraging results. However, there are opposing viewpoints regarding the emphasis on the suitability and compatibility of Ethiopian small-scale agriculture's future, with some questioning the program's successful outcomes about the amount of funding and time needed to scale up to the majority of farmers in the nation.

The program faced criticism for its high cost and time-consuming nature. Furthermore, these policies incentivized large-scale commercial farming at the expense of small farmers, exacerbating the plight of the peasants and raising concerns about social justice. This event underscored the potential pitfalls of initiatives aimed at boosting agricultural output. The slower-than-expected increase in agricultural productivity presented difficulties for the rapidly growing industrial sector. Unlike the previous two five-year development plans, the third five-year development plan did not experience the same level of rapid growth, mainly due to the sluggish expansion of the agriculture sector.

Over 90% of the country's population is employed in agriculture, which poses challenges in creating a stable market for industrial goods. Furthermore, the agricultural sector needs help producing goods for export, and the land tenure system presents obstacles to small-scale farming. Emperor Haile Selassie played a direct role in establishing manufacturing industries through joint ventures with foreign investors, contributing significantly to the rapid growth of the industrial sector in the past two five-year development plan periods. Fasika (2022) argued that Emperor Haile Selassie implemented numerous groundbreaking initiatives to develop Ethiopia during his reign. Evaluating the development of infrastructure based on verifiable evidence, it is evident that the Italian occupation built approximately 6000 km of roads over five years. However, from 1958 to 1973, the road networks only increased by an average of 2% annually, reaching a total length of around 9,160 km. On the other hand, significant advancements were made in the transportation and communication sectors, with the establishment of companies such as Ethiopian Airlines and Ethiopian Shipping Line. Haile Selassie's reign also established, organized, and strengthened various industries, including banking, insurance, telecommunication, electric power, and water supply. Despite their professionalism and competent personnel, these institutions were not easily accessible to most of the nation's population.

The slow economic growth under Haile Selassie's rule and limited access to modern education led to widespread social unrest. The education system needed to expand more quickly, particularly in rural areas, and the growing number of graduates unable to find employment in cities highlighted the imbalance between the education system and the economy's capacity to absorb new workers. The promise of a better life, used to promote modern education, was contradicted by the reality of disillusioned students turning to revolutionary ideas (Messay, 2006).

The gross domestic product (GDP) growth rate fluctuated during the 1950s to 1970s. The first five years of the development plan saw an average annual growth rate of 3.2%, which is considered a promising performance for the country's first experience, and the second five-year development period performed even better, surpassing the planned target with an average annual growth rate achievement of about 4.7%. However, the last five years of the Haile Selassie I government saw poor performance, with the GDP growth rate declining to 3% during the execution of the third five-year development plan from 1970 to 1974. This period faced political challenges and growing institutional obstacles, hindering the implementation of the development plan.

In summary, the data presented indicates that during Haile Selassie I's rule, Ethiopia experienced minimal economic progress. Despite some positive developments, the overall state of the economy remained sluggish, with the majority of the population relying on subsistence farming. Various sources, including Fasika (2022), Dessalegn (2008), and Pausewang *et al.* (1990), have identified several factors that hindered Ethiopia's progress during this time. These include the lack of financial capital for growth initiatives, a weak domestic savings rate, and widening social and economic disparities. The combination of these factors undermined the feudal-imperial order that characterized this period.

#### 5.6.5 Voluntary Associations and Nation-Building

The "voluntary association" concept encompasses political parties, civic organizations, and self-help groups within society. Exchange relationships are more likely to bridge ethnic divides when they are established within networks of voluntary associations, such as clubs, trade unions, and party youth organizations. This includes forming political parties and coalitions that unite different ethnic groups. The presence of voluntary organizations that connect with patrons across ethnic lines can facilitate the spread of political alliances horizontally. The abundance of voluntary

organizations across ethnic lines in a society makes it easier to connect coordinators from diverse backgrounds (Wimmer, 2018).

Robert Hess (1970) asserted that the initial labor relations decree issued on September 5, 1962, was grounded in a provision of the 1955 Constitution. This decree acknowledged the principle of collective bargaining, prohibited unfair labor practices, and established a labor relations board to mediate disputes. In compliance with the 1962 directive, the Confederation of Ethiopian Labor Unions (CELU) was formed, creating forty labor unions. Since its establishment, CELU has been actively advocating for the interests of the majority of its members by exerting pressure on the government and employers. The confederation has also sought to enhance its influence domestically and internationally by participating in voluntary social initiatives, such as the campaign against illiteracy. Furthermore, there has been a noticeable trend among reformist educated elite to utilize labor unions to advance their reform agenda through organized political action.

One of the interviewees in this study stated that the role of civic associations in nation building serving as a bridge to link Ethiopian society around its common national interests as follows:

*Civic associations in Ethiopia have been unable to break free from the influence of power elites and have not effectively acted as intermediaries between the government and society. Unfortunately, Ethiopians have not had the fortune to experience robust civic associations that actively promote nation-building on a national scale. Additionally, non-governmental organizations in Ethiopia need to engage more with the Ethiopian public. They often rely heavily on external funding sources and serve as vehicles for advancing the interests of foreign donor communities (Respondent no. 3, 2022).*

Undoubtedly, the need for robust civil societies significantly impacts the process of nation-building. Organized and influential civil societies serve as the people's voice, advocating for their rights and presenting alternative policies. They play a crucial role in uniting communities and integrating marginalized segments of society into the national agenda. Unfortunately, civic associations during the monarchy period were relatively weak in Ethiopian political culture and had little influence. Furthermore, they were often co-opted to serve the narrow interests of the ruling elite rather than mobilizing the broader society for common goals and a shared future (Respondent no. 32, 2022). As noted by one of the interviewees:

*In addition to solid government institutions that effectively deliver public goods, successful nation-building requires non-governmental actors like the media, civic organizations, and*

*other organized institutions that promote national unity. Understanding their political, economic, and occasionally ideological circumstances is essential for civil societies. In the past, the Ethiopian Teachers Union and the Ethiopian Workers Union played a significant role in bringing about reform in the Ethiopian state (Respondent no. 29, 2022).*

Before 1955, political party organizations were forbidden in Imperial Ethiopia, and union formation was not acknowledged. The government was reluctant to grant Ethiopian unions the right to associate, as they were viewed as a force of modernization that could not be wholly controlled and as potential political entities (Hess, 1970).

The elections during Haile Selassie's reign did not result in the elite group gaining power. Instead, individuals from historically privileged classes and those from low socio-economic backgrounds who showed talent and loyalty to the emperor could rise to leadership positions within new or reorganized institutions created due to economic and administrative modernization. The establishment of the Haile Selassie I University in Addis Ababa, the legalization of labor unions in 1962, the formation of a special palace military guard, the growth of the bureaucracy and the judiciary, and the education of army and air force officers all contributed to the emergence of this new generation of leaders (Hess & Loewenberg, 1964).

African political parties have emerged as opposition entities to colonial governments, taking on judicial, administrative, police, educational, and social welfare roles. In contrast to traditional African ideals and the colonial regime, these parties have established new principles and advocated for new interests. They have proven effective in political agitation, education, and communication, giving rise to charismatic leaders, martyr cults, and new political elite. They have played a key role in developing African economies and fostered a renewed unity among Africans while legitimizing new political systems. In Ethiopia, however, the Emperor monopolized these functions, and the elite recruited based on inscriptive criteria.

Ethiopia's economic growth has been uniquely challenged, potentially leading to long-term political instability. The country's absence of political parties presents modernization challenges, shedding light on the vital roles typically played by parties in developing political systems. This difficulty in establishing acceptable structures in their absence has hindered the involvement of Ethiopian elites outside the ruling class and impeded the nation-building process. Furthermore, the lack of political openness during Haile Selassie's rule allowed extremist and polarized political ideologies to grow. One of the politicians interviewed stated it as follows:

*The majority of intellectual groups, from university students to high school and elementary students, were influenced by radical Marxist thoughts. This led to a marginalization of moderate voices and a political space filled with aggressive and emotional movements. These spontaneous political movements, lacking well-organized political parties, brought forth two different discourses on the future of Ethiopian nation-building within the revolutionary movements: class struggle and national questions. The dominant discourse argued that the problem of nation-building in Ethiopia stemmed from the class struggle between the ruling aristocracy elite, who controlled the means of production, and the peasant labor forces in rural Ethiopia. A minority group, still in its early stages, believed that ethnic oppression was the major obstacle in the nation-building process. This argument posited that hostile ethnic relations and the domination of one ethnic group over others complicated the nation-building process (Respondent no. 8, 2022).*

According to the politician mentioned above, the limited room for political engagement and the absence of voluntary associations have led to a divisive political environment. This has resulted in a lack of diverse viewpoints and has hindered the peaceful transfer of power through democratic processes. Additionally, the absence of political parties has contributed to a leadership crisis.

#### 5.6.6 National Symbols and Nation-Building

Like all human groups, modern nations possess symbolic systems representing their stability and identity. These symbols are deeply ingrained in the national consciousness, distinguishing one nation from another through historical and idealized notions of national characteristics. National symbols such as the national flag, the anthem, heroes, currency, and monuments distill the country's fundamental principles and ideals into a few powerful emblems (cp. Mach, 1992).

National symbols play a crucial role in shaping a country's identity and can vary in importance based on factors such as the nation's history and political climate. These recognizable symbols serve as a means of conveying a nation's history and culture, fostering pride and unity among its citizens. They can take the form of physical entities like monuments or flags and intangible elements such as national anthems.

According to Polish sociologist Mach (*ibid*), understanding how a nation's symbolic system is interpreted and used by different people in various circumstances provides insight into the identities of the individuals and groups that comprise the country and the nation-state. Currency and the National Anthem are tangible symbols in people's daily lives and in externally projecting

the state's image. These symbols should reflect and express the national allegiance of different cultural groups. However, if the dominant culture monopolizes these symbols, it would effectively exclude individuals who do not belong to it, hindering the growth and prosperity of a feeling of national identity. Therefore, all state leaders should engage in symbolic nation-building to foster a sense of national unity among all segments of the country's population (Kolst, 2006).

Emperor Haile Selassie strategically utilized symbols to unite the nation and strengthen its identity. Flags, currency, emblems, and historical artifacts were all employed to showcase Ethiopia's rich history and the emperor's role as a protector of the nation's sovereignty and a beacon of modernity. According to one prominent politician:

*The symbols used by the emperor in his nation-building project were primarily meant to glorify his rule and promote his cult. A prime example is the symbolic representation of the Lion of Judah. This emblem conveyed a narrative that countered the prevailing ethnic inequality and injustice in Ethiopian society. The emperor's opponents argued that a small group of aristocratic families exploited the symbol to maintain their authority by claiming divine sanction (Respondent no. 18, 2022).*

During Emperor Haile Selassie's reign, the Ethiopian flag gained worldwide recognition due to its symbolic representation of freedom and patriotism, resonating with Ethiopians and many other Africans and beyond. After gaining independence, numerous African nations adopted Ethiopia's flag as a symbol of African solidarity and a tribute to the continent's first independent flag. The tri-colors green, yellow, and red have always played a crucial role in unifying the country and reshaping collective consciousness, symbolizing cooperation among diverse groups and tying together the nation and its people. Some interviewed politicians argue that:

*The use of national symbols in Ethiopia's nation-building has faced challenges due to conflicting views on our shared history, a lack of consistent and legitimate long-term ideology, a genuine shared political economy, and institutions that promote peace, stability, inclusive democracy, social justice, and sustainable economic development in the country (Respondent no. 21, 2022).*

As the above politicians argued, the national symbols had been a source of contestation in Ethiopia since the emperor Haile Selassie. As to the antagonist of the emperor, the symbols did not represent the people's culture, history, and values. Instead, they glorified the personality of the emperor. Most of the symbols used in the country's nation-building process, including the flags, currency, and national anthem, did not get wider acceptance by the emperor's adversaries.

## Summary

Imperial rule ended in 1974, without having established a robust and widely accepted nation-building framework. The monarchy and its symbolic nationalism had been relatively successful since the 13th century in politics, maintaining independence internationally and ensuring a certain level of state cohesion and stability. However, it struggled to address the emerging demands from urban classes, ethno-regional contestation, and broader modernization forces such as calls for representation, democratic decision-making, socioeconomic development, and rights for the wider population. The Ethiopian student movement, based at Haile Selassie I University, played a significant role in radicalizing Ethiopian politics, advocating for socio-political changes and significant economic reforms influenced by global revolutionary ideas. The adoption of Marxist-Leninist ideology further fueled this radicalization. While these movements brought about political change, they also led to polarization, violence, and the rise of ethnic-based liberation movements, shaping Ethiopia's political landscape in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The dismantling of the nation-building model of the imperial state and its elites was not followed by a readily available alternative model.

The national question, focusing on ethnic identity and regional autonomy, came to have a profound impact on Ethiopian politics. The influence of European missionaries, who promoted local languages and cultures, had already contributed to a fragmentation of Ethiopian unity and to the recognition and rise of ethnic self-awareness. The Italian occupation from 1936 to 1941 had actively fueled ethnic discord and narratives of oppressed and oppressor ethnic groups. Historical events in the country, such as the 1943 *Woyyane* rebellion in the Tigray Region, the activities of the *Mecha-Tulema* Oromo Self-Help Association (founded in 1963), and the Bale uprising (1960-63) in the Oromo area of southern Ethiopia exemplified the rise of ethno-nationalist contestation movements that emerged in response to marginalization and erosion of regional autonomy and showed the inability of the imperial regime to incorporate them in an overarching national narrative. The same inability was apparent when the imperial elite faced urban social protests, agitation, and a military 'revolutionary' uprising in 1974 that culminated in its demise.

## CHAPTER SIX

### THE ELITE AND NATION-BUILDING UNDER *DERG*'S MILITARY RULE, 1974-1991

#### 6.1 The 1974 Revolution

In 1974, Emperor Haile Selassie was removed from power by the Provisional Military Administrative Council (PMAC), also known as the *Derg*. Under the leadership of Mengistu Haile Mariam from 1977, the *Derg*, a military junta, implemented significant political and social changes during its 17-year rule. The nationalization of all land in 1975 aimed at eliminating feudalistic practices and redistributing land ownership. The following year, the *Derg* officially adopted socialism as its ideology, resulting in the nationalization and state control of industries, banks, and foreign-owned enterprises. However, the *Derg* faced opposition both domestically and internationally due to its oppressive tactics, human rights violations, economic mismanagement, and the devastating famine of the 1980s. In 1991, the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) overthrew the *Derg*.

Numerous academics and authors have conducted various studies on the nature and features of the Ethiopian Revolution. These studies include publications from the *Derg* period up to 1991 and beyond. Notable works from the 1970s to the 1990s include those by Halliday and Molyneux (1981), Markakis and Nega (1978), Addis Hiwet (1986), Ottaway & Ottaway (1978), Clapham (1988), Andargachew T. (1993), Keller (1988), Henze (1990), and Bahru (1991). These works provided commentaries and in-depth studies of the revolutionary period as it unfolded. Gebru Tareke's book, published in 2009, also contributes to this body of literature. Additionally, memoirs in Amharic have been written and published by former prominent *Derg* officials such as Fikre-Selassie Wogderes (2013), Fisseha Desta (2015), Tesfaye Dinka (2017), Berhanu Bayeh (2020), Fasika Sidelil (2021), and the former president Mengistu Haile-Mariam himself (2013). Most of these texts were written by participants in the events or by officials who had direct access to confidential archives and, in some cases, were transcripts of participant interviews. These works



shed light on the events leading to the Ethiopian Revolution in February 1974, its consolidation in November 1977, and its subsequent decline and downfall.

In this section, the study briefly explores the origins, impact, and distinctive characteristics of the Ethiopian Revolution and how it catalyzed the military's self-promotion into the nation's power elite, replacing the old one.

The Ethiopian Revolution of the 1970s was widely recognized as 'Africa's first revolution'. This label was attributed to the internal social tensions that ultimately resulted in the overthrow of Ethiopia's ruling class, the establishment of new political institutions, the emergence of new leaders, and the spread of an ideological fervor with significant consequences.

Comprehending the significance of the Ethiopian Revolution requires drawing comparisons with other historical revolutions, such as those in France, Russia, and China. In terms of historical scope and the radical transformations it brought about, the Ethiopian Revolution holds similarities to these iconic revolutions. Like its counterparts, the Ethiopian Revolution instigated sweeping societal, political, and governance changes. The overthrow of the established ruling class resulted in the dismantling of existing political institutions and the establishment of a Marxist-Leninist government led by Colonel Mengistu Haile-Mariam, replacing the old imperial system under Emperor Haile Selassie.

The Ethiopian Revolution was significantly influenced by the fervor of its ideological principles, particularly the adoption of Marxist-Leninist ideology as the guiding force of the new government. This ideology informed policies and governance structures and drove social reform, including socialist initiatives, the nationalization of industries, land redistribution, and a collective approach to economic progress. The revolution's impact has been extended beyond Ethiopia, and it has been inspiring neighboring countries and influencing political movements throughout the region. Somalia and Sudan, in particular, felt the ripple effect of the revolution, as it provided a model and inspiration for various revolutionary and opposition movements.

Unlike other African nations such as Algeria and Mozambique, where revolution was mainly achieved through anti-colonial and anti-imperialist struggles, the Ethiopian Revolution was primarily fueled by internal social conflicts and a demand for significant social and political change. Although anti-colonial sentiments may have been a factor, the revolution primarily addressed internal dynamics and fostered internal transformation (Crummey, 1981).

However, Negussay Ayele (1993), a supporter of the *Derg* at the time, argued that the Ethiopian Revolution faced disproportionate criticism and insufficient understanding compared to other revolutions in modern history. On the other hand, academics and Marxist sympathizers like Halliday and Molyneux (1981) contended that the Ethiopian Revolution should be recognized as "Africa's first great social revolution". However, it was soon characterized by various negative terms, including "a betrayed revolution" or simply as a "coup d'état," "garrison-socialism," "bourgeois dictatorship," or a "fascist military dictatorship." These labels often exhibited a limited focus on specific aspects of the revolution rather than capturing the broader societal and political process it encompassed.

Numerous academics (see above) contributed to the scholarly understanding of the Ethiopian revolution's origins and its progression or demise. These scholars collectively argued that the Ethiopian revolution could be traced back to a deeply entrenched feudalist imperial system characterized by oppressive practices, which hindered meaningful political and economic reforms. The unresolved issue of land tenure, which led to the question of how to come to equitable land distribution (commonly known as the "land to tiller" question), played a significant role in triggering the revolution. Factors such as the alleged economic stagnation, the social disparities, the grievances among peasants, and, albeit with minimal peasant protests, contributed to the overall discontent.

Additionally, the mutiny of soldiers in 1974 and the discontent of urban residents added fuel to the revolutionary fervor. The revolution also included the push for equality among various ethnic groups, the address of national identity issues, and the opposition to cultural hegemony. These complex factors came together to bring about the Ethiopian revolution in 1974.

The Ethiopian Student Movement (ESM) and the revolution of 1974 are closely connected, with the ESM playing a crucial role in sparking it. The globally inspired ESM ideological and social fervor significantly contributed to the revolutionary unrest, emphasizing the urgency for action (cf. Balsvik 1976). Extensive academic research has been conducted to comprehend how the student movement drove the revolution (e.g., Ottaway & Ottaway, 1978; Bahru, 2014). The ESM had a transformative vision for Ethiopia's political and economic landscape, drawing inspiration from international student protests in the 1960s that aimed to challenge authoritarian governments, imperialism, and inequality. The momentum gained from the global student

movement of the 1960s greatly influenced the emergence of the ESM as a potent political force capable of overthrowing the long-established imperial regime.

The ESM raised two crucial questions that posed significant challenges to the continued existence of the imperial regime. The first question revolved around the "nationalities" issue, drawing from Marxist discourse and advocating for equal rights for all ethnic groups. The second question centered on land reform encapsulated in the slogan "land to the tiller." The students' fight against imperial rule marked the beginning of a new era in Ethiopian history. Their movement swiftly garnered widespread support nationwide, leading to nationwide protests involving various sectors of society, including the military. It was these protests that eventually sparked the revolution in 1974.

The 1974 revolution in Ethiopia marked a significant turning point as it overturned the imperial power structure and brought about profound political and economic transformations. The revolution commenced by abolishing the monarchy and establishing a republic. In 1975, a crucial milestone was reached with land reform, which entailed nationalizing all land, a central demand of the Ethiopian Student Movement (ESM). Furthermore, the revolution declared "ethnic and religious equality" for all Ethiopian citizens. A vital aspect of the revolution was the introduction of *Hebretesebawinnet Ethiopia*. This socialist ideology aimed to reshape Ethiopian society and build a nation based on socialist principles, incorporating elements unique to Ethiopia. Lastly, the revolution led to a new ruling elite, primarily lower-ranking military officers, who assumed power in the political system.

## 6.2 The Rise of a Military Elite

Emperor Haile Selassie laid the groundwork for developing a modern army in the years following World War II. The emperor abolished the customary practice of raising troops through provincial levies and the antiquated military command structure. After his return from exile, he reformed the Ministry of Defense (then known as the Ministry of War) in 1942 and ratified a military pact with Britain. This pact established a British military mission in Addis Ababa charged with aiding the government in preparing a national army (Fantahun, 2014).

In its gestation phase, the Ethiopian army comprised ground, air, and naval troops, with the Emperor serving as the supreme commander. Four divisions constituted the army, with Division I

being the Imperial Guard stationed in and around the capital. Division II was stationed in Asmara and tasked with defending the northern part of the country. Division III was stationed in Harar and responsible for defending the eastern part of the country, primarily from potential Somali threats. Division IV, based in Addis Ababa, oversaw the south and west regions.

Ethiopia received technical and material assistance to establish or reorganize its armed forces from various countries, including the USA, Britain, Sweden, Norway, India, and Belgium. Sweden supported the creation of the air force in 1947 and continued to provide training until the late 1950s when the U.S. Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG) took over. Norwegians were involved in establishing the navy and provided technical support and training. The British Military Mission offered training to the ground army and the imperial guard until 1953, after which the US-MAAG took over training responsibilities until 1977.

The military elite was educated and trained at two military cadet schools: the Harar Military Academy and the Holeta Military Academy, also known as *Gennet Yet'or Timhirt Bet'*. Differences in recruitment practices and curriculum between the two schools led to the division of officers based on political, social, and educational views. This division prevented the ground forces' military elite from actively participating in politics and hindered their ability to form a cohesive and organized body. In contrast, the Air Force and Navy were organized and cohesive, recruiting cadets with similar educational backgrounds. The strong connections and close interactions among officers in these divisions played a crucial role in their rise to power (Markakis, 1974).

During the pre-revolutionary era, the military elites in Ethiopia represented a cross-section of society. Erlich (1983) identified four distinct categories within the military, with the generals being the most affluent and enjoying privileges that were the envy of civilians. The emperor handpicked some for various rewards, including promotions to governorships, diplomatic roles abroad, and grants of land and property. Loyalty to the emperor often outweighed professional qualifications regarding promotions, as many generals lacked formal training in military or non-military fields (*ibid*).

The second category consisted of colonels, most of whom were in their forties and aspired to join the esteemed ranks of the generals. While not all of them held the same unwavering allegiance to the imperial regime as the generals, they were highly skilled in their profession and refrained mainly from actively opposing it. The airborne and army aviation commanders wielded

considerable influence on par with the generals. During the revolution, many of these colonels were elevated to prominent leadership roles by the *Derg*.

The third category in the Armed Forces consisted of junior officers up to the rank of major, who were responsible for the day-to-day operations of the armed forces. This group was the most dissatisfied and frustrated within the Armed Forces, as they needed more control over crucial decisions such as training, organization, and unit rotation. Many of these junior officers received their training abroad. They pursued further education in subjects such as law, political science, management, economics, and engineering at Addis Ababa University, where criticism of the imperial regime was prevalent. The civilian elite and junior officers often engaged in discussions and debates at colleges, where the prevailing sentiment was that the imperial government could not implement necessary political and economic reforms. However, due to the fear of reprisal and the belief that their voices would only be influential with the support of senior commanders, junior officers and others were hesitant to express their concerns publicly. Despite attempts to mobilize younger officers, disparities in education, professional development, political viewpoints, and inter-service competition hindered their efforts. Nonetheless, most junior officers felt disillusioned with the government and the military hierarchy.

The final group consisted of non-commissioned officers (NCOs) and privates, among the lowest-paid soldiers working under a corrupt, ineffective, and unsympathetic military bureaucracy. This group consistently expressed grievances regarding quality of life issues, such as food and housing in the army. They were housed in overcrowded barracks in remote outposts with no rental homes available. The food they received could have been of better quality and delivered late. Surprisingly, these military leaders overthrew the imperial government and took control of the state during the 1974 revolution. Before the revolution in the 1960s, Emperor Haile Selassie believed that the newly organized professional army would support modernizing the nation and protecting his imperial interests. However, his actions inadvertently paved the way for lower-ranking military leaders to seize power.

When the *Derg* was established in June 1974, the Ethiopian military lacked developed political consciousness, and ideological distinctions were not made within the young and underdeveloped elite officer corps. The *Derg* drew inspiration from left-wing ESM parties, including the 'All Ethiopian Socialist Movement' (AESM or *MEISON* in Amharic acronym) and

the 'Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party' (EPRP), both of which were Marxist and served as ideological sources for the *Derg*.

At the beginning of their rule, the members of the *Derg* claimed that they were merely temporary caretakers of the popular revolution and would eventually hand over power to a civilian government. To reflect this intention, they adopted the name 'Provisional Military Administrative Council (PMAC)' after overthrowing the emperor. However, the civilian groups, particularly radical university graduates, students, teachers, and young bureaucrats, played a significant role in pushing the PMAC towards a more radical direction.

These civilian groups primarily influenced the PMAC's radicalization. University graduates and members of organizations such as the Ethiopian Student Movement (ESM) and senior bureaucrats gradually became part of the system and developed vested interests. Over time, they transformed into advocates for radical reforms within the government. These civilian groups, the so-called educated elites, brought fresh perspectives, idealism, and a desire for profound societal changes to the PMAC. Their involvement in the administration influenced the decision-making process and shaped the policies pursued by the military government. As they became more integrated into the system, they began to push for transformative reforms that aligned with their vision of a more egalitarian and socially just society. The evolution of these elite individuals into proponents of radical reform can be attributed to their exposure to the realities of governance and their first-hand experiences with the country's challenges. Their education and critical thinking skills allowed them to identify the deep-rooted issues that needed addressing and propose bold solutions. As they became more entrenched in the bureaucratic apparatus, they developed vested interests, further motivating their commitment to radical change. One former top *Derg* official repeated the common argument that was mounted against the *Derg* as a 'hijacker of the revolution'. He argued:

*Even though the emperor's government was about to fall, no organized political force or group showed up to seize control of the situation. All the political forces, including EPRP, were unprepared to take the lead at the beginning of the revolution. Who should rule as the emperor's successor is still up for dispute amid widespread protest and unrest. We got together unexpectedly in the face of growing political unrest to prevent a catastrophic clash and perhaps war between army divisions that supported the ruling class or the people. Additionally, we believed that the nation was at a crossroads due to the threat to national security from internal and external sources. So, we just reacted in the capacity of state protectors of national security. We leaped into leadership because of this and soon found ourselves in a position of great political power and responsibility. Most of us were lower-*

*level officers with various backgrounds representing various army divisions. At the start of the revolution, we did not even share a common vision or position* (Respondent no. 1, 2021).

It is clear from this statement, which looks reasonable and convincing, why the military seized power. However, this thesis has been contested and rejected by numerous scholars, including a prominent historian who was interviewed (respondent no. 31, 2022). He argued that the military officers did not intend to transfer power to a civilian government even though they came to control state power accidentally. However, civilian 'revolutionary' groups working closely with the military junta were also responsible for the PMAC's radicalization. Ideological factions influenced the internal power struggles within the military council, which played a significant role in their radicalization. Besides the ideological factions, external pressures from regional conflicts and internal pressures from economic challenges were considered drivers of the MAC's actions and radicalization tendencies. Some interviewed politicians also concurred that civilian groups pursued radical reform due to their vested interests and ideological stakes.

Additionally, these interviewees argued that eliminating political organizations like EPRP and AESM from the political landscape indicated the *Derg's* vital interest in consolidating its power rather than allowing a transition to civilian rule. These alternative explanations provide a nuanced understanding of *Derg's* intentions, the internal dynamics, the external pressures, and the limited influence of ambitious civilian revolutionary groups in the PMAC's radicalization. To sum up, the rise of the military elite to power in Ethiopia was driven by internal and external factors. Internally, the army's internal conflicts and students' demands for political change played a role. Socialist ideology, as voiced in the global political arena, clearly encouraged Ethiopian students, the intelligentsia, and military officers. Externally, the 1960 African independence movement and the decolonization momentum attracted the interest of Ethiopian army officers, while the legacy of post-independence coups in Africa demonstrated to them the military's ability to seize state power (cp. Fasika 2022; Fikreselassie, 2013; Fesseha, 2014).

### 6.3 Elite Recruitment, Placement, and Promotion under the *Derg*

In the years following the 1974 Revolution, the military officers, especially the NCOs, wielded absolute power. Military branches were the primary sources of the new elite groups that substituted the imperial rule. Some military sections and officers became the superstructure of the

new political system. One key respondent (no. 38, 2022) noted, 'The loyalty and interpersonal relationships were significant to the elite's recruitment, replacement and promotion. The pattern of elite recruitment relied on relationships and ideological commitments rather than the knowledge and skills of individuals. This also applies to other countries in specific ways, but it was a more deeply ingrained practice in Ethiopia's political and intellectual circles. Replacing the ruling elites in every tier of the political administration with new elites was extremely difficult. Since the power elite of the imperial government was portrayed by society as corrupt and ineffective, the *Derg* saw itself as justified in assuming responsibility for replacing the old governing elite with a new one. They invited senior bureaucrats to serve at various levels of the government structure and also recruited fresh university graduates. In addition, they moved military officers from different army divisions and put them in administrative and regional governor positions. The senior *Derg* official's view (respondent no. 34, 2022) supports the claim above.

The newly emerging elite had a range of backgrounds. The core elites were from the military, some power elite members were from the educated classes, and others were senior officers from the imperial government— a group with mixed political and social attitudes, from revolutionary to conservative to moderate. During the reign of the emperor, elite recruitment was more personalized and based on personal merit. The emperor's closest advisors, nobles, knights, and religious leaders were personal references for the recruited elites. Loyalty to the monarch and individual competence were the two main criteria for recruitment. Under the *Derg*, elite recruitment was done through political parties/movements. Political parties were not officially present in Ethiopia before the revolution, but several emerged months after Haile Selassie's administration was toppled. The All-Ethiopian Socialist Movement (*MEISON*) and the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party (EPRP) were the most well-known political parties formed since the revolution. Both parties identified as leftist and appeared to have a similar ideological stance. In 1975–1976, the only difference was that one was more 'tactical' than ideological. While *MEISON* acknowledged that military rule might be 'progressive,' mainly if it carried out the fundamental objectives of the extreme left, the EPRP demanded the swift establishment of a civilian government (see Gilkes, 1982).

As noted by the *Derg* senior officials (e.g., interviewee 01, 2022), the military rulers officially invited political parties to be recruited for the potential elite through the Provisional Office for Mass Organizational Affairs (POMOA). The leftist political organizations, like AESM,



EPRP, *Woz* (Labour) League, ECHAAT ('Oppressed Peoples' Revolutionary Struggle'), MALERED('Marxist-Leninist Revolutionary Organization'), and *Abyotawi Seded* (Revolutionary Flame') were given the duty of recruiting qualified elite members for various government positions. This was a new departure compared to the old practice during the imperial government, where elite members were recruited mainly by personal choice and individual decisions. The recruitment under the POMOA office unveiled a new practice of recruiting elite members through collective decision-making, seen as the optimum method for selecting 'superior' elites (Respondent no. 1, 2021).

The POMOA coordinated this recruiting for the ruling elite, which was in charge of forming a unified leading political party and enlisting promising elite members. However, open conflict broke out during the revolution between MEISON and, notably, the EPRP. Ultimately, the EPRP chose to leave the POMOA, and MEISON remained a staunch ally of the military rulers.

This elite recruitment through the POMOA went via a 14-member steering committee with EPRP and MEISON supporters. MEISON was in the lead with five supporters, while the EPRP had two. When the EPRP left POMOA in 1977, more MEISON backers took their place. After the exit of EPRP members of other leftist organizations mentioned above, such as the *Woz* League, *Echaat*, MALERED, and *Abyotawi Seded*, joined POMOA and served as channels of recruitment of new ruling elite members both at the national and regional levels of the administration (see Fesseha, 2014).

Later, *Derg* established a political school, Yekatit 66, to train middle-rank leaders, known as *cadres*. The school became the epicenter of elite recruitment and ideological indoctrination of the regime. One of the interviewees described the school's contribution as follows: Notably, Yekatit 66 School was founded because it gave rise to cadres, the top and middle echelons of the governing elite who are ardent political foot soldiers. This school produced cadres who were excellent communicators and knowledgeable about Marxist theory. They were gifted with great political communication abilities. Ethiopia's political culture was altered when the 'cadre' was introduced. Throughout the EPRDF and PP eras, cadres have been used as the base for massive mobilization (Respondent no. 47, 2021).

As noted by the above interviewee, the cadres emerged as profound actors from the grassroots political structure to the upper echelons. Apart from the Yekatit 66 School, the military rule sent the senior and groomed elite to top positions, both military and civil backgrounds, in

‘friendly socialist countries’ such as the USSR, China, Bulgaria, Romania, Cuba, etc. Furthermore, the *Derg* established committees to supervise the work of the various ministries to which new elites were assigned. These consisted of civilian groups from the government and university graduates who had returned from self-imposed exile in Europe and North America. Most of these new elites were the technocrats who engineered the radical socialist program. One of the interviews with a senior opposition political leader confirms this:

*Recruiting, placement, and promotion strategies were hybrid under Derg. The political elites were disproportionately low-ranking officers drawn from the military to represent the defense forces. Most were recruited based on ideological loyalty and their commitment to the revolution. Over time, these low-ranking officers recruited in-demand jobs to professionally capable and influential officers from the national army and well-educated politicians from the political parties of ordinary citizens. As the Derg ruling class grew over time, intellectuals with capacities in their technical competence joined and strengthened it. Derg attempted to empower its elite by not just selecting members from the system's existing elites for political positions but also by educating newer generations through the use of scholarships from communist nations in addition to recruiting and promoting from among those individuals (Respondent no. 9, 2022).*

As mentioned before, the *Derg* government considered an individual's competence when grooming them for official positions. However, several interviewees dispute the claim above and assert that the government gave more weight to allegiance than competence. One of the interviewees noted that when the *Derg* came to power, the elite's recruitment, placement, and promotion became based on ideological allegiance. As a result, low-ranking military officers were responsible for supervising educated professionals working for government institutions nationwide, from the top down to the lower structures. Professionals were assigned to positions in some highly technical fields based on their loyalty to the regime. The *Derg* introduced the new culture of a yes-men ethos, with a lack of political identification with any of the competing parties. *Derg* also successfully demolished the merit system, which was quite common in most institutions during the emperor's reign in both the civil service and the military, particularly in high-ranking posts (Respondent no. 47, 2022).

As indicated above, the recruitment, placement, and promotion practices of the *Derg* were similar to their predecessors in the way that they were based on political loyalty—but not to the state as a whole, but rather to the power structure of each particular leader. The recruitment of elites during the reign of the emperor took into account not just allegiance but also other factors that focused on competence. As a result, there were intellectuals with high levels of capability in

high-ranking positions due to merit. The meritocracy opportunity allowed for comparatively high standards of elites throughout this time. The low-ranking military officers who replaced the elite community after *Derg*'s purge negatively impacted the country.

Most of the elites were recruited from the previous government at the outset of the revolution. However, those in charge of the political authority at the front were drawn from the lower strata of society, including lower-ranked military officers. Ideological fidelity to the state served as the primary recruitment criterion. The ruling elites at this period were Marxists, militants, and fiercely nationalist. Later, the military rulers started recruiting the elites from higher education institutions, mainly from Addis Ababa, Asmara, and Haramaya universities. Universities gradually became a foundational basis of elite recruitment.

#### 6.4 The Nature and Character of the Elite

Following the elimination of the old ruling elite and dismantling the radical intellectuals' groups from the left, *Derg*, which had come from the lower-ranking military officers and some workers from the lower classes of the society, came to control state power. Subsequently, a few 'opportunistic' intellectuals were also established as a new political elite without socioeconomic or psychological links with the old elite. The *Derg*'s 'revolutionary' measures entailed support from the working class or even more so from the peasants. It neither got support from the old elite nor from the radical-left intellectual groups, which faced massacres and mass detention. Thus, the *Derg* became the leading political force, based on a self-declared ideology of a 'Socialist-oriented, strong Ethiopian nationalism.'

When the *Derg* stabilized its grip on power and acquired confidence after the repressive and bloody 'Red Terror', violently suppressing all opposition, highly qualified technocrats and professionals based on merit joined the political elite in the civil services. This diversified the elite's composition. The remnants of the old elite and the radical leftist intellectuals were marginalized, if not eliminated, and became powerless in national issues (Ottaway, 1976).

The character of elites under the *Derg* administration could be summarized as radicals, loyalists, and 'patriots' but also largely incompetent. Unlike the emperor's time, the elite's character was widely observed during the *Derg*'s reign, which was political-ideological 'radicalization.' Most scholars and politicians saw radicalization as a new trend in Ethiopian

politics that emerged with the leftist political parties. Messay Kebede (2008) has argued that introducing the modern educational system into Ethiopia as part of the drive to modernization created a mood of alienation and cultural dislocation. This new trend of radicalization dislocated the old culture and prompted alienation, 'cultural pathology,' and mental disorientation in post-revolutionary Ethiopia. He said elitist education policy produced educated elites willing to embrace radical ideas. The new elite group became simultaneously radicalized and dislocated from their own culture. They were open and quick to embrace new ideas and thoughts from the external world. If one takes the spread of Marxism-Leninism as an example, it was sudden and rapid, disconnected young elites from anything that had gone before. The worst thing is that they rejected the argument and idea of other scholars and politicians who argue for an 'evolutionary' understanding of radical politics. According to one scholar from Addis Ababa University (Respondent no.17, 2022), the educated elite who originated from the student movement were radical in their political stand and orientation. They were rigid and brought a new culture of uprooting opponents and dying for goals. They called it 'Yealama Tsinate' in Amharic, translated as 'persistence of purpose.' Violence became a new accepted means of achieving political goals and was a manifestation of radicalization. Another former senior *Derg* official complemented the above points:

*Even though most of the elites were considered leftist at the outset of the Ethiopian revolution and sought to implement revolutionary ideas that were directly adapted from the Soviet, Cuban, Vietnamese, and Chinese revolutions, they disagreed about which socialist sub-ideology should be chosen and adhered to. They most often [...] attacked each other. They did not share a common stance or vision* (Respondent no. 33, 2022).

This radical mindset that was embedded in politics created a culture of violence, which took the shape of state-led terrorism (i.e., the 'Red Terror' (see Toggia, 2012; Wiebel, 2015), as the interviewee mentioned above noted. The nation was gripped by severe political and intergroup violence in the late 1970s. Ethiopia's major cities and towns, particularly Addis Ababa, Gondar, Jimma, Asmara, and Dessie, experienced an increase in violence in 1976. The military government that later adopted and promoted its own Marxist-Leninist idiom and plans and heavily relied on the use of force to stifle dissent was violently challenged by radical left opposition groups, notably the EPRP. The use of force, summary executions, torture, and confiscation of property became manifestations of the new radical political culture (Abbink, 1995) defined by violent exchanges and causing thousands of people to be killed.

Another typical elite characteristic was political loyalty to the regime. This feature persisted from the imperial era and became a standard norm of elite behavior during the *Derg* era. Both intellectual and military elites were expected to exhibit loyalty to the top leadership and ‘the revolution.’ Loyalty was thus considered the glue that held relationships together in times of difficulty. It induced and sustained cooperation among the ruling elites.

According to one opposition leader (Respondent no. 4), the *Derg* feared a backlash from imperial rule supporters. Several attempts were made to end the revolution and re-establish imperial rule. Because of this, loyalty was a pillar of the elite hierarchy that protected the revolution and the new political system from all internal and external threats. As a result, the majority of elites expected to demonstrate loyalty to the government. Loyalty became the norm, and a necessary quality for entering the ruling elite circles, as asserted by the opposition leader interviewed. It gave the elites a new kind of ‘personality.’ The majority of the elite members were reluctant to express their true feelings. To put it simply, they act like devoted followers of the government. This trend made the rise of authoritarianism and dictatorship following the revolution possible. It impacted the ruling elite's circle's inhibitions to have meaningful conversations or criticisms of the party program and policies.

Another typical elite characteristic was being opportunistic. Several scholars and politicians argue that the emerging power elite in the ruling circle are opportunistic, perpetually under the way of the ruling class. According to one interviewee, elites in the military have a reputation for being opportunistic. Most higher-education elites do not believe in military rule and join the government to exploit the opportunity. Opportunist tendencies, therefore, were a prevalent trait of elites in the military. Some educated and military elite members wanted to take advantage of all the opportunities that come with access to power.

Regardless of their stance, they cooperated with the regime and prioritized their own interests. The majority of elites with a higher education background joined the administration to take advantage of opportunities rather than have faith in military authority.

Being an opportunist remained one of the critical traits of Ethiopia's power elite even after the fall of the *Derg*, as indicated by the interviewee mentioned above:

*Most elites with higher education backgrounds entered the political structure to help themselves and their kin. This sparked a trend that placed the more educated power elite below the less educated power elite. The educated elite were perceived as servants and*

*technical workers who worked for the less educated power elite* (Interview with respondent no. 38).

Incompetence was another trait of the elite that was widely seen under the *Derg*. As it was emphasized above, the *Derg*'s core ruling elites were non-commissioned officers (NCOs) with lower levels of education. The long-lasting old culture was broken by the rise of the low-ranking officers to the top of the power structure. The old culture expected its leaders to be wise, well-educated, and experienced—the ascent of the low-ranking officers to power altered this culture. People believed anyone could head political and economic institutions and climb the power ladder. This negative precedent severely damaged The meritocracy ethos ingrained in the nation's bureaucracy and political system. As confirmed by one of the prominent opposition leaders:

*The competence and quality of elites in Ethiopia progressively declined due to the political action of the Derg regime. During the reign of Haile Selassie, educated people were very professionally capable and involved in national social and political issues. At that time, numerous public intellectuals first debuted in Ethiopia. Furthermore, the education system was largely effective, from the primary to the higher levels. However, the Derg began to politicize education. It assigned cadres to the universities, ended intellectual debates, and politicized professional associations. Independent thinking started to worry people, and at that point, Ethiopia's educational system began to deteriorate* (Respondent No. 8, 2022).

Most academics, politicians, military officers, businesses, and traditional leaders interviewed agreed that the caliber of elites seriously declined since the military's ascent to power. After the 1974 revolution, junior officers were responsible for installing inept leaders in various government posts. Moreover, the succeeding EPRDF government maintained this precedent, with the overall quality of elites staying at a low level (As, for example, noted by respondents no.18, 19, 23, 26, 27, 30, 35, and 37; in 2022).

## 6.5 The Power Structure and Elite Integration

The absolutist feudal-monarchical system that had existed for centuries with feudal and developing bourgeois relations predominating was brought down by the revolution of 1974. The emperor, his numerous family members, and court, other hereditary or, in Levine's words, "quasi-hereditary" and titled aristocrats, high-level bureaucrats, big compradors, and clergy formed the highest tier of the authoritarian social state political framework that had developed in the pre-1974 period. Semi-serfs, free peasants, nomads, laborers, minor bourgeoisie, and intellectuals comprised

the pyramid's base. Land ownership was a significant factor in the feudal upper crust's ability to rule.

The institutions established during the 1950s and the 1960s (such as the Parliament, Council of Ministers, High Court, municipal courts, etc.), fashioned after bourgeois Western parliamentary ones, were more symbolic than substantive. On the eve of the revolution, the upper echelons of Ethiopia's socio-political system were made up of noblemen, the middle ones of middle classes, and the lower ones of peasants. The old power structures continued, but they gradually lost their capacity to rule. As a result, the Coordination Committee of Armed Forces, Police, and Territorial Army, or *Derg*, was established. It consisted of soldiers democratically elected as noncommissioned and commissioned officers by their respective regiments. By coordinating the revolutionary forces' operations, the *Derg* effectively served as a military-revolutionary center.

The revolution signaled the dissolution of the previous power structure and sociopolitical order and the establishment of a new one. Crown Council, Parliament, Council of Ministers, Royal Court-Chief, and Royal Guards were abolished, along with the entire network of imperial intelligence and security apparatus. The Constitution was also abrogated, leaving only those laws that were not contradictory to the revolution in effect. After that, the superstructure underwent several profound changes, including restructuring the state's decision-making bodies, important fiscal institutions, industrial and commercial enterprises, and abolishing the monarchy and titles.

The PMAC, a collective state body that served as a revolutionary parliament,' had the most significant legislative authority. Soldiers and non-commissioned officers made up half of PMAC. The PMAC served as a super cabinet, an anonymous collective military, executive body to which the civil cabinet and public workers were accountable. This was true even though the administrative framework of the previous administration and the majority of its cadres were preserved. The PMAC Congress, which selected the Central and Standing Committee for daily operations, was the highest authority. Commissions linked with PMAC that deal with social, economic, legal, and administrative matters, as well as information and public relations, domestic and international policy, and security and defense were established. In addition to serving as Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces, the PMAC Chairman also served as Chairman of the Council of Ministers. PMAC appointed the executive body—the Provisional Military Government—and increased the number of civilians on it by issuing decrees (also known as "proclamations") with the legal force of constitutional acts. The previous power structure,

comprised of the emperor, aristocrats, nobilities, clergy, and knights, was replaced by the new power structure that consisted of the military, technocrats, and representatives of the people.

The new power structure and the circulation of the elite had caused a crisis that had a significant impact not only during and after the revolution but also on the generations that followed. The power elite were severely affected by circulation and replacement. Numerous Ethiopian aristocracy members perished; some were imprisoned, and others were forced to flee their homes and immigrate abroad. Ethiopian power elites declined in number and quality because of the military regime's atrocities and isolation. *Derg* atomized the remaining elites and replaced the elite community with non-elite officers. If elites exist as a community, they may have more sway over society.

The economic elite was shattered, shrank in size, and developed weak capacities because of land reform, nationalization of properties, and limited capital engagement. However, some businesspeople connected to the government figures and operated through patronage networks. The socialist political ideology that emerged after the revolution put an end to the burgeoning private sector and the developing corporate and economic elites. The new socialist philosophy that emerged in Ethiopia opposed private property ownership and promoted collective property rights and a significant role for the government in the economy. Due to socialist economic policies, some of the nation's budding business elites left the country, while others fell into poverty. Government control was exerted over the banking, industrial, transportation, and service sectors. Petty businessmen gradually supplanted the corporate elites at the local and national levels. The economic elites, therefore, were not visibly incorporated into the government's power structure as of the emperor's reign.

The military rulers viewed traditional elites as a natural ally and ardent defenders of the imperial power both during and after the revolution. They were, therefore, hostile against the traditional elites and unwilling to co-opt them into the new political structure. Traditional figures from the Orthodox Church remain outside the system of power. Some well-known and influential Orthodox leaders were persecuted; some were imprisoned, and others were banished. Similar tactics were used to undermine and systematically exclude other traditional elites, including community leaders and practitioners of traditional dispute resolution (TDR), from participating in the nation's social, political, and economic life. Traditional elites were thus absent from the power



structure of the post-1974 revolution. Traditional elites were purposefully disregarded, uprooted, and left out of the power structure.

The intellectual or educated elite was partially expelled and absorbed into the new power structure. The educated elite faced hostility from the *Derg* and its highest-ranking officials. They have a distrustful gaze toward intellectuals. The reason was that intellectuals were quite vociferous and critical of the military taking over power. They agitated for the restoration of civilian rule. Some joined political organizations on the New Left, such as the AESM and EPRP. Between 1976 and 1978, there was an open battle between the EPRP and the military, which resulted in the persecution of intellectuals and the deaths of close to 40,000 committed young, educated class members. A new culture of violence and state-based terror emerged with the expulsion of the educated elite.

The power elites' core at the revolution's inception consisted of 120 junior officers. Gradually, most *Derg* members dropped out for different reasons, including the power struggle among the officers. Between 60 and 80 of the original 126 members, eight remained within the *Derg*. The vast majority of the *Derg* officers are graduates of the Holeta military academy. Almost all those from the senior academy at Harar were eliminated in the July 1976 and February 1977 purges. The ten-member Standing Committee was the core of the revolutionary government. Beyond this, there was a Central Committee with an estimated 32 members. The congress of all the surviving members is believed still to meet on an annual basis. While it has powers of discussion and ratification of some decisions, it no longer takes major initiatives against the will of the Standing Committee. Dozens of PMAC members not directly involved in the Standing Committee were distributed among civilian ministries or on the PMAC committees that oversee each ministry. Twelve have been appointed as provincial governors, and since 1980, four have held positions in the Council of Ministers.

As this study discussed above, military rule in the post-1974 period was characterized by elite disintegration. Elite disintegration occurs when loose cohesion and disunity are displayed among dominant elite groups in society. According to Putnam (1976) and Higley and Burton (2006), elite integration is a requirement for a successful democratic transition, political stability, the exercise of collective power, and making joint decisions abided by all members of the polity. Putnam (1976) identified six "integrative factors" or "dimensions of elite integration": social homogeneity, shared recruitment patterns, interpersonal interaction, value consensus, group

solidarity, and institutional context. He claimed that value consensus is perhaps the most important of these factors. Higley and Moore (1981) also argued that shared moral principles and interpersonal relationships are the most critical issues in elite integration. If members of an elite group share similar ideologies, social backgrounds, educational and professional experiences, and recruiting processes, they are considered integrated.

Considering the above explanation, we did not see elite integration under military rule. There were power scuffles among the power elites and hostile relations among different segments of the elite groups. There was a stiff power struggle from 1974 to 1976 among top PMAC leadership factions. This struggle resulted in the purge of one-third of the *Derg* members, mainly educated military officers, from the power circle. Moreover, the emerging power elite systematically excluded the educated, economic, traditional, and political elites from the power structure. Elite disintegration has been an observable phenomenon from the beginning—most elites from all political spectrums share a common ideological orientation during and after the revolution. The problem arose in connection with divergent educational backgrounds and diversity of origin. According to one of the top *Derg* officials, the elite disintegration resulted in a power scuffle among the Ethiopian leftists and other groups and gradually left a vacuum for ethno-elites rise and dominance of nation-building in the post-1991 period. The power struggle significantly debilitated the leftists. So, one of the significant hurdles in the nation-building process is the power struggle and lust for total power control by competing political forces. Ethnicity itself was part of this struggle and later surfaced as a means to control power (Respondent no. 1, 2022).

## 6.6 Elite and Nation-Building under Military Rule

Following the revolution of 1974, the military overthrew the monarchy and put on hold all of the nation-building initiatives the emperor had put in place within the larger framework of modernization. The military unveiled a new program for constructing a nation that emphasizes equality, justice, and self-reliance. This section looked at the military rule's efforts to construct a nation while taking ideology, organizational structure, public goods, communication schemes, and national symbols into consideration. I adopted these indicators from Andreas Wimmer's (2018) seminal work on nation-building and added indicators.

### 6.6.1 Ethiopian Socialism as a Source of Nation-Building

Under military administration (1974–1991), the nation-building process takes a new twist and follows a path of socialism. *Derg* announced socialism as a new ideology for reconstructing the nation in December 1974. It declared Ethiopian socialism, *Ye-Itiopia Hibrete sebawinnet* (translated as ‘Ethiopian Socialism’). It outlined "self-reliance, the dignity of labor, and the supremacy and indivisibility of Ethiopian unity" as core values of the new ideology. *Ethiopia Tikdem* (‘Ethiopia First’) was the political motto of the Ethiopian socialism. Under this motto, the government launched several economic reforms and policies, including the 1975 land reform and nationalizing vital economic sectors.

The *Derg* issued the Land Reform Proclamation of March 1975, which nationalized all rural land, abolished tenancy, and put peasants in charge of enforcement. No peasant was allowed to possess a plot larger than ten hectares, and no one could employ farmworkers. Farmers were ordered to organize peasant associations, one for every 800 hectares, which would be headed by executive committees responsible for enforcing the new order. In July 1975, all urban land, rentable houses, and apartments were also nationalized.

The grandly titled ‘Government Ownership and Control of the Means of Production Proclamation’ of March 1975 ordained a minimal role of private capital in the economy, after all major industrial, financial, and commercial institutions, comprising about 200 companies, were nationalized without compensation (in January and February 1975). There was not much foreign capital anyway, and there was hardly any mining, which made the wholesale nationalization of it simpler. Multinational involvement was mainly limited to trade, plantation agriculture (particularly sugar and cotton), and a small amount of industry. Although some of the nationalized assets were later given minimal compensation, and the government attempted to entice fresh private investment, none has yet to materialize (Clapham, 1987).

The *Derg* regime tried a novel approach to nation-building that marked a departure from the imperial government. The architect claims that because of the embedded economic and social inequality that existed in Ethiopian society for centuries as a result of feudalism, socialism was chosen as the best course of action. According to the architect, socialism alone can address the problem, as it did in Russia and China. In line with this, in 1976, the *Derg* proclaimed a program known as the ‘National Democratic Revolution Program’(NDRP). The NDRP focused on addressing the question of nationalities in Ethiopia. It gave the nationalities the ‘right to self-

determination,' but it was restricted to regional autonomy rather than independence/secession. Equal rights for all ethnic and linguistic groups were also acknowledged (cf. Gilkes, 1982).

The architects who insisted that Socialism was the best way to do nation-building based their argument on one of two contending schools of thought. According to the Ethiopian Leftist School, hierarchical class division was the main contradictory force in society. It placed a small, well-off aristocratic class at the top and the majority of poor, mass peasants at the bottom. It kept the unequal political and economic relations between them. The supporters of this group proposed that eliminating the small ruling class would solve the nation's fundamental political and economic problems. This school's proponents characterized their viewpoint as "the fundamental political-economy problem of Ethiopia is the class struggle." Ethiopian leftist groups like AESM, EPRP, and others mentioned above advocate this thought (see Fesseha 2014).

The second school is what came to be known as the 'ethnic-nationalists,' who contended that exploitation and inequality in Ethiopia were based on ethnic and linguistic disparities. Accordingly, they stated that the governmental and economic establishment of the country favored one ethnic group, the Amhara, and encouraged the dominance of its language and culture. They called for the abolition of Amhara cultural hegemony and the establishment of a kind of 'multiculturalism.' The protagonists of such an ethnic-elitist worldview characterized 'the core political and economic problem of Ethiopia' as an "unequal ethnic relation and cultural hegemony that favors northerners". When analyzing Ethiopian politics today, these competing claims still serve as ideological roots in the evolution of left-wing and ethno-national political viewpoints and competition. One of the former top officials articulated the argument in the following way:

*We find these two sets of elites in the nation-building discourse. One set [.....] attributed the problem of nation-building in Ethiopia to the class struggle (መደበዊ ትግል) between the feudal lords (the ruling class) who control the means of production, mainly land, and peasants, [...]. This ruling class mainly originated from northern and central Ethiopia. There were substantial numbers of local feudal elites in various regions. The class struggle discourse analysis explores the problem of nation-building through the lens of economic exploitation and power relations between competing political elites (lords and knights) and the society (peasants). The other kind of discourse argues that ethnic oppression (የብሔር ጭቁና) causes the nation-building process problems in Ethiopia, and it emanates from unequal ethnic relations and domination of one ethnic group over other groups. The 'Amhara ethnic group' is depicted as the ruling and dominant elite group over others. This discourse claims that the Amhara used their privilege during modern state formation under emperor Menelik II and imposed their culture, language, religion, and values over other ethnic groups. The imposition of culture and language resulted in unequal relations between the Amhara and other ethnic groups. The Amhara are privileged to get access to*

*resources, power, and influence due to their ethnicity and are often considered the ruling elite (Respondent no. 18, 2022).*

Another senior political figure from the opposition camp said:

*Instead of advocating the assimilation principle of nation-building, Ethiopian elites had challenges because of a mentality that downplayed the value of managing diversity. However, they have a very extreme stance on violence. For instance, the General Mengistu Neway-led coup at the end of the 1950s, which caused the country to lose well-known patriots like Abebe Aregay and other high-ranking political and military elites, was regarded as a model of success and sowed the seeds of violence in the minds of the next generation, preventing them from serving their country. Forcible killings and detentions carried out by the Derg regime fourteen years later were made possible by the 1950s coup, which set a negative precedent in Ethiopian politics. The 1950s coup attempt set a bad precedent in Ethiopian politics for arbitrary killings and detention that happened fourteen years later by the Derg regime (Respondent no. 9, 2022).*

As noted by the former official, this discourse takes a central place in mainstream politics. Some scholars (respondent no. 30, 2022) refuted socialism as the right choice for nation-building. There was no tangible capitalist class and a well-established working class since the country was predominantly agrarian and the political infrastructure was feudalistic. These academics questioned the decision to use socialism as the foundational ideology for the country's post-1974 political transition. However, the dominant viewpoint of socialism by leftist groups masked their voices. Even though the ideas of the leftist groupings predominated, there were differences of opinion among them about creating a socialist state. For instance, the disagreement over how to enact socialism in Ethiopia between the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party (EPRP) and the All-Ethiopia Socialist Movement (MEISON) was a good example. Between 1975 and 1976, both sides argued about how to implement socialism in Ethiopia. According to Gilkes (1982), the EPRP advocated for the swift installation of a civilian government and supported a transition led by a civilian government. However, MEISON supported a transition led by a military government willing to provide "critical" and temporary support. The demand for immediate transfer of power to civilian rule was, according to a former *Derg* top official, difficult:

*The previous governing class would likely win and regain government control if elections were held. An unstable threat to national security was added to the Eritrean issue. The military ruling elite arrived at the point of no return following the revolution. However, they decided to continue on political power against their initial plan, which called for a seamless transition and the transfer of power to political forces chosen by the people. However, we could not do so because of the people's unrelenting demands. The people demanded that issues regarding the land be answered immediately by the tiller and others.*

*Any political entity that emerged after the revolution must address the land as the tiller matter because it was a driving reason behind the revolution (Respondent no. 1, 2023).*

Transferring authority to civilian government after the Ethiopian revolution seemed unfeasible for two reasons, as a former *Derg* top official explained. First, the military was forced to remain in power due to the lack of a strong political. Second, the absence of a united leftist political group indicated the possibility of defeat by political forces that supported or were loyal to the emperor. As I describe below, this topic is contentious in explaining the absence of organized political parties. As *Derg* officials repeatedly claimed in the interviews and some of their published memoirs, transferring authority or moving toward civilian government looked improbable (e.g., Fikreselassie, 2013). Ethiopian socialism, therefore, became an official ideology of nation-building in Ethiopia until 1991. However, it was not successful and did not yield the desired result. Scholars identified several reasons. However, the most fundamental reasons are summarized in two points. First, culturally speaking, there was a ‘dislocation,’ as contended by Messay Kebede (2008). Socialism was alien to Ethiopian society, and most of its values were hostile to the norms and values of Ethiopian social and religious life. Even if it gained wider acceptance and popularity in the early years, it gradually lost its acceptance and caused deep discontent. One of the top *Derg* officials reminisced:

*The original nation-building strategy emphasized democratization, social fairness, and radical political reform for quick economic development. However, we were compelled to embrace socialist doctrine due to the impact of the outside world and pressure from leftist political organizations, notably EPRP and AESM. We lacked any other options. In fact, at the outset, we defined Ethiopian socialism in terms of the notion of ህብረተሰባዊነት or ‘sociability.’ Our goal was to adopt a socialist ideology compatible with our society’s cultural, religious, social, and other aspects and to make the socialist philosophy suitable to Ethiopian reality. However, proponents of AESM and EPRP rejected this revolutionary theory and urged the nation to switch to scientific socialism. They strongly argued that there is no Arab, African, and Ethiopian socialism. There is only one socialism, i.e., scientific socialism. So, we were forced to adopt scientific socialism without conducting any proper study and assessment. To me, the nation-building failure of our time is attributed to this problem (Respondent no. 34, 2022).*

As clearly stipulated by the official, the major cause for the failure of socialism in Ethiopia is the incompatibility of the ideology with the cultural and social fabric of the society—the second factor associated with the economy. Socialism failed to transform the economy as anticipated at the outset of the revolution. Most scholars projected that the economy would become at least modestly industrialized after overthrowing the feudal system (ignoring the fact that agrarian

industrialization was already incipient). However, Socialism ruined the economy and, even worse, resulted in massive famine (partly due to economic mismanagement) and socio-political dismay. The third factor, as noted above, was that as the economy collapsed, socialism lost its credence. This paved the way for the rise of ethno-nationalists into power, with a new conception and venture of nation-building under the motto of ‘multiculturalism’.

#### 6.6.2 The Political Parties and Civic Associations

This aspect focuses on the institutional dimension that promotes smooth relations between the state and society. It is known as organizational structure, as noted in the earlier chapter. Organizational structures support alliance, cooperation, and unification across ethnic and cultural divides of the society. They act as gathering and interest articulation units. They appear as networks of connections between government agencies and voluntary associations like political parties, trade unions, and the like. If there is already a substantial network of these civic organizations, it is easy to forge relationships beyond ethnic boundaries (cp. Wimmer 2018). They hold people's interests so that state officials or politicians can interact with them more effectively. It is significant to reflect on the evolution of these organizations, particularly in the early years of state formation. If a complex web of these groups has already developed, the new power brokers can use it to organize supporters and find political leaders. Under these circumstances, it becomes less probable that ethnic minorities or even majorities will be politically excluded because many civic organizations have already established branches in regions of the nation home to various ethnic communities. Thus, the new leaders' support base and the leadership will be multi-ethnic.

In post-1974 Ethiopia, Marxism gained a receptive audience. However, the institutions of political parties and civil/civic society were fragile and non-existent. The successive regimes, including the military, had not allowed political parties to exist and operate legally. They also systematically undermined civil society organizations from taking root. This trend created complications during and after the 1974 revolution. One of the major setbacks was the absence of political parties who could take a lead role in the revolution. Despite domestic repression at the beginning of the 1970s, the student movement sought to develop into a revolutionary movement. It started to build toward engaging in armed conflict and founding a Marxist-Leninist party. In Ethiopia and abroad, various party-like organizations arose, most of which operated clandestinely. They included the Ethiopian People's Liberation Organization (EPLO), its headquarters in Algiers,

the All-Ethiopia Socialist Movement based in Western Europe, and several smaller organizations. The Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party (EPRP), officially founded in 1975 by the EPLO, merged several smaller groups and attracted tens of thousands of youths and laborers to its banners with the call for a "People's Provisional Government."

The vanguard communist party is theoretically the primary entity in a state-socialist society. The party's two main goals are to provide an authoritative interpretation of historical development laws and lead the revolutionary working class. The political power of the communist party also gains legitimacy in the process. Therefore, rather than being the enemy of the party, the state is, in theory and practice, an instrument of the party. The Ethiopian situation offers an intriguing and significant analog to this overarching rule of state socialist growth. The state, comprised of a military oligarchic ruling class, is the dominating institution, not the vanguard party. The state, as represented by the Provisional Military Administrative Council (PMAC), was in power since the beginning of the revolution. The *Derg* created an army and bureaucracy, which replaced the imperial era's king and sources of support and replaced the old guard and administrative officials. They were supported by a bureaucracy that carried out the orders of the top in the name of the rank and file. It appears that institutionalization will prevent it from playing a prominent role in social transformation. It is more likely to become just another tool in the hands of the (military oligarchic ruling elite), with its main function being to legitimize the dominant position of this new ruling class.

As explained above, the socialist-communist organizations could not form a political party in time for the revolution to begin. As a result, no strong and reliable political groups could be identified to represent the leftist side during the revolution. As previously indicated, the student movement gave rise to two political parties after the revolution: EPRP and AESM, which had little in common. The first political party in Ethiopia was the Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Party, formally established in August 1975. The Ethiopian Women's Organization, the Revolutionary Workers Union of Ethiopia, the Organization of Oppressed Soldiers, and the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Army were just a few of the large-scale groups it backed. According to reports, it had tens of thousands of members and sympathizers. Ethiopian People's Liberation Organization and numerous other currents merged to form the EPRP.

Despite having its headquarters in Algiers, the radical student leaders who created EPLO in West Berlin in 1972, including Tesfaye Debessay and Berhane-Meskel Redda, were also active



at the time. The *Abyot* ("Revolution") group led by Getachew Maru, sometimes referred to as "the first Maoist in Ethiopia," and Red Banner were among the other revolutionary organizations that it absorbed within EPRP. *Democracia* ("Democracy"), which started publishing clandestinely in 1974, was the group's primary journal. From 1976 until the 1980s, the journal's name changed to *Abyot* and was distributed in Europe by its foreign department. The military regime was seen by the EPRP as having hijacked the revolution of 1974, and they swiftly turned against it. In 1976, the *Derg* began a campaign of brutal, deadly repression against the EPRP, to which there was armed resistance, including retaliatory assassinations under the Red Terror campaign.

Another leftist political party was the AESM above (Meison), clandestinely established in 1968 by Ethiopian intellectuals residing in Europe and led most notably by the academician Haile Fida. Meison<sup>4</sup> remained a covert group until its leadership returned to Ethiopia in 1974. At that point, they started an underground newspaper known as *Ye Sefiw Hizb Dimts* or "Voice of the Broad Masses," distributed inexpensive Chinese Marxist-Leninist publications, and set up a bookshop. In contrast to the EPRP, Haile Fida collaborated with the *Derg* and became a top political counselor. Ironically, despite Meison being heavily affected by the anti-revisionist movement, the *Derg* advanced toward the Soviet Union under the guidance of Haile Fida. The initial wave of *Derg* persecution against EPRP was led mainly by Meison, making Meison a target for EPRP retaliation. Meison members became deeply ingrained in the *Derg*'s mass groups and the state apparatus, especially the state security apparatus. However, as the Soviet Union started to press the *Derg* to purge the nation of Chinese influences in the later months of 1977, Meison resisted growing Soviet dominance and joined the resistance. The "Red Terror" campaign of the *Derg* was extended against Meison, and its leader, Haile Fida, was detained and killed. The military's persecution of both parties put an end to hopes for a successful political transition utilizing a robust communist party as the vanguard. The break-up and purging of these parties not only weakened the leftist organizations in Ethiopia but also undermined the efforts of the military government to create a 'prosperous socialist nation-state.

During this time, when the proximate conditions for the 1974 revolution were set, there were many voluntary, loosely organized, semi-autonomous organizations. However, they were too apolitical and weak to form a cohesive civil society. These loosely organized associations were mostly used for social and some for economic purposes, such as *Edir* (self-help associations in

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<sup>4</sup> (In Amharic language) *Mela Ityoppya Soshalist Niqinaqē*.

time of death), *Iqub* (rotating saving and credit associations), and *Maheber* (associations based on kinship or religion), which predominantly served as self-assisting collectives. Some of these groups, like the Mecha-Tulema Association (an association bent on promoting development programs among the Oromo), which were perceived by the state as a threat to political society, were forced to be an outgoing ebb before their political wave gathered momentum. The modern civil society organizations initially appeared in the 1930s. Welfare agencies like the Red Cross began operating in the 1950s. Other local, national, and international CSOs began to thrive after the Red Cross was established. The concurrent famines in 1973–74 and 1984–85, under the Imperial and *Derg* governments, increased the number of CSOs and NGOs that provide humanitarian aid in Ethiopia (Clark, 2011). One prominent civil society and human rights advocate claims that:

*The lack of a robust civil society in Ethiopia is a critical issue that most Ethiopian scholars do not acknowledge when discussing the nation-building challenges. Because there is no civil society, there is no accountability in politics, and there is no system of checks and balances. Without a robust civil society, Ethiopia's authoritarianism would not have been sustained. To me, the lack of effective civic organizations and political parties is the primary societal cause of the dictatorship in Ethiopia. The military deliberately obliterated all traditional and modern civic associations during its reign. It considers civic organizations a threat* (Respondent no. 39, 2022).

As explained above, by the time the military assumed political power, no viable civil society could counterweight the military power. The military had an organizational advantage over other political organizations that surfaced after the revolution. Their political fate was not hard to forecast. Their “war of maneuver,” an attempt to take control of political power despite the backing of civil society, was doomed to failure, nor was the strategy of “war of position,” building civil society before state power is seized.

### 6.6.3 Public Goods as Glue of Nation-Building

For a nation-building effort to be effective, it is crucial to have the ability to offer public goods, and it will be an essential factor, as noted in the previous chapter. The term “public good” describes a good or service made available/accessible to everyone in a society (cf. Ostrom & Ostrom, 2019). Public goods, including national defense, infrastructure, education, and security, are provided for its citizens by the government in considerable amounts. The efficient operation of society—economically, politically, and culturally—requires the availability of public goods.

Without the physical and social infrastructure and their protection, society would have more difficulty sustaining itself. Governments typically provide these services, and taxes cover all of their costs.

According to Wimmer (2018), the capacity to provide public goods is another important indicator of nation-building. The more a government can provide public goods across all regions of a country, the more acceptable and legitimate to rule. The elite will be interested in establishing an alliance and integration with the political center. The ethnic composition of governing elites will reflect such encompassing alliance structures, and thus, the ethnic diversity of the population does not matter. The military government's ability to supply citizens with public goods was limited after the Ethiopian Revolution, which lasted from 1974 until 1991. The provision of essential services and social and physical infrastructure was subpar.

The military rule failed to provide public goods as expected by the public. It did not expand roads and other related facilities in its nearly two decades of rule. According to the records, in 1951, there were only 6,400 km of the total road network, of which 3,400 km were asphalt, and the remaining 3,000 km were gravel roads. Only urban regions contained the whole network. In 1973, while the Imperial monarchy was stumbling, the network had just expanded to 9,160 kilometers. Over the years 1951–1973, the network expanded on average at a pace of 2.05 percent per year. The stock road expanded to 19,017 km from 1974 to 1991 under the *Derg* dictatorship at a growth rate of 6.2 percent per year. There was a poor network of gravel and asphalt roads under the *Derg* reign. The poor road inter-linkage did not foster regional integration and connections between rural and urban areas (Worku Ibrahim, 2010). Even if the record showed growth in road expansion, the rate was inadequate and insufficient to contribute to successful nation-building.

Likewise, the elementary school coverage considerably outpaced imperial time, although not to the degree anticipated. The late 1970s and early 1980s saw a significantly more significant expansion of basic schooling. The gross enrolment ratio of the primary schools rose from 15.8% in 1974 to 36.2% in the 1988–1989 school years. The number and placement of schools, as well as the size and makeup of the student body, all underwent considerable growth. The military government made a considerable shift in expanding the school by focusing on small towns and rural areas that had been ignored during the imperial administration. The aim was to ensure a more equitable distribution of schools in all geographical areas. According to Alemayehu and Lasser (2012), this move actually garnered massive support from the public during the initial phase of the

revolution. However, the collapse of the economy and failure to supply other public goods exacerbated the crumbling of the new nation-building endeavor.

Early on, the *Derg* had ambitious intentions to expand basic healthcare, including a program for community health workers, but the implementation of these plans was hampered by limited budget spending. The focus on primary healthcare and the expansion of rural health services are the cornerstones of the government's approach to healthcare, yet the budget allotted for it was just 3.5% of the overall budget. After ten years of the revolution, there were 87 hospitals in total, with 11,296 beds, or one bed for every 3,734 people. There were 141 health facilities and 1,949 health stations in the 20,000 rural *kebeles*. However, many of them lacked a doctor (Kloos, 1998). Accessibility to the health service for the majority of rural people was far from reality. People from rural areas traveled a day or half to reach the nearby health centers (Kloos, *ibid*).

The political economy aspect of the ties between the state and its citizens concerned the resources that they exchanged. Citizens were more likely to politically support a government that provides public goods in exchange for the taxes, dues, and fees collected from them. The more a government is capable of providing public goods across all regions of a country, the more attractive it will be as an exchange partner, and the more citizens will attempt to establish an alliance with it. The composition of government will reflect such encompassing alliance structures and thus the ethnic diversity of the population. Citizens who receive public goods in return for their political loyalty and their taxes are also more likely to embrace the nationalist rhetoric generated and propagated by governing elites and their intellectual aides (Chege, 1979).

People's confidence in socialist ideology and nation-building had been low and shaky as a result of the *Derg's* inadequate capacity to offer fundamental public services. The people's lack of trust in nation-building as a result of this constraint emerged as the primary factor in its failure.

#### 6.6.4 Linguistic and Education Policy as Integrative Element of Nation-Building

The third key aspect of successful nation-building involves the development of effective communication strategies. Establishing a common language and script through linguistic and educational initiatives can transform a diverse society into a unified and cohesive one. This enables people to connect across ethnic and geographical boundaries, strengthening and enduring relationships. Additionally, a shared script facilitates the spread of political networks throughout a nation, reducing barriers to effective governance. For example, using a standard script in Ethiopia

has helped bridge linguistic divides and facilitates communication among its diverse population. This scriptural homogeneity has also allowed for the recruitment of the bureaucratic elite through standardized written tests, ensuring that no region is marginalized due to linguistic differences. A standard script has enabled diverse political groups to communicate and collaborate, fostering a more cohesive and inclusive society.

Hence, language and educational policies play a vital role in successful nation-building. In Ethiopia alone, more than 84 languages can be categorized under the language families of Semitic, Cushitic, Omotic, and Nilotic. The highest density of languages is found in the western and southwest of Ethiopia, while in the eastern parts, we observe a greater degree of homogeneity (Záhořík & Teshome, 2009). One notable effort during 1974-1991 was the policy decision to conduct adult literacy programs in fifteen ethnic languages (Mamo, 1982). The literacy program (campaign) started in 1979 and ended only at the fall of the socialist government in 1991. The other noteworthy language policy was transcribing various languages in the Ethiopic (Fidel) script, most of which were in unwritten form hitherto. However, the use of these languages was limited to the non-formal education sector. The government did not push forward to use them as instructional languages in the formal system. (Germa Amare, 2006).

Under the guise of socialist doctrine, the National Democratic Revolution program restored the equality of Ethiopian ethno-linguistic groups and their various languages. The statement "In the People's Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, all ethnic groups are equal" refers to the equality of ethnic groupings (Shehim, 1985). The National Democratic Revolution Program of Socialist Ethiopia, which was published in 1976, states the following in Article 5: The right of self-determination of all nationalities will be recognized and fully respected. No nationality will dominate another one since each nationality's history, culture, language, and religion will be recognized equally by the spirit of socialism. Each nationality will have regional autonomy to decide on matters concerning its internal affairs. Within its environs, it has the right to determine the contents of its political, economic, and social life using its language.

The inclusion of "self-determination" of ethno-linguistic communities and equal governmental recognition of their languages and cultures were the main policy directions adopted by the military regime, as the article indicates. The *Derg's* language policy declaration, ordering equal recognition for all languages and speakers, was seen as a positive development for nation-building and a way to ease interethnic tensions. The founding of the then-Institute of Nationalities

in the middle of the 1980s- made up of illustrious linguists, economists, geographers, and political scientists- was one of *Derg's* additional progressive actions. The Institute's primary goal was to do in-depth research on the ethnic makeup of society, politics, and the economy of various ethnic groups, as well as on their languages. Additionally, the Ethiopian Language Academy was restructured in 1985 and given the mandate to monitor and research language-related issues in the nation, introduce a writing system for the previously unwritten languages, create dictionaries, grammar books, and literary works, expand language vocabulary, and create grammatical and sociolinguistic documentation (cp. Amsalu, 1982).

The new policy approach after 1974 helped to pave the way for multilingualism in Ethiopia's multiethnic setting. As a national adult literacy initiative utilizing numerous minority languages, the "National Literacy Campaign" began in 1975. Legalizing the literary use of fifteen indigenous languages was one of the clear benefits of the (1975–1990) national literacy drive. Afaan Oromo, Tigrinya, Tigre, Wolaitta, Sidaama, Haadiyya, Kambaata, Afar, Saho, Gedeo, Somali, Kafaanono, Silt'e and Kunama were among the languages spoken. The training was conducted in these fifteen languages, including Amharic, which comprise around 95% of the population. The Ministry of Information launched the publication of *Bariisaa*, a weekly Oromo newspaper, in 1975 (Zelalem, 2012). 1974, Ethiopia had an almost 93% illiteracy rate (*ibid*). It fell to roughly 23% in 1989 due to widespread adult education campaigns with the slogan "National Work Campaign for Development through Cooperation" and the use of multiple languages as instruction mediums. 1987, the PDRE constitution mentioned the government's overt language policy. The constitution's Article 2-Subsection 3 recognized the equal recognition of all languages and the right of speakers to advance their languages. The Democratic Republic of Ethiopia's working language is Amharic, according to Article 116 of the constitution. The constitution also affirmed that the ethnicities of Ethiopia, which mainly were classified according to language, had the right to self-determination. These rights rectify the freedom of preserving, practicing, and developing cultural, religious, and linguistic heritages of ethnic groups (Zelalem, 2012).

The *Derg* promoted Amharic as the country's official language, using a strategy similar to the imperial era. Amharic, the most widespread language, remained the primary language of instruction in the nation's schools. As a result, while the imperial authority was committed to creating an educated elite that spoke Amharic, the *Derg* tried to make Amharic widely used (Tekeste, 2006). In contrast to the imperial era, there were significant advancements in language

treatment difficulties between 1974 and 1991, as was already established (Alemu & Tekleselassie, 2006). The *Derg* policies were more progressive than those made during the imperial era. As stated repeatedly, the policy provided equal treatment for all ethnic groups, languages, and customs. In addition to lowering the illiteracy rate, another policy benefit was the literacy campaign's use of local languages, which resulted in a positive impression among diverse ethnic groups. The language policy often has the following two characteristics. Like its predecessor, it first promoted Amharic as the official working language. This decision continues the military government's policy of using Amharic as its primary language of communication throughout the nation's construction. However, this policy attitude had unfavorable effects. Amharic's continued uses as some ethnic groups see the national tongue as a sign of cultural exploitation and a disregard for other cultures and languages. Second, the policy continued to support Amharic as a language of instruction and other languages as a medium of mass communication. However, the military government's efforts did not receive enough recognition for its policy.

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#### 6.6.5 National Symbols for Cement Nation-Building

National symbols such as flags and anthems are vital to nation and state building. States use a variety of symbolic representations to foster nationalism. They do this by using symbols to help all segments of the nation feel more united. However, competing ethnic and political groups frequently disagree with the flag, anthem, and other symbols. Usually, symbols split the country

instead of bringing it together. Therefore, national symbols representing the nation are the subject of disputes and debates (Kolst, 2006). In the Ethiopian case, the national flag is controversial and a source of conflict among competing ethnic groups. However, the national flag is one of the oldest and is considered by other African countries and Black societies in the Caribbean as a symbol of victory and a sign of emancipation (Stratford, 2011); domestically, it is painted as a symbol of exploitation and domination by ethnic-elites. The ethno-nationalists would prefer to avoid recognizing it as a symbol of the nation (Goshu & Castro, 2016).

According to one political leader:

*Ethiopia's current flag, which is green, yellow, and red, dates back to the old imperial era. It is frequently used as a metaphor for inequality, exploitation, and dominance. A national dialogue should be held to bring about agreement among divergent opinions over the national flag. It is important to revive the story surrounding the flag. The flag should be a unifying factor, not a source of dispute (Respondent no. 14, 2022).*

During the military rule, the government gave due attention to promoting national symbols as a means of effective nation-building effort. Throughout its 17-year reign, the military rulers promoted national symbols such as the flag, the national anthem, and specific artifacts as means of nation-building. According to one scholar:

*The Derg put much effort into popularizing national symbols, emphasizing the national anthem and flag. The national flag ordinance had to be observed in government buildings, educational institutions, and security facilities. It was also required to salute the national flag and sing the national anthem. So, students sing the national anthem at school, and employees salute flags at work. This custom has fostered a strong sense of patriotism and Ethiopian nationalism. Additionally, by including Ethiopian history in the curriculum, the government has tried to instill a sense of shared nationalism and pride in the youth. However, this effort did not continue and stopped with the change of government in the post-1991 period (Respondent no. 47, 2021).*

During the military rule in Ethiopia, there was a strong emphasis on teaching Ethiopian history at all levels of the education system. Ethiopian history was made a core part of the primary and secondary educational curriculum to foster a shared history and identity among the diverse ethnic groups in the country. However, this approach did not create a common consensus among the competing ethnic groups. The *Derg* regime's 'Ethiopianist' version of history was rejected by emerging ethno-nationalist movements such as TPLF, EPLF, OLF and ONLF, who argued that the history of Ethiopia was based on selective and biased narratives that glorified a few individuals while ignoring the diverse histories of the country. Despite these criticisms, courses on Ethiopian



history continue to be widely offered in all schools (Sisay & Enguday, 2022). According to one of the former *Derg* officials:

*Ethiopia is a historic nation with a long and rich past. The state's formation and its continued existence have experienced ups and downs. Invasion and incursion attempts by foreign powers had been made on multiple occasions. We sacrificed blood and lives in order to overcome all of these obstacles. Here, we can highlight the Adwa triumph that freed our nation from colonial yoke and established us as the only sovereign nation in Africa. We are Africa's pride. We aimed to instill national pride in the next generation. For this reason, we placed primary emphasis on history education. We sincerely believe that history could be used to bring diverse ethnic groups together (Respondent no. 33, 2022).*

As the former *Derg* official remarked, the government approach was not well received by ethno-nationalists, even though it emphasized history teaching to create a sense of shared identity. The ethno-nationalists frequently claim that Ethiopian history is convoluted, contentious, and lacking in general agreement. One scholar explains the controversy surrounding the Ethiopian history as follows:

*Ethiopia is an ancient country with a lengthy history and civilization. This has previously been documented and is supported by academic study and a book that has been written. However, Ethiopia's ancient history is rejected by ethno-nationalists. They do not acknowledge it as a part of Ethiopia's shared ethnic past. Instead, they contend that the old history of Ethiopia only tells the tale of North Ethiopia and does not encompass the entire nation. They are adamant that the nation's history needs to be reviewed and revised to consider all Ethiopians' histories. How you disrespect and ignore your nation's past is abhorrent (Respondent no. 43, 2022).*

In conclusion, national symbols like flags and anthems can play a crucial role in nation-building by fostering unity and shared identity. However, in diverse countries like Ethiopia, they often become sources of dispute among competing ethnic groups. The Ethiopian national flag is seen as a symbol of victory and emancipation by some, while others view it as a sign of exploitation and domination. Similarly, History education in Ethiopia has been a source of contention, particularly during the military rule of the *Derg* regime. While the regime aimed to instill a shared identity and patriotism through teaching Ethiopian history, ethno-nationalist movements criticized it for being selective and biased towards the imperial legacy. They demanded a revision of history that would be more inclusive and representative of all ethnic groups in the country. Achieving a balanced narrative that embraces the diverse experiences and perspectives of the population is essential for fostering unity and pride in the nation.

## Summary

The Ethiopian Revolution of the 1970s, led by the *Derg* military junta, brought significant political, social, and economic changes to Ethiopia. Various factors, including the oppressive feudalist-imperial system, economic stagnation, and social disparities, triggered it. The revolution gained momentum through the Ethiopian Student Movement, which raised questions about ethnic equality and land reform and led to nationwide protests. The revolution resulted in the establishment of a republic, the nationalization of land, and the introduction of a unique socialist ideology.

Numerous scholars and authors have studied the revolution, providing insights into its origins, progression, and aftermath. Memoirs by former *Derg* officials offer first-hand accounts. While the revolution is considered a turning point in Ethiopian history, dismantling the old imperial system and giving rise to a new power elite, the *Derg* also faced massive criticism for its repressive tactics, human rights abuses, and the devastating famine of the 1980s. 1991, the *Derg* was overthrown, marking another new chapter in Ethiopia's political landscape.

The revolution led to a shift in elite recruitment, with the military, political parties, universities, and training institutions playing a role. The ruling elite during the *Derg* regime consisted of individuals embracing socialist-oriented Ethiopian nationalism and prioritizing loyalty to the regime. However, the decline in competence and quality of the ruling elite and the politicization of education had negative impacts.

The revolution had dissolved previous institutions and abolished old power elites, replacing them with the military, technocrats, and 'representatives of the people'. However, power struggles and purges disintegrated the experienced parts of the power elite, resulting in a lack of integration among different groups. The *Derg* regime implemented Ethiopian socialism as an ideology for nation-building, emphasizing self-reliance, labor dignity, and Ethiopian unity. However, socialism faced challenges due to its incompatibility with Ethiopian society, which led to economic decline, dislocation of cultural practices, and discontent among the population. The failure of socialism paved the way for a new venture of nation-building under the motto of multi-ethnicity/'multiculturalism'.

The military government struggled to provide essential public services, hindering nation-building. Inadequate infrastructure, healthcare, and education limited progress. Communication

initiatives aimed to bridge linguistic and educational gaps among diverse societies. Efforts were made to promote literacy programs in ethnic languages and recognize the rights of ethno-linguistic groups. However, the decision to promote Amharic as the official language faced criticism.

Disagreements arose among ethnic groups regarding national symbols and history education. The national flag and history curriculum were interpreted differently, with some seeing them as symbols of victory and others as signs of exploitation. Establishing a balanced narrative that acknowledges the diverse experiences and perspectives of the population is essential for fostering unity and pride in the nation, a goal that was not achieved under the *Derg*.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### THE ELITE AND NATION-BUILDING UNDER *EPRDF*'S RULE (1991-2018)

#### 7.1 State and Nation Rebuilding Based on Ethnic Identity

With the overthrow of the military rule (the *Derg* regime) in 1991, ethnicity became the dominant political philosophy of Ethiopia's ruling political class. According to Abbink (2012), ethnic-based federalism, inspired by a neo-Leninist political paradigm known as 'revolutionary democracy', was one of Ethiopia's central tenets implemented by the post-1991 government. Ethnic identity was considered the cornerstone of politics under this dispensation, developed by the ruling Tigray People's Liberation Front (which was dominant in the ruling coalition EPRDF). The concept of a pan-Ethiopian identity was de-emphasized, while the constitutional recognition of identities that were thought to be previously marginalized communities was prioritized. The new political order granted ethnic and cultural rights to various ethnic groups and allowed them to play a role in the country's mainstream politics. Identity-based politics made ethnic divides eventually flare up, and political liberties, respect for human rights, and economic equality became problematic as the regime unfolded. The foundation of the Ethiopian state in 1991 was built upon the concept of 'unity in diversity'. At its core, the state's formation was centered on recognizing the rights of the 'nations, nationalities and peoples' (NNP) of Ethiopia to have autonomy and on enabling them to exercise self-determination. Before analyzing the state/nation-building initiatives undertaken by EPRDF, it is important to briefly describe how ethnic-based ideology and politics in Ethiopia first took root and then progressively became the dominant elements in the political order in post-1991.

The term "ethnic politics" describes a situation in which politicians frequently use ethnic identity as a rallying point for support and where constituents frequently back politicians who belong to the same ethnic group (Posner, 2005; Chandra, 2006). When members of various groups start to view one another as rivals for control, and when they think they will not receive official protection and help if "one of their own" is not in power, ethnic politics is frequently seen as an

issue. Many contend that ethnic politics ought to be contained, eliminated, or handled through specific institutional arrangements since it frequently encourages inter-ethnic friction and bloodshed (Lynch, 2015). There is a growing academic consensus that (aspiring) elites play a crucial role in political mobilization, which is necessary for contending ethnic nationalisms. In other words, elites are instrumental in orchestrating the (ethno-) nationalist movements, shaping the agenda, and providing the necessary leadership to achieve predetermined objectives (cf. Merera 2004). Ethiopia saw the emergence of an organized ethno-nationalist political movement in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, mainly due to its unsuccessful modernization efforts. Many scholars attribute the roots of ethnic politics in Ethiopia to Haile Selassie's flawed approach to nation-building, which marginalized certain ethnic groups from the core of the nation's political and economic decision-making. Interestingly, the anti-state resistance initially arose in Eritrea, the former Italian colony (1890-1941), because they were not explicitly ethnic. The annexation of the federated region of Eritrea by the imperial government in 1962, along with exclusionary policies, sparked organized nationalist political opposition, which later served as an inspiration and focal point for ethno-regional movements across Ethiopia. According to Messay (1999), Emperor Haile Selassie's autocratic rule post-annexation led to isolation and stagnation in Eritrea, further fueling Eritrean nationalist protests, which were fragmented. Erlich (also cited by Messay, *ibid.*), claimed the following on Eritrean nationalism:

*The province was annexed not because Addis Ababa had the power to force it but essentially because the strong elements in Eritrean society of the time wanted it. They did so mainly because they wanted to participate, spiritually and materially, not in the life of a provincial Eritrea but in the life of great Ethiopia, which promised them better possibilities in various fields (Erlich 1986: 208).*

As Messay (1999) further noted, the Eritrean elite became frustrated when the government did not keep its promises, leading to a rise in Eritrean nationalism. During the British military rule (1941-1952), ill-advised policy and tight centralization considerably broadened the base of dissident nationalism. In addition to the growing Eritrean dissent, the Eritrean nationalist movement also sparked ethnic-based liberation movements in other parts of Ethiopia: it inspired the emergence of the Somali, Tigrayan, Oromo, Afar, and other ethnic-nationalist groups in Ethiopia. The Eritrean liberation movement's nationalist approach and military triumphs were a template for other ethno-nationalist political opposition movements (cf. Messay 2009). Above all, the military accomplishments of the Eritrean resistance persuaded other movements to use

separatist language and tactics to succeed. Other forms of contestation and conflict were either dropped altogether or relegated to second place. Similarly, Gebru (2009) asserted that the Tigrayan ethnic-nationalist movement emerged within the Ethiopian student movement in the early 1970s and further strengthened ties with the Eritrean nationalist movement. He explains his points as follows:

*Tigrayan self-awareness became more pronounced after the Eritrean insurgency and the rise of a radical student movement and solidified during the civil war. This does not mean that Tigrayan social identity was a made-up concept only popularized and legitimized by armed conflict. Instead, it emphasizes that the emergence of a creative and manipulative social movement was more rooted in the material foundation of a unified state than in a fundamental ethnic identification with ideas of exclusion from state power and its resources. The success of the insurgent leadership was due to its ability to bridge the gap between its own political goals and the material needs of the population. The ethno-nationalist movement was driven to victory by combining the insurgent leaders' unmet political and educational aspirations and the widespread desire to abolish socially oppressive conditions (Gebru, 2009, p. 82).*

As Gebru pointed out, the Eritrean independence war served as a significant inspiration for the Tigrayan nationalist movement, which then gained momentum in different parts of the Tigray Region. The rise of insurgencies in both Eritrea and Tigray (refer to Aregawi 2009) also reinforced the role of ethno-nationalists in the Ethiopian political discourse. According to one of the top former *Derg* officials:

*The pan-Ethiopianist and Leftist groups ultimately destroyed one another in their power struggle. Several national politicians of Ethiopia lost their lives as a result of the red and white terrors. The ethno-nationalist groups solidified their position and became the dominant political forces in mainstream Ethiopian politics as the pan-Ethiopian political camp grew weaker and more vulnerable. Ethno-nationalist discourses and narratives subsumed the pan-Ethiopian group's thoughts and ideas. The TPLF's ascent to power using the EPRDF as a tool signaled the end of the role played by the pan-Ethiopian camp in Ethiopian politics (Respondent no. 1, 2022).*

The position and survival of the pan-Ethiopian political camp were significantly impacted by the politics of destruction within the camp, as highlighted by the high ex-official of the *Derg*. This made it easier for the ethno-nationalists to dominate and control state politics and for ethno-nationalism to take root. According to Messay (1999), ethno-nationalism is an ideology contrived to further the economic interests of the ruling ethno-regional elites. Dissident nationalism grows whenever solidarity and integrative nationalisms fail or are hindered by historical circumstances. He further argued that there is no better way of corroborating the theory of ethno-nationalism than

by a concrete study of the instances favoring its growth, usually the result of exclusionary policy and loss of power. In Ethiopia, centralization in the name of modernization is the ultimate cause of all exclusions. The first victims of Emperor Haile Selassie's exclusion policy were the traditional nobility and the pre-war intellectuals:

*The stagnation of economic growth, the increasing needs of modern life, both in terms of individual consumption and the running of the state machinery, population growth, the spread of modern education, etc., tend to accentuate scarcity and competition. Consequently, exclusion and appropriation for power appear as the only way to control resources... ethnicity, both as a policy of exclusion and as a reaction to exclusion, could not have found a better justification and function (Messay, 1999, p. 313).*

Ethno-nationalism in Ethiopia is a political ideology cultivated and propagated by rural 'educated' elites to obtain political power and fulfill their economic aspirations. For instance, Gebru (2009) asserted that TPLF used 'Tegaru' identity<sup>5</sup> as an anchor to mobilize Tigrayan nationalism. According to Gebru, Tigrayan nationalism was spearheaded by TPLF (after it neutralized its predecessor, the TLF or Tigray Liberation Front), and he pointed at three characteristics of the TPLF as follows:

*First, the TPLF was a by-product of the Ethiopian student movement, and many of its leaders were inspired by the same idealistic and egalitarian ideas of social change. Second, the TPLF tapped into a powerful feeling of alienation among many of the modern sectors of society—the urbanites—from the central authority, which they saw as distant and unconcerned yet exploitative. Third, the above analysis does not devalue the centrality of language and culture as independent driving or motivating forces for such social movements; as the histories of Basque and Catalan nationalism in Spain attest, for instance, poverty or economic marginalization is not the only reason for the rise of autonomist or separatist nationalisms. Economic prosperity can be not only an antidote to nationalism but its springboard. That said, if political power and material entitlement were the Tigrayan and Eritrean insurgents' goals, it was the war by which they attained them (2009: 82).*

According to Markakis (2011:163, 189), the explanation of the differences among student movement activists in their struggle against military rule in Ethiopia (after 1974) was that one side held the view that popular mobilization must transcend nationality divisions and rely on class solidarity, while the opposing side argued that in certain instances nationality contradictions ought to be resolved first through a struggle of national liberation, as a prerequisite to winning the class struggle. The latter was the view of those who formed the TPLF.

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<sup>5</sup> Name given to Tigrean ethno-nationalism.

## 7.2 The Rise of Ethno-Nationalist Elites

### 7.2.1 The Radicalization of Ethiopian Politics

As noted by Messay Kebede (1999), the Eritrean uprising, the Tigrayan revolt, and the Oromo ethnic-nationalist movements were led and propagated by elite elements from rural areas that were associated with or led by urban-based (aspiring) elites in terms of leadership and their ideological texture. The leading activists of the movements are, by and large, a result of the frustration of not having power or representation or fearing impending loss of power, and they perceived themselves as victims of exclusion by Emperor Haile Selassie's centralization policy.

The Tigrayan nationalist movement, which emerged in 1975, was a direct consequence of the social tensions provoked by an authoritarian regime striving for modernization. This movement was a reaction to Haile Selassie's early and discriminatory imperial rule, which was characterized by economic inequality, oppression, lack of democratic representation, and cultural marginalization. Ethnicity was exploited to advance the political and economic interests of a marginalized social class that felt excluded from imperial Ethiopia's modernization efforts. Gebru Tareke succinctly described the Tigray-based ethnic movement as follows:

*In the 1970s, Tigray did not experience a revolutionary upheaval despite the presence of common catalysts for revolt, such as poverty, oppression, and alienation. Although the population grew, the amount of land available per person decreased steadily, leading to a decline in cultivated land. Widespread poverty, high unemployment, and pervasive corruption were longstanding issues, but there was no indication of a collective awareness of these problems among the people of Tigray. Instead, a small group of radical urban intellectuals were responsible for initiating the revolutionary war, and it required considerable effort to rally the rural population. Ultimately, the revolution's success was due to the determined leadership, the active support of the mobilized population, the dedication of the fighters, and the leadership's ability to appeal to ethnic and territorial loyalties over class allegiance. By transforming provincialism into peasant ethno-nationalism, the insurgents could lead their movement to victory (2009: 83).*

By the mid-1960s, Haile Selassie I University had become the focal point of a student movement that was evolving into a significant force for political activism, aiming at bringing about meaningful socio-political change. Messay (2008) attributes the movement's origins to the imperial regime's failure to address the urgent socio-political issues affecting Ethiopians and the specific concerns voiced by the educated elite.



The university provided a relatively open platform for discussing political issues, especially compared to other sections of society. Thanks to a strong advocacy effort, students secured the right to form their groups, hold meetings on campus, and publish their articles. These freedoms facilitated the spread of radical ideas and fostered collaboration between educated elites and students. In addition to the relative freedom of speech and the right to association, the government's lenient treatment of students and avoidance of harsh coercion further contributed to the rise of radicalism.

According to Messay (2008), if the government had been more receptive to the reformist students' proposals, it could have helped the moderate leaders demonstrate the effectiveness of reformism. However, resisting even minimal reforms, the government inadvertently pushed most students to embrace radical viewpoints. Messay (*ibid.*) added that on top of rejecting reforms, the government applied a policy of systematic repression, which made the moderate student movement leadership lose ground. The repressive measures undertaken by the regime enabled the radicals to claim that the situation was hopeless and that all forms of moderation were utterly inappropriate and inefficient. He elaborated as follows:

*In addition to blocking reforms and creating despair, a repressive state actually works toward the promotion of radical leaders. When frightened by repression, moderate leaders leave the scene, radical students step in both to air demands specific to the student population and to spread their ideological beliefs. The withdrawal of moderate leaders confirms the extent to which repression cripples moderation. In the face of sacrifices and risks, the radicals have an incontestable edge, given their initial commitment to the cause of revolution. The more dangerous the situation becomes, the greater the prospect for radical students to come to the forefront of the struggle (Messay, 2008: 28).*

The success of radical groups in converting many students to radicalism can only be fully explained by considering the passionate influence of Marxist-Leninist philosophy. Enthusiasm, combined with socio-political circumstances, plays a crucial role in radical groups' success, as it is closely linked with their exceptional determination, dedication to the cause, and strong organizational skills. Lack of inclusivity among the various elite factions led to contradictions that were the root of the radicalization of recent Ethiopian politics. According to Merera (2003b), the contradictions within and between the old/traditional and the modern educated elites contributed to the radicalization of Ethiopia's politics. He further addressed this point as follows:

*Paradoxically, Ethiopia's ruling class, which survived the Italians, did not move by the shock waves and once again preoccupied itself with the consolidation of power rather than facing the challenges of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The outcome was, on the one hand, a growing*

*contradiction between the traditional elite, which was refusing to give way to the rising modern elite, and the latter was caught in a contradiction of its own, on the other. The traditional political elite felt threatened by the modern elite, and instead of giving way to the latter, it was drawn into an endless competition/conflict. The modern elite, on its part, entered the struggle with a more severe contradiction within itself, i.e., the multi-national goal, which was aimed at the need to change the country as a whole, and an ethnic/regional agenda, which was aimed at the need to end the marginalization of the hitherto subjected peoples. Thus, the new phenomenon of inter- and intra-elite struggles began, culminating in the demise of the country's ancient regime in 1974 (Merera, 2003b: 146).*

Andargachew (1993) suggests that by 1960, Ethiopian politics had become increasingly radicalized, leading to a shift in power from the old aristocracy to a new elite. Although the monarchy existed, it struggled to remain relevant to these new elites, which had taken over military and administrative functions. This power shift led to the emergence of a Marxist-Leninist intellectual approach among students, particularly within the Ethiopian Student Movement (ESM). The ESM was heavily influenced by external ideologies and the ongoing internal dynamics of Ethiopia, making it difficult to fit within a Marxist framework. Additionally, opposition forces and uprisings in peripheral areas further contributed to the radicalization of the student movements. These movements also significantly impacted radical civil movements, the military, and members of the government structure, including government employees, university students, and military personnel both within and outside the country. Andargachew (1993) further explained how radical ideas created fertile ground for ethno-nationalist movements:

*Popularization by the Addis Ababa University students of the thorny question of the right of national self-determination as an appropriate solution in the Ethiopian context gave secession a cloak of respectability that had not been there previously. One of the spin-offs of this was the departure of the Eritrean students and graduates from Addis Ababa and Asmara en masse to the ELF, culminating finally in the emergence of the EPLF led by leftist elites (Andargachew, 1993: 30).*

The ESM, he continued, adopted Marxism-Leninism as the right ideology to pursue in order to overthrow the imperial government. It further served as the foundation for the formation of Leninist-Maoist parties. The ESM advocated radical reforms regarding land redistribution and democratic rights. According to Bahru:

*The radicalization of Ethiopian students [.....] is both the cumulative nature of the process and the manifold influences that brought it about. It cannot be subsumed under one convenient rubric of cultural dislocation or the undue influence of a small minority, as*

*Messay attempts to do. Least of all, one can speak of the entire process as a manufactured movement'. The role of the Crocodiles<sup>6</sup> and their followers in agitating the student population to come out in protest is an indisputable fact. But that was one of a number of factors that contributed to the adoption of ever more radical positions. These other factors were both internal and external. They included...the 1960 coup-even though it was abortive, and maybe because of that African scholarship students, global influences, and the heavy-handed reactions of the government and the university administration to student initiatives (Bahru, 2014: 151).*

While the Ethiopian student movement played a crucial role in shaping Ethiopian politics and achieving significant political change, it also contributed to the polarization and violence that characterized Ethiopian politics in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In the early 1970s, the student movement aligned itself with leftist political groups such as the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party (EPRP) and the All-Ethiopia Socialist Movement (*MEISON*), advocating for radical social and political change, including the restructuring of the state and self-autonomy for various ethnic groups. However, the subsequent rise of ethnic-based liberation movements led to a departure from the student movement's initial ideals, marking the emergence of ethno-elites, which will be discussed in the following section.

#### 7.2.2 The Evolution of Ethno-Nationalists

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, the 'national question' issue began to take center stage in the political discussions within the Ethiopian student movement. Since 1991, it has become a significant factor in Ethiopia's political ideology and power structure. The initial *Woyyane* rebellion in Tigray from 1941 to 1943, the *Mecha-Tulema* Oromo Self-Help Association, and the Bale uprising from 1964 to 1970 (as documented in Østebø 2020) stand out as examples of popular movements rooted in ethno-nationalist sentiments since 1941. The nationalities/national question made its way into student politics in the late 1960s and has continued to gain prominence since it was not the primary focus of the student movement (Bahru, 2014).

Bahru (2014) posits that the emergence of ethno-nationalism can be traced back to the alienation and isolation of the ruling elite, which began with the emperor's centralization of power in 1941. This centralization resulted in the loss of hereditary rights and internal autonomy for regions, leading to assimilation under imperial rule and dissatisfaction with the regional governors chosen by the emperor. The Italian forces, during their brief occupation from 1936-1941, also

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<sup>6</sup> The 'Crocodiles' were a radical student group within the ESM.

played a role in undermining Ethiopian nationhood by fostering ethnic conflict. They propagated a narrative that portrayed Ethiopia as a collection of disparate ethnic groups oppressed by Amhara colonial rule, which led to the division of the Ethiopian people into 'oppressors' and 'oppressed'.

Missionaries from Europe, mainly from Scandinavia, further contributed to the erosion of Ethiopian unity and nationalism by fostering ethnic identity in various regions of Ethiopia and Eritrea (Fantahun, 2014). According to one of the interviewees:

*The missionaries wanted to undermine the Ethiopian Orthodox Church's societal supremacy and influence on political life. Using the local language and culture, they offered evangelism to win souls and win over many followers. In some areas, they also preached the Orthodox faith as belonging to the ruling class and the Amhara ethnic group, which later created the groundwork for the rise of ethno-elites in numerous areas (Respondent no. 30, 2022).*

The above argument makes sense since most of the ethno-nationalist movements originated in areas where missionaries widely operated, such as former provinces like Wollega, where the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) was dominantly based for many decades; Eritrea, the homeland of ELF and EPLF, and Tigray, similarly the home base of TPLF, can also be cited here as examples.

The political transition after the end of the Italian occupation in 1941 faced numerous challenges. Certain political factions supported by the Italian government posed a significant threat to the emperor, prompting him to restructure provincial boundaries and centralize power in regional administrations. This led to a reconfiguration of provinces and a more effective mixing of cultures, but paradoxically, it also fueled the rise of ethno-nationalist movements in different regions.

The initial *Woyyane* revolt, rooted in ethno-nationalist sentiments, arose from the marginalization of Tigrayans and their traditional leader. Meanwhile, the Gojjam and the Bale peasant movements were driven by the pressing need for land and tax reforms, each with regional and ethno-nationalist underpinnings. Even the *Mecha-Tulema* Association, a precursor to Oromo nationalism, began as a self-help organization focused on improving education, communication, and health. In Eritrea, the centralization effort led to a loss of autonomy and direct imperial rule, sparking armed resistance that eventually grew into a full-fledged uprising (cf. Messay, 2008; Bahru, 2014; Gebru T., 2009).

The first group of Ethiopians to address the national question was the reformist-educated elite of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. In that period, two categories of works and issues raised by Ethiopian

intellectuals could be distinguished, with the influential early 20th-century intellectual Gebre-Heywet Baykedagn(1886–1919) being a prominent figure. However, there was little evidence that Ethiopian students were considering the kind of drastic answer that would become the norm after 1969 before the national question erupted onto the national stage in that year. Ethno-nationalism evolved into a political ideology in response to the piece that Walleign Mekonnen, a second-year political science student at Haile Selassie I University<sup>7</sup>, published in the periodical *Struggle* of 1969 with the heading "On the question of nationalities in Ethiopia". He contended that Ethiopia was made up of a dozen different ethnicities, each of which had its language, manner of clothing, history, and social norms, but that 'Amharisation' was imposed upon them.

Since its inception, the student movement, which was disharmonious of several groups and tendencies, was burdened with intractable and ultimately fatal problems, as Gebru suggested:

*The diverse social and ethnic backgrounds of the students, their divergent experiences and views, and their pursuit of clashing and often incompatible goals, strategies, and tactics led to factionalism and sectarianism. Basically, there were two contradictory but interlocking tendencies-unities in opposition to royal absolutism and diversity in thought and organizations reflections of generational and experiential differences, social atomization, and a culture of mistrust and deviousness deeply ingrained in the popular psyche. Sincere idealism, inadequate or mistaken historical analysis, lack of political experience and skill, and costly dogmatism were the main reasons for the intensifying disagreements and factionalism. Sectarianism also reflected the social divisions and fragmented identities of society and the geographical dispersion of the movement itself. The existing social system affected Ethiopians differently, and their perceptions of social reality differed (Gebru T. 2009: 29).*

The seeds of the political articulation of the national question grew and further increased polarization, and the debate on whether class or nation was the primary cleavage in the country heated up. Gebru stated it in the following way:

*One view maintained that national oppression was more blatant and explosive than social oppression; consequently, its resolution superseded all other contradictions. This stance would lead to the emergence of ethno-nationalist movements. The other view emphasized the oppressed class affinity, refusing to consider national particularism an enduring problem. Ethno-nationalism is viewed as a dangerous distraction from the primary class cleavages, class loyalty, and the ensuing struggles. It foresaw an end to national antagonisms soon after eradicating unequal social relations. The multinational parties born just before the revolution would remain steadfast upholders of this perspective, although ultimately losing to the ethno- nationalists, who convinced their supporters that*

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<sup>7</sup> He and other activists were shot and killed in December 1972 while attempting to hijack an Ethiopian Airlines flight.

*culturally based forms of solidarity must supplant nationwide class interests* (Gebru T. 2009: 33).

As previously mentioned by Gebru, the national question in Ethiopia has become a highly contentious political issue, centering on the Ethiopian state's nature and the dynamics between its diverse ethnic groups. This issue has played a pivotal role in the deconstruction and reconstruction of the Ethiopian state, as discussed in the works of Abbink (1995, 2015). The emergence of ethno-elites, who advocate for the interests of specific ethnic groups, has been a significant outcome of the national question and has dramatically influenced Ethiopian politics. The following section provides a more detailed explanation of the rise of ethno-elites and their impact on Ethiopian politics.

### 7.2.3 The Rise of Ethno-Nationalist Elites

After 1991, Ethiopian politics saw the emergence of ethno-nationalist elites taking control, ushering in a significant power shift and introducing new political dynamics in the country. Ethnic-based liberation movements such as the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF) and, to a lesser extent, the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) played a dominant role in shaping the post-1991 politics in Ethiopia.

Since the 1980s, some student movement members have established various ethnic liberation fronts to fulfill the agenda of "equality of ethnic groups in Ethiopia". The essay, written by Walleign Mekonnen, was influential despite being historically simplified and relatively shallow. It claimed that Ethiopia's governing elite had hidden the fact that Ethiopia was not a nation but rather made up of diverse ethnic groups "with their languages, modes of dressing, histories, social organizations, and territorial existence."<sup>8</sup> Instead, he claimed, there was only a "pseudo-Ethiopian nationalism" founded on the linguistic and the cultural supremacy of mainly Amharas and to some extent Tigrayans. This domination was said to have led to unequal relations among the "nations" of Ethiopia. The trinity of language (Amharic), culture (Amhara-Tigray), and the Ethiopian Orthodox Church (religion) was seen by Walleign to make up the 'Ethiopian nation.'

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<sup>8</sup> Read more at: <https://www.theelephant.info/features/2020/11/27/pan-ethiopianists-vs-ethnonationalists-the-narrative-elite-war-in-ethiopia/>.

The ideas championed by Wallelign and activists like him were ultimately translated into ideology and action, sparking political and violent conflict driven by ethnic elite-led movements seeking the "liberation" of ethnic groups. The Eritrean Liberation Front emerged in 1962, giving way to the Eritrean Peoples' Liberation Front (EPLF) in 1972, which successfully secured Eritrea's secession from Ethiopia in 1991. While the ELF and EPLF were not ethno-nationalist movements, they preceded other ethno-regionally based liberation movements, such as the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) in 1973 and the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) in 1975, followed by movements in the Somali and Sidama regions. These movements emerged from radicalizing intellectual-elite discourses on "liberation" and "oppressor-oppressed" binary opposition narratives. Foreign powers with geopolitical interests in Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa supported them. The rivalry between the USSR and the USA during the Cold War played a crucial role in fostering these liberation groups, which later became breeding grounds for ethno-nationalist elites.

In the aftermath of the overthrow of the *Derg*'s military rule in Ethiopia by EPRDF and EPLF in 1991, the Council of Representatives (COR) was established at the Conference in July 1991 to serve as an interim legislative assembly. It approved the formation of a 'Transitional Government of Ethiopia' (TGE), marking the emergence of federalism, a more liberal economic approach, and recognition of the right of ethnic groups to self-determination. One of the veterans of the OLF movement recalled the July 1991 conference as follows:

*The 1991 conference was the first attempt at elite bargaining in the history of Ethiopia. Various elites who represented different ethnic groups in Ethiopia sat together and were able to discuss the future fate of the country. The conference was remarkable because, for the first time, elites agreed on power division and the country's political transition. The event was not all-inclusive but created a space for most political forces. It was also considered remarkable because it thwarted the possible threat of state disintegration, which was looming after the fall of the military regime (Respondent no. 18, 2022).*

Another senior figure from an opposition party refuted the above claim and argued that:

*The 1991 July conference was a showcase to ethno-elites, who created the People's Democratic Organization (the so-called PDOs) under TPLF mentorship and control. Most of the PDOs were overnight products or private properties of a few ethno-elite members who created a partnership with TPLF. EPRDF used them to legitimize its rule and consolidate power. The July conference could not be considered an elite bargain but should be seen as a platform for legitimizing ethno-elite rule in Ethiopia. An excellent example is the power division agreement shared among EPRDF, OLF, and newly established PDOs (Respondent No. 4, 2022).*

As the prominent opposition politicians noted, the July 1991 conference sealed the rise of ethno-elites as the governing power elite of post-1991 Ethiopia—the winner EPRDF coalition consolidated control of the government. The four-member EPRDF was able to establish a coalition with other ethnic-based parties and led the transition allegedly by sharing power based on ethnic quotas. After the transition period, the 1995 constitution abrogated the idea of Ethiopia as a nation-state by introducing ethnic federalism and reinventing Ethiopia as a 'nation of nations'<sup>99</sup>, dividing the nation into nine regional states based on the majority ethnic identities of those regions' populations. Since then, the power hierarchy has been owned and controlled by elites from different ethnic groups. Through several clauses that ensured self-rule based on ethnic identity, the 1995 constitution also set a landmark for legitimizing the rise of ethno-nationalist elites to power and their domination of national politics.

Thus, numerous ethnic-based political parties were established in response to the post-1991 political dynamics, and the political bloc led by ethno-nationalists came out on top. The influence of the pan-Ethiopian political block was gradually reduced. Since 1992, Ethiopia has had five consecutive elections over five years under the new political system. In each of these elections, the ethno-elites maintained control over the state and thus are still the main political force in Ethiopian politics today (2023). Additionally, the ethno-elites created a variety of 'narratives' to support their dominance in national politics. A synopsis of such narratives of ethno-elites from major ethnic groups is given in the next section.

#### 7.2.4 The Discourses of Major Ethno-Nationalist Groups

Various factors, including historical experiences, political ideologies, and cultural realities, have shaped the discourses of ethno-elites in Ethiopia. These discourses are often grounded in narratives of identity, nationalism, and historical injustice, and they can unite and divide different ethnic groups. One central discourse of ethno-elites in Ethiopia is ethno-nationalism, which emphasizes that each ethnic group is entitled to its territory, rights, and resources. This discourse often emphasizes historical and cultural differences between ethnic groups and asserts the need for self-determination and autonomy.

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<sup>9</sup> As it was termed by Fasil Nahum (1995), a pro EPRDF-lawyer who had a great role in the drafting of the 1995 federal constitution.



This ethno-elite discourse evolved from the ESM in the 1960s and 1970s and was later fragmented into several narratives. The ethno-elites used elitism as a mechanism to claim and obtain exclusive rights to political power. Messay Kebede (2008) suggested that the educated elites who familiarized themselves with the tenets of Western culture and ideologies tended to claim entitlement to such authority; no other segment of the society could contest their leadership or their interpretation of ‘modernity’. Messay (*ibid*) further showed these claims of these aspiring educated elites, using the enormous prestige of modern education and creating ‘entitlements’ to power, which are evidenced in the student publications of the time, whereby they assume their role as the ‘vanguard’ of society.

In the absence of a clear national direction for the country’s education system, polarizing tendencies considerably increased among the educated elites, together with alienation from the old, established elites. It was difficult for such uprooted elites to take on the responsibility of working towards integrating the nation; they were vulnerable to many conflicting internal and foreign pressures that undermined national norms. According to Messay (2008), due to losing their sense of national purpose, educated Ethiopians could not reach a consensus regarding Ethiopia and its future and instead turned to their ethnic and regional ties. After the illusory and transient unity around Marxism-Leninism (a reflection of alienation from national Ethiopian heritage), there was no option except for the (even more divisive) ideology of ethno-nationalism. The educated elite’s obsession with ethnicity came to serve no purpose other than maintaining the divisive tendencies inherited from the Marxist-Leninist idea of class struggle. Unfortunately for the nation, this ultimately unleashed the forces of hostility and retaliation, stoked by the Haile Selassie regime’s economic failures and social exclusion. The forces they unleashed quickly upended Ethiopian society in the name of Socialism and its offspring, ethnic nationalism (Messay, 2008). Ethno-nationalist groups constructed new narratives and used different political discourses to assert their legitimacy. This study selects the political discourses of TPLF, OLF, and EPRDF.

#### *7.2.4.1 The TPLF Political Discourse*

The TPLF, a political movement founded in 1975 by ethnic Tigrayan students, was founded in the Tigray University Student Association (TUSA), established in 1971. According to Bahru (2014), Gebru T. (2009), and Gebru A. (2014), the TPLF emerged as a result of the Ethiopian student movement, with many of its leaders being influenced by idealistic and egalitarian ideas of social change. The TPLF also capitalized on the widespread sense of alienation among urban

sectors of society towards central authority, which was perceived as distant, unconcerned and exploitative (see Gebru, 2009). Additionally, the marginalization of the Tigray language and culture served as independent driving forces behind these social movements.

John Markakis (2011:189) explained that the TPLF political discourses were rooted in the belief that Tigray is a nation with its own unique identity and that Tigrayans are direct descendants of the Axumites, who had a rich African civilization. They also believed that Tigray was a subjugated nation within the Ethiopian empire. Markakis emphasized the TPLF's political objective, stating that Tigray, an "oppressed nation," has the right to self-determination. This could include options such as autonomy, federation, or even establishing an independent state as a last resort if peaceful coexistence becomes impossible. The TPLF's analysis of the socio-economic and political situation led them to believe that the Shoan Amhara ruling elite was responsible for Tigray's poverty, underdevelopment, and marginalization. This led Tigrayan students to launch a national and social revolution based on armed struggle against feudalism, imperialism, and capitalism to establish their independent republic (Aregawi 2009: 21, Fesseha 2014: 395, Yinebeb 2020: 75–76).

In addition to facing opposition from feudalism, capitalism, and imperialism, the TPLF also had to contend with other adversaries. The Shoan Amhara elite, the *Derg* military regime, and various political parties, including the EPRP, *MEISON*, EDU, TLF, and OLF, were considered enemies and engaged in conflict with the TPLF at different times. Ultimately, the TPLF emerged victorious and gained political dominance in Ethiopia in 1991. Initially focused on Tigray's ethno-nationalist interests, the TPLF shifted its focus to liberating all of Ethiopia through armed conflict, eventually forming the EPRDF coalition with other political forces.

#### *7.2.4.2 The OLF Political Discourse*

Since the student movement of the 1960s, the OLF has actively worked to develop a rhetoric opposing Ethiopia as a nation. Several uprisings and rebellions occurred in Oromia, and the Oromo political struggle began to take shape during the growing opposition to the Haile Selassie I administration's rule, as Yinebeb (2020) noted. The Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) was founded in 1973 by a group of elite Oromo-educated individuals, many of whom were high school and Addis Ababa University students. According to John Markakis (2011), the OLF defined and articulated the Oromo struggle as the "liberation of the people from Ethiopia's colonial power"

advocating for the right to self-determination and promoting armed struggle as the primary means to achieve independence.

However, the call for Oromo nationalism did not resonate with most Oromo people living in rural areas. This was due to measures implemented by the *Derg* government, such as the 1975 land reform, which allowed peasants to own land and be free from tenancy, and the establishment of self-administration at the local kebele level. Additionally, the unclear nature of Oromo national identity and a lack of political consciousness were contributing factors. As Markakis (2011:197) explains, "Oromo traditional society was closely integrated within the tribal framework but lacked unifying structures beyond that level. The institutions that had been providing unity and strength to Abyssinian society were absent among the Oromo. Throughout their historic migration, the Oromo did not establish unity beyond the tribal level or coordinate their efforts for a common purpose. Each tribe pursued its destiny independently, and inter-tribal warfare was common."

The development of Oromo nationalism required deliberate effort and did not gain significant momentum until the later years of the *Derg* regime. The OLF's prospects improved in the 1980s as the *Derg* regime grew weak, with its forces occupied on the northern front and the peasantry worn down by the regime's policies, which included continuous conscription of peasant sons, forced war contributions, collectivization of farms, enforced villagization, and resettlement. These grievances led the youth in the western Oromo areas to align with the OLF. At the same time, the call for Oromo nationalism began to resonate more strongly among educated urban elites, especially the younger generation who had experienced the regime's arbitrary violence. As the *Derg's* grip on power weakened, the OLF's persistent efforts started to yield results (Markakis, 2011).

#### *7.2.4.3. The Discourse of the EPRDF*

As discussed above, the political discourse of EPRDF after controlling power in 1991 differs from the discourses during the armed struggle before 1991. The core ideological thoughts of its founders, such as TPLF and EPDM (the latter were the leftists from the EPRP who abandoned their Marxist-Leninist political ideologies), gradually changed when the EPRDF member organizations grew to four, including the Oromo Peoples Democratic Organization (OPDO, established in 1990) and the Southern Ethiopian People's Democratic Movement (SEPDM), established as a multi-ethnic political force after 1991.

The EPRDF contended that the absence of ‘democratization’ was a problem for Ethiopia’s survival. It even claimed that the absence of democracy was one of the root causes of the instability of the country, as manifested in the insurgent wars in various parts of the country, particularly in the North. This has also led to the perpetuation of poverty, regional inequalities, and backwardness. In its narratives, EPRDF emphasized the democratization of multi-ethnic Ethiopia as “the only solution to survive as a state.” Otherwise, Ethiopia’s destiny as a state would be disintegrated, like Yugoslavia after the end of the Cold War (Meles Zenawi, 2017; Bach, 2014). The EPRDF even asserted that without democratization in the country, there could not possibly be peace, coexistence, or amicable separation (Policy Document, 2010)<sup>10</sup>. EPRDF not only underlined the need for ‘democracy’, but also underscored the *type* of democracy they thought would fit in the Ethiopian context- *in contrast to liberal democracy*. In its internal documents, the EPRDF compared liberal democracy with that of its own ‘revolutionary democracy’: this was a Leninist concept, and they held that the ‘social base’ of liberal democracy for them was an advanced private (modern, industrialized) sector and its fundamental elements were hegemonic beliefs of the society regarding democratic values such as the rule-of-law, equal rights of all citizens before the law, advanced political culture via an entrenched division of power and checks-and-balances to ensure accountability. The EPRDF further argued that in Ethiopia, “objective reality” *disallowed* liberal democracy from prevailing. The main reason was that the absence of a social base (including a well-developed middle class) and conditions for a democratic culture would make it impossible to implement it. The EPRDF program asserted that if there would be an effort to apply a liberal democracy model ‘without a proper social base’, the result could be the emergence and dominance of ‘parasitic rent-seeker classes’ serving the interests of the few. According to the EPRDF’s assertions (2000), liberal democracy would thus be based on such a ‘rent seeker group’ in the Ethiopian context, and this could not ensure ‘development’ and real democracy but only create a state captured by corrupt networks. Such a kind of state could neither realize democracy nor development benefitting the masses. Liberalism would only serve as a cover, an instrument rather than consolidating an actual democratic system.

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<sup>10</sup> See: ‘The fundamental questions of democracy in Ethiopia’(August 2000); ‘The democratization affair in Ethiopia’(May 2002), and ‘Revolutionary democracy, its historical evolution and future direction’(May 2017): EPRDF policy documents, all in Amharic.

In addition to these contentious arguments, they further stated this is their major difference in ideology-the application of liberalism in Ethiopia would face another problem related to the ‘national question’: a liberal approach would, due to its ideological foundations and emphasis on individual rights, give less attention to (ethnic) group rights, and this would limit the ethno-nationalists’ agenda and appeal (and they were themselves one of these movements). The ‘national question’ being declared a burning democratic question’ in the Ethiopian political landscape meant that any political solution that would not respond to this question would never have a chance to establish a ‘sustainable democratic system.’ Based on such expedient ‘arguments,’ the EPRDF ideology presented its ‘revolutionary democracy’ as an alternative principle. The party ideologues pointed out the reasons why revolutionary democracy was the only viable model for realizing the democratization agenda of Ethiopia. The long-standing ‘national oppression’, interwoven with other kinds of grievances that triggered opposition and supported by armed struggle, was diagnosed as the main cause of the overthrow of the military *Derg* regime. Unless the national question was resolved democratically, it could create chaos in the country as a whole. Individual rights alone could not fully resolve the national question. Of course, they claimed that group rights should be respected in line with individual rights, which is the other side of the same coin. Without individual liberty, the rights of nations, nationalities, and peoples would not be practical, but group rights should be realized simultaneously. This position would guarantee ‘revolutionary democracy,’ a social base in Ethiopia, and the security of its hegemony. Group and individual rights would be respected to benefit the mass of the (predominantly rural) population: the peasantry, constituting 80-85% of the population similarly; urban dwellers and intellectuals will benefit from revolutionary democracy (although this was less plausibly elaborated).

The EPRDF also identified the possible obstacles to revolutionary democracy. Rent seekers who cannot produce competitive goods and services in the market but aspire to be rich through patronage networks with state authority and the remnants of the previous ruling class could be categorized as an anti-revolutionary democracy. Incidentally, none of its ideas or discourse, as outlined above, prevented the EPRDF from developing its rent-seeking elite and its systematic sacrificing of individual rights in favor of ethnic group rights under the auspices of its own political and economic hegemony.

### 7.3 EPRDF's Elite Recruitment, Placement and Empowerment

Any political system has mechanisms to recruit and place elites in favorable positions of power, and this recruitment process is instrumental to sustaining the system's survival (cf. Seligman 1964). It distributes, represents, and quantifies political influence among competing political forces. Recruitment encompasses two stages, including the transition from non-political positions to those that qualify for powerful political positions and the assignment and selection of individuals for particular political positions.

The elite recruitment pattern, as outlined by Le Vine (1968), both reflects and affects society and the whole political system. Elite recruitment depicts society's value system and its level of consistency, and it indicates contradictions, the degree and kinds of representativeness of the system, the basis of social stratification, its articulation with the political system, and the structure and change in political roles.

Elite recruitment patterns determine avenues for political participation and status; influence the kind of policies that will be formulated and enacted; accelerate or retard changes; affect the distribution of status and prestige; and influence the stability of the system. Le Vine stated that modern elites include those who participate in the political structure that they occupy via formal and informal positions of authority in government executives, legislatures, judiciaries, and bureaucracies as a ruling elite or working in top level positions in political parties, and leaders of functional civic associations or economic interest groups.

EPRDF's elite recruitment and placement since 1991 passed through different trajectories depending on the roles of its member organizations in the participation of the armed struggle and their intimacy with the constituency of each party. The TPLF's recruitment process used very stringent criteria for cadres at all levels, including the highest. Gebru Tareke, as cited in an internal document (2009:99-100), outlined that the TPLF had stringent standards for selecting its political and military leaders during its armed struggle. These leaders were chosen based on their steadfast loyalty and dedication to the organization. They were described as confident, resolute, and prepared to make sacrifices, embodying a clear vision and determination in their cause. They had to eschew intellectualism, elitism, and militarism, prioritizing the people's interests above all else. They should adhere to party discipline, welcoming constructive criticism and self-reflection. Anti-organizational behaviour and detrimental social practices were firmly rejected, with a skillful

handling of social conflicts. They valued comradeship over personal interests, showing a deep understanding of the enemy's tactics while remaining committed to serving the people and taking principled stances on crucial matters. Their willingness to endure hardship and make sacrifices would serve as exemplary displays of their 'unwavering' commitment (*ibid*).

The brightest minds in society were allegedly screened using these criteria since they had the ideal attributes, yet only a select few met these demanding standards. During the armed conflict phase, participatory evaluation was already used as a supplementary screening tool to identify these individuals, allowing the TPLF to develop a unified and devoted leadership at all levels. However, other EPRDF member organizations did not follow such strict elite recruiting guidelines, especially after assuming state power in 1991. Regarding elite recruitment, placement, and empowerment, most of the interviewees shared the following common opinion:

*The EPRDF recruited elites in various ways depending on the member groups. The capacity and dedication to serving the interests of the Tigrayan people served as major recruitment criteria. Elite members were placed and promoted based on their performance being evaluated inside the party structure. In the sister organization, particularly in the South and the Oromo regions, the focus of recruiting and promotion was on those who were not the best mind of the society, economically underprivileged, and lacking in self-confidence with the goal of remaining vertically devoted to the TPLF in order to dominate the entire society up to the grass-roots level. Therefore, being loyal to TPLF and its revolutionary democracy and disloyalty to the people they come from were the criteria for recruitment and promotion (Respondent No. 27, 2022).*

One prominent former leader of OLF argued similarly to the above interviewees, saying that EPRDF had two aspects:

*On the one hand, TPLF was purposely established by the Tigray elite, who had full freedom to produce ideas and organizational freedom to implement what it had planned. On the other hand, the organizations created by TPLF were responsible for implementing what was planned by the TPLF to control the nations and nationalities through those yes-men in every region. They compared the three regimes in terms of elite recruitment and placement. Given loyalty to the monarchy system, the attention to the quality and competence of elites was better during Haile Selassie's reign. Even though educated aristocracy and nobility families controlled vital positions, there was room for those competent intellectuals to be assigned to high-ranking government positions based on their professional competency. The Derg was using competent intellectuals like its predecessor, at the back of the military officers. However, the EPRDF was reluctant to recruit and place competent intellectuals in key government positions. It recruited yes men to manipulate power as it wanted. The main criterion for assigning elites to political positions was political loyalty (Respondent no. 9, 2022).*

In the EPRDF era, elite recruitment was heavily influenced by a commitment to ethnic politics and given less emphasis on pan-Ethiopianism. This meant that individuals had to align with ethno-nationalist ideologies and demonstrate allegiance to their ethnic group to be considered for recruitment. As a result, professional qualifications and competence were often overshadowed by ideological loyalty when selecting, placing, and elevating elites within the political system. Those who held independent opinions on national issues were viewed as a threat to the nation's reconstruction, further diminishing the importance of their expertise. Another opposition leader and House of Peoples Representatives member echoed this sentiment:

*Political loyalty was a factor in EPRDF recruitment and placement at all levels, including woreda and kebele levels. Competence was irrelevant from an EPRDF standpoint. In addition to political allegiance, radical ethno-nationalist political beliefs were considered when applying for positions at high levels of authority. The country's nation-building effort was pushed into political, economic, and social structural issues during the EPRDF era, which rendered the system inoperable and drove the institutions' general inefficiency (Respondent no. 26, 2022).*

Another young academician added the following regarding EPRDF elite recruitment, placement, and empowerment in comparison with its previous regimes, complementing the above view:

*... The application of merit-based competency had worsened from the monarchy period to the EPRDF period. Recruitment and placement were given the proper consideration for professional competency and quality during the emperor's reign. In the Derg era, where ideological devotion was prioritized over professional competence, merit declined. Yes, the political elite under the Derg military rule included highly qualified professionals, but the majority of them were chosen for high ranking positions based on their political devotion. The most significant omission from EPRDF's elite recruitment and placement initiatives for political jobs at all levels was disregard for professional competency. Even though EPRDF failed to recruit elites who were both of the highest caliber and were accepted by their respective communities, it must be commended for its inclusiveness in including all of Ethiopia's nations, nationalities, and peoples in positions of decision-making and significant political participation (Respondent no. 24, 2022).*

One of the prominent diplomats described the situation as follows:

*To be part of the political elite in the period, the recruitment criteria were political loyalty and the candidates' stand against 'patriotism' that were considered a manifestation of a 'pan-Ethiopian' political orientation. EPRDF was hostile to intellectuals and basically against the educated elite. So, this attitude made the relationship between EPRDF and the intellectuals antagonistic, and consequently, the party encountered staunch opposition from intellectuals throughout its tenure. Hence, EPRDF was forced to rely on less qualified rural elites to fill the party and the key political positions of government institutions,*



*including the parliament. The political scene during the 1974 revolution was dominated by the urban elite members who were primarily supporters of the EPRP and the AESM, respectively. In contrast, during the EPRDF's reign, elites were mostly from the rural areas and had anti-urban elite sentiments. You do not run political and economic institutions with unqualified liberation fighters based on ideological loyalty. This caused a mess in the running of government institutions and the delivery of proper services during EPRDF's time (Respondent no. 16, 2022).*

As noted by the above interviewees, elite recruitment unveiled rupture and discontinuity, and it was precluded from positively contributing to the country's nation-building process. The power elites during the EPRDF era were recruited, hired, placed, and promoted based on political loyalty. By ethnicizing national politics and disenfranchising the mainstream elite from taking part in national objectives, the EPRDF compounded the outstanding nation-building issues already visible under its predecessor and offered no real way forward. As one respondent said: “The EPRDF fostered the diversity of its elites based on their capacity to advance party doctrine rather than their devotion to the people” (Respondent no. 14, 2022).

According to another interviewee, elites under the previous regimes were replaced by cadres of the new ruling party, and unqualified members were assigned to high-ranking political positions in the EPRDF period. However, some said that one new and good thing during EPRDF was the attempt to integrate elites from pastoralist groups (Respondent no. 27, 2022).

One of the intellectuals from Addis Ababa University expressed his view regarding how EPRDF distorted the merit system in elite recruitment and placement as follows:

*There was no transparent recruitment or promotion process in the civil service, let alone political positions that required political allegiance. Despite their grades or academic accomplishments, even recent graduates from schools and universities could occasionally be assigned based on their political allegiance. Convinced that political affiliations are a good way to maximize individual interests, educated young people joined parties to take advantage of the opportunity and advance their educational levels (Respondent no. 37, 2022).*

In summary, this research found that during the EPRDF era, the primary criteria for selecting elite candidates were not their competency and dedication to the Ethiopian state but their loyalty and commitment to the party. It was essential for candidates to be dedicated to upholding ethnic-based politics and to demonstrate a strong attitude and commitment to ethnic ('nationalities') self-determination. This devotion to ethno-nationalism was fundamental for elite recruitment, placement, and advancement within the political sphere. Candidates who adhered to pan-Ethiopian

political views were often labeled as 'chauvinistic' and 'anti-EPRDF', risking being excluded from any political role within the EPRDF establishment. Particularly those who considered as they do not support the rights of NNP self-determination.

The EPRDF instituted a complete overhaul of the former government's elite leadership, placing its experienced veterans and dedicated political cadres in positions of power at every level, including the military. This decision resulted in the expulsion of the former elites from all state institutions and their replacement with ethno-elite members known as cadres, who often needed to be more competent and experienced. This shift had a significant impact on the overall competency and performance of the elite leadership. One EPRDF official recalled a moment when the party prioritized grooming less educated individuals for positions of power.

The EPRDF aimed to transform the political landscape by grooming its elite members. To this end, the party established the Civil Service College (later: University) to provide specialized education for its political leaders. Graduates of this institution came to hold influential positions of authority at the national, regional, and local levels. This strategy ultimately included less experienced ethno-elite members in prominent positions within the top power elite (Respondent no. 20, 2022).

The recruitment and treatment of elites based on their ethnicity resulted in deep-seated hostility and distrust among the elite class, which ultimately spread throughout the society. These issues often became intricate, making it difficult to reach national-level consensus. Consequently, these differences plunged the country into a profound crisis, hindering any nation-building efforts and pushing the nation to the brink. The fragmentation of the elite class led to the emergence of unintended, disgruntled factions within the elite, causing Tigrayan political elites and senior veterans from ANDM to become more wary of other moderate groups and further exacerbating elite polarization. This polarization extended beyond the elite class and became a serious societal issue.

Due to conflicting political beliefs among subsequent political elites in Ethiopia, the succession led to a complete overhaul of the prior elites, with little consideration given to the need for continuity in nation-building policies and ideals from the previous administration. Consequently, nation-building efforts needed more continuity and had to be restarted after the expulsion of the previous elite. The following section briefly overviews the characteristics and nature of the new post-1991 elite.

## 7.4 The Nature and Character of the Elite during the EPRDF Regime

The character of a political system is significantly shaped by political elites, and the nature of elites, in turn, is influenced by the political system itself. This intersection becomes particularly important during periods of transformative change in a political system, where elites assume a vital role, e.g., in forging new institutions (see Kaminski & Kurczewska, 2011). The behavior and interpersonal connections of the ruling elite members influence politics, among other things. These connections have a significant role in determining whether a political system is democratic, developmental, non-democratic, or non-developmental. The leadership's political outlook, commitment, and vision play a significant role in determining the political climate and the character of the state (Sebudubudu & Molutsi, 2011). One of the prominent historians from Addis Ababa University interviewed for this study succinctly described the nature and character of the elite during the EPRDF reign as follows:

*The elite that emerged in Ethiopia after 1991 is the newly created elite. Some families and individuals may have moved to the EPRDF era elites from the Derg era. But most of the political elite came forward following the system the EPRDF put in place. The primary feature of this elite group that differentiates them from the elites in the past is that they were not national elites. Truly speaking, they were not elites with a national view. They had the power, resources, and influence in their respective ethnic groups. Hence, they fulfilled the characteristics of power elites. However, a significant characteristic that they lacked was not being national elites. Each of them remained a 'nationality elite' that had its boundaries. Hence, we didn't see any nationality mixed with any other one; intermarriage was not that observable. They didn't have a common social platform, either – no joint clubs, societies, etc. But this did not mean that they were antagonists. They worked together; they interacted in various ways. After all, they were ideologically ethno-nationalist elites (Respondent no. 30, 2022).*

Each ethnic group in the post-1991 period claimed to be represented by its ethno-nationalist elites. Therefore, the various elites needed a platform that united them. A representative of one ethnic group cannot support the causes of another ethnic group. As a result, they needed to build links and were biased against one another. They had competing interests beyond all else. The elites of the Oromo and the Amhara pushed for their respective groups, resulting in confrontations. This was because the political struggle was centered on ethnicity rather than party ideology. The ethnic rivalry was almost comparable to conflict between two independent nations. Due to this

fragmentation, there was little chance they would develop into unified national elites. Another interviewee further described the character of the post-1991 elite as follows:

*All elites of the regime had intrinsic dictatorial traits and believed themselves to be experts on all aspects of national affairs, whereas the rest of society- including intellectuals regarded by the ruling class as ignorant of these matters. To observe distinctive characteristics of the political elites under the EPRDF regime, it is important to note that they did not develop through mainstream institutions; rather, the majority of them are a result of the politics of ethno-nationalism. The EPRDF is an inherently anti-elite political party, which in turn, replaced the remaining elites of the former regime with its own, low-profile, ideologically devoted cadres and new economic elites through political networks. Professionalism and the merit system were supplanted by incompetent ethno- nationalist opportunist elites and low-profile party members (Respondent no. 4, 2022).*

The ruling class during the EPRDF period was marked by ideological divisions over the political stance of the regime. The EPRDF presented the Ethiopian state as an empire needing rebuilding with the support of the country's nations, nationalities, and peoples when it first came to power. This core political idea led to conflicting and polarizing opinions among pan-Ethiopian political groups, mainstream academic communities, and ethnic nationalist political forces, including the power elites of the EPRDF. The exclusion of the country's intellectuals from participating in important national political, economic, and social affairs intensified adversarial relationships between intellectuals and the ethno-elites. The EPRDF aimed to exert as much control over the economy as possible, replacing the former state-owned economy with party-led corporate organizations and handing the remaining resources to newly emerging business elites. Opposing political forces and intellectuals viewed the EPRDF, particularly TPLF, negatively, believing that the regime's philosophy was divisive and harmful to national cohesion. On the other hand, some elites supported ethnically oriented politics, believing that the devolution of authority and the distribution of resources to the regions would give them advantages to benefit from the nation's wealth (Respondent no. 8, 2022).

One of the prominent politicians from the ethno-nationalist camp underlines the unfolding dynamics of economic affairs as follows:

*In EPRDF's time, the situation was different from the previous regime in the sense that the business elites were empowered based on ethnic lines and political affiliations, particularly since the 2005 elections. The fusion of business elites with the political elites created significant numbers of new and influential business entrepreneurs. Some of these business elites emerged as key actors in the country's politics, supporting the EPRDF rule. However, when the power elite members lost their position, the business activities of these new entrepreneurs faced significant upsets. Some of them became bankrupt and others fled*

*the country. I think one of the unique characteristics of the Ethiopian economic elites is that they build linkages with every regime that comes, and as a result, they fall together when the regime changes* (Respondent no. 9, 2022).

Several respondents in this study described the nature of the post-1991 Ethiopian elites as rigid, exclusive, anti-democratic, self-centered, divisive, not so competent, ethno-nationalist, and radical in their political stand. We witnessed a continuation of a similar nature as seen under the previous regime, and this was an obstacle to nation-building efforts. In the next section, the discussion deals with the trends of elite integration and disintegration.

## 7.5 The Power Structure and Trends of Elite Integration/Disintegration, post-1991

The nation-building efforts during the EPRDF rule were closely linked to the influence of ethno-elites in post-1991 Ethiopia. The EPRDF aimed to establish a new federal system that granted autonomy to various ethnic groups to address historical grievances and promote ethnic rights. However, this also allowed elites from different ethnic groups to assert their authority and negatively impact the direction of the state-building project. The EPRDF's approach to nation-building was highly centralized, with crucial decisions made by a small group of elites, primarily from the TPLF within the ruling EPRDF coalition. These elites controlled significant resources, such as state-owned enterprises, and often utilized this power to further their interests and solidify their control over other regions.

The TPLF introduced a new concept of Ethiopian statehood, as noted by Gebru (2009), who highlighted the TPLF's establishment of an ethno-nationalist discourse rooted in the notion of "national oppression" instead of nation-building. This ideology was enshrined in the Transitional Period Charter and the 1995 Constitution, granting significant political influence on ethno-elites. The EPRDF adopted an ethnic-based federal system, with regions predominantly named after and controlled by specific ethnic groups. This framework empowered ethno-nationalist elites to organize and mobilize politically based on their ethnic identity, granting them access to resources and state subsidies while legitimizing their political ambitions. Although influential in shaping regional policies and establishing de facto autonomy, their power often led to conflicts with each other and the central government.

The central focus of ethnic politics was the principle of 'self-determination' for ethnic groups. While most members of the transitional parliament in 1991 supported the NNPs' call for

self-determination, it is essential to note that they had been selected and approved by the EPRDF leadership. Four minority political groups in the Council were more hesitant and were ultimately removed in 1993. Many argued that due to the EPRDF's exclusive nature, 32 of the 87 seats in the transitional parliament were allocated to EPRDF member parties, 12 to the OLF, and the remainder to other parties and civic associations. Ethno-nationalist-oriented parties were in the majority from the beginning. (For further information, see Vaughan (2003).

The conflicting political ideologies between successful ethno-nationalist groups and the 'pan-Ethiopians' have initially led to polarization. In addition to the alienation and exclusion of the pan-Ethiopian elites, the educated elite have gradually distanced themselves from the political and socioeconomic debates, with their contributions often being ignored. The political and academic elites have increasingly opposed the EPRDF's revolutionary democratic philosophy, leading to further division and hindering cooperation or integration and consensus building among the elites. This has made it difficult to find common ground in efforts to (re)construct the country and has also impacted the cohesion within the EPRDF member parties over time.

As Vaughan (2015) noted, given the theoretical perspectives on ethno-nationalism and power decentralization, on 'democratic unity' based on diversity and the planned liberalization that the EPRDF promised, the party was never deeply committed to these things or pluralism and was resistant to the emergence of alternatives or competing political views:

*A dominant view within the EPRDF is that disagreements over policy and perspective should generate competition rather than dialogue. This has contributed to a polarized political landscape, in which the ruling party has benefited little from the constructive criticism of outsiders. A further corollary is that elections have evolved as per formative plebiscites designed to reinforce the national consensus behind the ruling party (Vaughan 2015: 309).*

Even though decentralization, democratization, and liberalization were advocated by the EPRDF, it polarized the country's political spectrum due to a concentration of state power in the hands of the ruling ethno-elites and the alienation and exclusion of all other (social, occupational, religious, a.o.) elites from any nation-building agenda. One of Ethiopia's top military officials made the following observations regarding the effects of the country's split political views:

*Those ethnic-based treatments of the power elites who have different ethnic and political backgrounds triggered mutual suspicion and mutual mistrust among elite members and this descended to the society. The problems became complicated from time to time and it was difficult to establish common ground on national issues. The kind of disagreements among elites led the country to a deep crisis, which not only affected the nation-building*

*process but also pushed the whole nation to a cliff. The problem of political polarization is not limited to the elite level but has also become the major political attitude across society everywhere (Respondent no. 13, 2022).*

Another leading academic and politician argued that elite disagreement on key national political problems undermined the country's political and economic transformation. The issues were made worse by the ruling elite's contradictory actions and self-interest that excluded and eventually replaced the educated and experienced elites with new, incompetent political ethno-elites from within the EPRDF itself. As one respondent said:

*The effects of discontinuity in all facets of nation-building did not produce elites capable of guiding the nation toward modernization. The inability to change our polarized politics, our inability to change our political culture to one that values civility, the obsession with power that the ruling elites have, their attempts to lead in an uncivil manner, and our general inability to change our politics all work against the development of a successful elite (Respondent no. 43, 2022).*

As mentioned earlier, excluding certain elite groups intensified the overall division along ethnic lines. This created a significant barrier to forming a shared national identity and political community in nation-building. The elite were deeply divided and needed help to find common ground on the trajectory of the country's development. As a sense of political and economic marginalization among ethnic groups in Ethiopia grew, the disintegration of the elite became a more pressing issue. Additionally, a growing number of Ethiopia's ethnic-nationalist leaders, who had initially supported the introduction of federalism in 1991, began to express dissatisfaction with the limited concessions in practice, as power remained tightly centralized in the hands of the EPRDF core. Aregawi Berhe, a former founder of the TPLF in the 1970s who later parted ways with it in the late 1980s, has argued (2001:2009) that the nature of the TPLF and its allies was never democratic and could not transform the Ethiopian state beyond their narrow group power interests.

*From day one in power, the EPRDF [...] has been unpopular basically because it came to power by military force and remained in power using the same instruments of force that brought it to power. This partially explains why the EPRDF is engaged in gross violation of human and democratic rights. The democracy talked about by the EPRDF and its allies is nothing more than a fashionable paper formality that camouflages the true nature of the EPRDF leadership. In brief, the nature of EPRDF's eclectic ideology and the application of the policies that emanated thereby generated immeasurable uncertainty in the country's bureaucratic apparatus, deterring the functioning of the state. The so-called constitution,*

*crafted by the EPRDF and its advisors was neither legitimate nor could regulate the role of the state as it was a programmatic constitution of the ruling party (Aregawi 2001: 7).*

Aregawi's point is quite apt in explaining the mistrust among elites within EPRDF who have controlled state power since 1991 and the perceived TPLF's hegemonic role in the country's post-1991 politics. In the next section, the study briefly addresses the nation-building project carried out by the EPRDF power elites in the post-1991 period.

## 7.6 The Elite and Nation-Building during the EPRDF rule

Ethiopia underwent a significant political transformation during the EPRDF's rule. This transformation involved establishing a new political system based on democratic pluralism and decentralizing power along ethnic-linguistic lines. The primary goal of this new structure was to transform Ethiopian statehood from one characterized by perceived ethnic dominance to a more egalitarian democratic nation-state that embraced all ethnic groups.

The EPRDF and its allies played a crucial role in this nation-building effort, with the OLF assuming a secondary position. The objective was to dismantle the previous Ethiopian state founded on a pan-Ethiopian framework and replace it with a new state structure based on ethno-national principles. The EPRDF centered its narrative on the "national oppression thesis", drawing from Stalinist theories of nationalities within this new nation-building project. This approach contrasted with other competing interpretations of Ethiopia's imperial history, such as the 'colonial thesis' advocated by groups like the Oromo Liberation Front or the 'multinational Marxist thesis' supported by other factions of the ESM, like the EPRP.

The role of ethno-elites in the post-1991 nation-building project was substantial but also generated controversy. The success of the ethno-elites in creating a nation has been questioned. In retrospect and in view of the multiple armed conflicts to date (2023) it is very doubtful whether they have done it successfully. More evident are heightened ethnic tensions and conflicts.

In 1991, there were initial hopes for positive change as the ethno-elites engaged in a renewed nation-building process through the new federal dispensation. This system allowed for political representation and self-governance for different ethnic groups, enabling them to preserve their language, culture, and traditions. While this arrangement empowered ethno-elites to participate in decision-making at regional and federal levels, it also led to competition for resources



and political power among regions. This competition often resulted in the prioritization of individual interests over national interests, contributing to the marginalization of certain ethnic groups and the escalation of ethnic conflicts.

After 1991, the EPRDF dismantled the *Derg* time political, economic, and security institutions to advance an ethno-nationalist agenda without meaningful agreement with other political forces. Ethnicity and multi-party democracy were critical factors in this deconstruction of the Ethiopian state. However, efforts to democratize under the politics of ethnicity faced significant challenges in transitioning to democracy and accommodating ethnic diversity (Aalen, 2006). The EPRDF emphasized the positive aspects of ethnic identity, and the ethnic-based federal arrangement was intended to diffuse the conflict that had plagued Ethiopia in the second half of the twentieth century. However, this structure also led to competition and conflict among ethnic groups over state resources, adding a new dimension to existing local disputes over land, water, government budgets, and other resources (Vaughan & Tronvoll, 2003).

Despite criticisms of ethnic federalism's implementation in nation-building, the EPRDF ethno-nationalist elites continued to advocate for it and garnered the support of emerging ethno-nationalist elites. This was in opposition to pan-Ethiopian political forces that resisted the ethnicization of Ethiopia. They also pushed for state decentralization, political "democratization" and the liberalization of the economy to benefit the various ethnic groups (Vaughan & Tronvoll, 2003: 27).

The EPRDF's nation-building project focused on promoting Ethiopians' sense of belonging to one of the "Nation, Nationalities and Peoples" as the basis of their political identity. This was to be reinforced through economic and socio-political changes. The EPRDF implemented ethnic-based criteria for public goods provision, introduced new education and language policies, established a multi-ethnic party system, allowed for the development of civil society, and altered national symbols and history to support this project. Whether this process can still be considered as 'nation-building' is a matter of debate. However, the study examined the critical aspects of this process in the next section, including ideology, public goods provision, education and language policy, voluntary associations, and national symbols.

### 7.6.1 'Revolutionary Democracy' and Developmental State as Organizing Principles of Nation-Building

Even after coming to power, the EPRDF leadership opposed the idea of 'Ethiopianness' and saw it as the underlying cause of Ethiopia's political problems. Instead, they advocated for a new Ethiopian nationalism based on the 'nations, nationalities and peoples' (NNP) paradigm. The EPRDF's 'revolutionary democracy' replaced the Socialist ideology of the *Derg* government but still emphasized its role as the vanguard of farmers, urban workers/ residents with lower and intermediate incomes, and other new 'developmental actors'. This demonstrates the enduring impact of Socialist ideology on their beliefs. According to Lenin's doctrine, forming social alliances between workers and peasants was crucial for a successful revolution and for the working class to lead. The EPRDF consistently prioritized farmers as the foundation of its political support rather than the urban middle class. One of the interviewees noted that:

*Revolutionary democracy was the guiding ideology of the EPRDF, which played a significant role in nation-building efforts in Ethiopia. It served as a nucleus in the new nation-building initiative. The EPRDF pursued a policy of decentralization and devolution of power to regional governments, which led to a more participatory and inclusive approach to nation-building. One of the key features of revolutionary democracy is the emphasis on the importance of democracy and development in a single process. The EPRDF has incorporated this principle into its approach to nation-building, with a focus on participatory democracy and economic growth as essential components. Additionally, the EPRDF has prioritized social inclusion and equality in its nation-building efforts (Respondent no. 45, 2022).*

According to the interviewee, EPRDF focused on implementing policies to reduce poverty, enhance access to education and healthcare, and advance gender equality. These efforts resulted in increased social mobility, lower poverty rates, improved economic growth, and improved quality of life for many individuals. In addition, EPRDF acknowledged the significance of cultural diversity, or 'multiculturalism' in nation-building endeavors. The government authorized ethnic groups to govern themselves and preserve their languages, cultures, and traditions. EPRDF officials believe this approach has contributed to a sense of national unity and pride among the diverse ethnic groups. Since assuming control of the state in 1991, the EPRDF not only implemented policies to establish ethnic federalism through the 'revolutionary democratic' state but also introduced the party-led 'developmental state' model to legitimize further consolidation of power in the central party state. However, the contradictory nature of ethno-federalism and the developmental state in the power dynamics of the new central and regional power structures

gradually became apparent. While federalism called for the decentralization of power, political practices revealed highly centralized power by the central government, seen as necessary for national development. This paradox was one of the leading causes of the crisis during the EPRDF's rule, leading to internal party conflicts and widespread public protests from 2015 to 2017, ultimately resulting in the decline and ousting of the TPLF-led EPRDF from power in early 2018.

The implementation of ethnic federalism, along with economic liberalization and the introduction of multiparty politics, was a response to the demands of the international donor community in the early 1990s. This positioned Ethiopia as an essential ally of the West. However, there were criticisms of the government's approach to nation-building, with some arguing that the revolutionary democracy ideology was used to limit political pluralism and freedom of the press and civil society. Additionally, concerns about corruption and human rights abuses arose. The conflict in the North in 2020-2022 further highlighted the deep systemic crisis caused by the contradiction between ethno-nationalist and pan-Ethiopian political forces in the country. The idea of an emerging systemic contradiction alluded to above is shared by many Ethiopian analysts. One of my interviewees described the contradiction as follows:

*There are two competing national questions being advocated by political elites in Ethiopia. There is nationalism associated with the state which some call civic nationalism. There is also nationalism associated with religion or ethnic groups. These nationalisms are sometimes complementing but often competing with each other. The former can also be called pan-Ethiopianism. Pan-Ethiopianists firmly argue against the institutionalization of ethnicity which, in their view, diminishes the pre-existing shared culture and values. According to pan- pan-Ethiopianists, Ethiopia comes first; all other issues like ethnic identity, religion, and language are secondary. They even consider the adoption of ethnic federalism in 1991 as a TPLF's strategy of divide-and-rule. On the other hand, ethno-nationalists perceive pan-Ethiopianism as a political force that desires to reinstitute ethnic marginalization, suppression, cultural domination, and assimilation which were historically done against their group rights in the name of national unity (Respondent no. 45, 2022).*

The EPRDF's approach to nation-building emphasized the importance of unity among Ethiopia's diverse ethnic groups, not just through territorial integration but also through shared goals and values. The FDRE constitution also highlighted the common desire for peace and democracy among all Ethiopians. The EPRDF believed fostering a robust national community would lead to social and economic progress, benefiting all citizens. However, the practical implementation of these ideals in politics sometimes aligns with these aspirations (cf. Meles 2017).

However, most individuals who were interviewed contended that the EPRDF's rule had some positive aspects. They compared the EPRDF to the imperial and *Derg* regimes and argued that the EPRDF successfully achieved economic growth and poverty reduction. A 2020 World Bank report supports this, stating that sustained economic growth in the 2000s lifted millions of Ethiopians out of poverty. The EPRDF also tried to address ethnic inequality, known as the 'nationalities issue' which is considered a central issue in Ethiopian politics. This promoted multiculturalism and 'identity politics,' bringing marginalized groups into the center of Ethiopian politics. The following pledge had been made by EPRDF in its training manual that has articulated based on its program, updated in 2017:

*Democratic order is not limited to respecting the human and democratic rights of the individual. Based on these rights and parallel to them, rights should extend to the right to self-determination and equality of nations and nationalities. The people of Ethiopia must become beneficiaries of these entitlements in full and on equal footing. In this regard, their capability to exercise these rights must be augmented and enhanced. To create a single, vibrant, and coordinated economic community, all regions must have equal rights and support to develop. A concerted struggle must be waged to create unity among the Ethiopian people based on mutual interest and fraternity. To overcome sentiments that are hostile to the democratic unity of our people requires a relentless struggle based on democratic principles (EPRDF 2017, updated program paper: 10).*

However, the ideological ambiguity of this model of 'revolutionary democracy' and rights recognition drew sustained criticism for its lack of ability to foster durable integration and cohesion among the various Ethiopian population groups. For instance, one of the arguments made by the speakers at the symposium 'Nation-building in Ethiopia: the quest for an enduring direction', held in 2018, reviewed the state of nation-building in Ethiopia in the following manner, noticing persistent problems.<sup>11</sup>

*The Ethiopian social and political system has long suffered from a mix of inadequacies resulting from the failure of a plethora of social and political actors to strike the golden middle ground. The Ethiopian federal political system that is currently at work lent a lot of focus to ethno-nationalism that proved detrimental to efforts aimed at forging a sense of common belonging of citizenship and nationhood in shared values and historical legacies. It is now widely believed that the workings of the present Ethiopian political system are characterized by several inadequacies and flaws that should be addressed in good time. Those who assert that the prevailing situation is inimical to successful nation-building claim that several social groups are not adequately represented in federal government*

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<sup>11</sup> Symposium (2018), Nation-building in Ethiopia: In quest of an enduring direction. Key messages and policy recommendations, November 2018, Addis Ababa.

*institutions and that citizens' rights to live work and own property in places of their choice in the country have been repeatedly violated.* (Symposium 2018: 4)

According to the speaker's statement, the revolutionary democratic doctrine failed to reach a compromise that could address the conflicting interests of different political groups and societal segments. The ambiguity of the EPRDF ideology also hindered the nation's reconstruction. After 2005, the party replaced the revolutionary democracy doctrine with the developmental state ideology, neglecting the potential role of other social and civil organizations. This perpetuated the ideological shortcomings of previous regimes. In the following section, I examine the involvement of voluntary organizations in EPRDF's nation-building efforts.

#### 7.6.2 The Voluntary Associations

Voluntary associations, in general, can play a crucial role in nation-building processes (cf. Watt 2005; Wimmer 2018: 29, 196). EPRDF recognized the importance of these associations in fostering social cohesion, promoting community development, and advancing democratization efforts in Ethiopia. It supported the establishment of various types of voluntary associations, such as political parties, cooperatives, community-based organizations (CBOs), youth organizations, farmers' associations, women's associations, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). These associations had often been provided with the resources and support necessary to contribute actively to the country's economic and social development. By initially encouraging the creation of voluntary associations, the EPRDF created a platform to contribute to policymaking and nation-building efforts. While they were more often than not co-opted by the party, these associations played a significant role in creating opportunities for marginalized sections of society, such as women, youth, and rural communities.

One of the initial significant successes of EPRDF was its commitment to opening up political space and establishing a multi-party system. This transition to party and electoral politics was a new phenomenon that marked the country's move toward a democratic system. The multi-party system in Ethiopia under EPRDF's rule included various political parties operating at national and regional levels. EPRDF, a coalition of four ethnically based parties representing the country's major ethnic groups, faced challenges such as the long-standing dominance of the ruling party since 1991. Accusations of using state control to limit opposition activities and manipulate electoral processes were also leveled against the EPRDF. Additionally, the ethnic-based nature of

the political parties led to a fragmented political landscape along ethnic lines, fueling tensions and conflicts in regions with perceived competing interests among different ethnic groups.

Furthermore, voluntary associations, known as parties, were also divided based on urban, regional, or socio-economic agendas as individuals felt their interests were not adequately addressed. The Ethiopian Democratic Party (EDP) gained prominence in 2000, and the Coalition for Unity and Democracy (CUD) emerged in 2004 and experienced significant success in the 2005 election. *Medrek*, or the Ethiopia Federal Democratic Unity Forum, a broad coalition of opposition parties founded in 2008, brought together several of these parties, all representing dissatisfied constituencies. The EPRDF initially claimed to prioritize the interests of rural communities in its policy-making. However, over time, it shifted its focus to gaining the support of urban, educated, and intellectual groups. Despite this shift, political opposition to the EPRDF remained strong, albeit somewhat subdued. The ethno-elite of the EPRDF did not respect open political space and rights for very long. The political space became much more challenging for opposition parties and civic organizations since the momentous national general elections in 2005 (cf. Abbink 2006). Many observers and other political analysts regarded these elections as the most accessible and the fairest ever. For the first time in Ethiopian history, debates between opposition parties were broadcast on TV and radio, allowing opposition groups to advance their agendas. This event symbolized the opening of political space for all opposition groups. However, this promising beginning and hope for Ethiopia's future was a big deception. Between June and November 2005, security forces killed many civilians protesting the alleged manipulation of the voting results in Addis Ababa and other major Ethiopian cities while also detaining thousands of opposition members, journalists, and human rights activists, accusing them of terrorism (cf. Bach 2014; Abbink, 2006). This backlash also affected other non-political civil society organizations.

Next to political parties, other voluntary organizations exist as autonomous institutions in civil society, not run by the state, either. They act as agents reflecting the political, social, and economic interests of the people. In Ethiopia, civil society has played a complex and sometimes contradictory role in nation-building processes; although they, as a rule, were not founded with that aim in mind.<sup>12</sup> The EPRDF recognized the importance of civil society organizations (CSOs)

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<sup>12</sup> The country had its own historical 'civil society' institutions, such as the funeral associations (*iddir*), the saving clubs (*iqub*), collective work groups (*debo*), religious associations (*mehabir*), etc. They were always non-political.

in contributing to development and advancing democratic ideals. On the other hand, the government was often accused of co-opting or suppressing civil society groups and creating a restrictive legal framework that limited their scope and activities. One of the EPRDF's main concepts (especially after 2005) is the 'developmental state', emphasizing the role of the state in directing and driving development. This has led to a focus on having state and party-led institutions deliver the social services and take charge of economic development, and not civil society organizations.

However, EPRDF initially encouraged civil society engagement as a means of promoting participatory democracy and gathering broad support for its development agenda. CSOs in Ethiopia were given formal recognition and offered tax breaks and other institutional support. CSOs have, therefore, played some role in advancing development initiatives in areas such as health, education, and poverty alleviation. Nonetheless, the EPRDF's restrictions on CSO activities over time, including through new legislative measures such as the repressive Charities and Societies Proclamation of 2009 brought this phase to an end. It led to ca. 1000 CSOs effectively suspending their activities, and many observers concluded this approach was an attempt to suppress critical voices and limit anti-government activism (cf. Sisay 2012). In the same year-2009-the government also established the 'Charities and Societies Agency', to allegedly regulate the activities of the NGOs, CSOs, and charity organizations. While the official aim was to ensure that they operate in compliance with the country's laws, policies, and regulations and that they "contribute meaningfully to the development of the country" the Agency did not alter the repressive framework enacted in the CSO law of that year.

Although there was a positive narrative and the legalization of the right to form voluntary organizations, the EPRDF did not support independent civic associations as a contribution to nation-building. In reality, the EPRDF was intolerant of independent associations and sought to control their activities, including their daily operations. Any association that held fundamental principles differing from the EPRDF ideology was viewed as an agent of foreign countries or the opposition political camp.

CSOs and voluntary associations in Ethiopia thus largely remained fragile compared to other African countries, like Kenya, South Africa, or Nigeria. Nevertheless, CSOs de-emphasizing any political messages made significant contributions to humanitarian services, saving the lives of hundreds of thousands of rural Ethiopians in food-insecure situations by providing food, health

care, education, and other support. The government left them to it- if they would not be involved in political matters, but even here, the line was thin (cf. Tewodros 2018).

Still, CSOs kept doing their best, including professional associations that were seen by their members as crucial to promoting not only their interests but also as catalysts for the shared interests of society at large, as one of the CSO's leaders stated:

*Civic associations created by citizens have the power to bridge cultural barriers to organize their members in support of common national agendas. In this regard, both the Ethiopian Teachers Association and the Ethiopian Workers Association (labor union) have traditionally played an important role in mobilizing both their members and the general public for social change (Respondent no. 39, 2022).*

In Ethiopia, CSOs have a long history of assisting those in need, with their efforts evolving from the 1970s and 1980s to encompass a wide range of projects in the 1990s and a focus on promoting human rights in the 2000s. The implementation of the 2009 CSO law, however, hindered the progress of CSOs and impeded their involvement in human rights issues. Despite these challenges, civic society organizations have played a vital role in advancing Ethiopia's national development priorities. They have mobilized foreign resources, introduced new ideas and technologies to improve the productivity of beneficiaries, provided training and capacity building, and supplied materials to enhance living conditions and production capacity. Additionally, they have promoted business opportunities and increased community participation, contributing to nation-building and social cohesion. Unfortunately, the government has not viewed CSOs as genuine partners in the country's development; instead, it has expressed suspicion and accused them of spreading "neoliberal ideology" (cf. Gebre 2016).

One of the leaders of a community self-help organization emphasized Ethiopians' rich history of establishing and running cultural self-help groups. These organizations have played a crucial role in addressing a wide range of community social, political and economic issues. However, due to the suppression of the ruling elite, their constructive role and societal value were unable to mature and evolve into a nation-building instrument, and he further emphasized that:

*Civic associations should never be subject to the influence of the ruling class and could not effectively bridge the gap between the state and the people. He expressed Ethiopia's unfortunate lack of active civic organizations that could support democratic relationships and facilitate nation-building as a shared social goal. Additionally, he noted that non-governmental organizations have a weaker connection to the general public, relying heavily on their funding sources and often advocating for the interests of foreign donors*



*without providing truly altruistic services to support Ethiopian efforts for national improvement* (Respondent no. 3, 2022).

Tekeste (2006) supports the CSO leader's point by stating that the political system under the EPRDF did not support CSO involvement in nation-building. At the time, society was deeply divided, making it challenging to create a unified political community. The use of ethnicity for political mobilization worsened this fragmentation, hindering civil society's role in nation-building and potentially leading to identity-based conflicts and instability.

### 7.6.3 Public Goods Provision as an Instrument of Nation-Building

The success of nation-building relies heavily on improving the social and economic state. Economic factors are crucial in uniting and integrating diverse communities into a cohesive political and economic entity. Under the EPRDF government, infrastructure development was prioritized as a critical element of nation-building. The government understood the importance of infrastructure in driving economic growth, creating employment opportunities, and reducing poverty. Providing public goods is a vital strategy in nation building. These goods are accessible to all and can be utilized repeatedly without diminishing their benefits for others. Public goods can be provided at local, national, or international levels and include essential services such as health-care, education, and national defense, as they benefit the entire state.

Regarding the provision of public goods, the EPRDF made outstanding progress due to its ideology that strongly emphasized the rural masses as beneficiaries. Compared to previous governments, the EPRDF significantly improved public goods provision. It attempted to combat poverty and connect people through the expansion of infrastructure that fostered the creation of market and labor mobility, which were considered drivers for creating a single economic and political community. EPRDF has implemented a series of five-year national economic plans since 1995 under the names of Agriculture Development-Lead Industrialization (ADLI), Plan for Accelerated and Sustained Development to End Poverty (PASDEP), Sustainable Development and Poverty Reduction Program (SDPRP), and Growth and Transformation Plans (GTP I and GTP II), running up to 2022. The result of these often donor-country and World Bank-supported plans was a reduction of the number of people living in poverty<sup>13</sup> and brought about double-digit economic

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<sup>13</sup> The share of the population living below the national poverty line decreased from 30% in 2011 to 24% in 2016, and human development indicators improved as well.

(GDP) growth for more than fifteen years in a row since the early 2000s (cf. Planning and Development Commission 2020),<sup>14</sup> and specifically accelerating since-2004/2005.<sup>15</sup>

One of the interviewees explained the success of the expansion of infrastructure under EPRDF along the official party lines:

*The EPRDF strongly emphasized infrastructure development, particularly in vital sectors such as education, health, transportation, energy, water, and communication. The government has allocated significant funding to various infrastructure projects in recent years, including constructing new highways, railways, airports, hydroelectric power dams, and mobile networks. Of particular focus was the improvement of transportation infrastructure to enhance access to markets, services, and employment opportunities for both rural and urban communities. Efforts have also been made to expand and enhance the road network through the construction of expressways and bridges and investments in the railway system to facilitate the movement of goods and people within the country and to neighboring nations. In the energy sector, Ethiopia has made substantial investments in hydroelectric power stations, aiming to meet the country's growing electricity demands and modernize its economy. The Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam, Africa's largest dam, is a symbol of these efforts and is expected to significantly increase electricity generation while benefiting rural households and boosting export earnings (Respondent no. 10, 2022).*

Government economic policies have also bolstered the state's ability to reach remote, previously isolated rural areas. The expansion of road infrastructure is a prime example. Unlike previous administrations, the EPRDF's road network has consistently grown since then. For instance, it increased from 19,017 km in 1991/1992 to 85,966 km in 2019/2020 (FDRE 2021).<sup>16</sup>

Another way that the EPRDF sought to achieve nation-building was through the expansion of *education*, traditionally a prime venue for socio-cultural nation-building. The government invested heavily in expanding access to education and improving its quality (however, the opposite happened practically in education quality), particularly in rural areas. The literacy rate has significantly increased, from approximately 20% in the 1990s to about 50% in 2020. The government has also promoted local languages in education, allowing students to learn in their mother tongues. Additionally, the EPRDF policy has emphasized the importance of respecting

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<sup>14</sup> Growth was driven, among other things, by capital accumulation, particularly through investments in public infrastructure. Due to massive social protests and COVID-19, Ethiopia's real gross domestic product (GDP) growth slowed down in the years 2018, 2019, and 2020, and growth in the industrial and service sectors dropped to single digits. However, the COVID-19 pandemic had little impact on agriculture (where more than 70% of people work), and its contribution to growth slightly increased in FY2020/21 compared to the prior year (World Bank, 2020).

<sup>15</sup> The World Bank's overview of Ethiopia's economy, 2020.

<sup>16</sup> See also Appendix 3.

different ethnic and religious groups, advocating for the teaching of Ethiopia's diverse cultural heritage, and promoting gender equality, including improved access to education for girls (See Appendix 4.). In line with this, the government has recognized the economic significance of communications infrastructure for the country. It has invested in expanding the mobile network, fiber-optic cable, and broadcasting infrastructure. Despite the progress made, Ethiopia still needs to work on infrastructure development, including the need for private sector involvement, efficient systems, and attracting foreign investments.

In addition, the EPRDF government recognized that *health* is a crucial component in the nation-building process. It implemented policies and allocated significant resources towards achieving better health facilities and outcomes for the population. One of the key initiatives of EPRDF's healthcare policy was the Health Extension Program (HEP), which aimed to improve *access* to essential healthcare services, especially in rural areas. Under this program, a health extension worker is assigned to each village to provide basic health services, such as maternal and child health, disease prevention, and health education. The HEP was instrumental in reducing child and maternal mortality rates and increasing the uptake of family planning services. The EPRDF government also invested in building new hospitals and upgrading primary health centers, as well as implementing a community-based health insurance system (See Appendix 5).

In conclusion, despite significant advancements in economic and infrastructure development and the expansion of educational and healthcare services from 2000 to 2020, various socio-political issues continued to hinder the nation-building efforts. These issues were particularly prevalent in politics, the judiciary, societal peace, and relations between ethnic groups. The lack of fair distribution of economic gains, governance issues, mismanagement of public resources, and corruption were constantly debated, making it challenging to measure the true impact of public goods expansion on nation-building. While the EPRDF's prioritization of infrastructure development, healthcare, and education was intended to be a crucial strategy for nation-building, it faced obstacles in achieving its goals.

#### 7.6.4 Education and Linguistic Policy as Integrative Elements of Nation-Building

In this section, the researcher delved into Ethiopia's education and language policy sector during the EPRDF era. The EPRDF elite placed great ideological significance on the latter aspect. In many countries, education was viewed as a significant tool for fostering national unity. It was

also seen as a means of modernization, facilitating the harmonization of social and ethnic groups by creating shared values (Bell & Stevenson 2006). Education policy was a top priority for governments worldwide, aiming to cultivate citizens with a shared sense of identity and collective destiny. In recent decades, there has been increasing global pressure in this area, with education policies expected to have implications for economic prosperity and social citizenship.

The primary goal of education in Ethiopia during the EPRDF era was to develop citizens who actively contribute to the country's social, political, and economic progress. This included equipping the younger generation with the knowledge and skills necessary to improve production and productivity for the benefit of society. However, the education system also served as a tool for instilling specific beliefs and values in the youth, mainly through civic and ethical education focused on ethnic identity rather than a broader Ethiopian identity. This was evident in a study analyzing civic and history textbooks by Dawit and Haftu (2012).

*.... the dominant influence of civic and ethical education textbooks is to shape ethnic identity over Ethiopian identity. As revealed in much of the transcribed data, civic and ethical education textbooks have contributed to deepening students' ethnic identity over their Ethiopian identity, though some did say, "it made me recognize other ethnic identities." The textbooks encouraged students to have strong feelings about ethnic values and behaviors and underscored ethnic identity as the core value for human beings. The textbooks also reinforced the idea that ethnic groups should administer themselves and be governed by people coming from the same ethnic group. The 'we' essence from a nationalist perspective appears to have been marginalized (Dawit and Haftu 2012: 144-145).*

The EPRDF ruling elite implemented a unique approach to language policy as an integrative element, differing from previous administrations. The National Education and Training Policy (NETP) of Ethiopia, established in April 1994 under the Transitional Government of Ethiopia (TGE), outlined the policy objectives for education. One objective was to acknowledge the rights of nations and nationalities to be educated in their language while also providing a national and international language for communication. The language policies were formalized and institutionalized in the FDRE 1995 Constitution, where Article 5 stated that:

All Ethiopian languages shall enjoy equal state recognition. Amharic shall be the working language of the federal government. Members of the federation may, by law, determine their

respective working language (FDRE Constitution 1995)<sup>17</sup>. One of the former senior EPRDF members interviewed for this study described the language policy of EPRDF as follows:

*The EPRDF acknowledged the rich diversity of Ethiopia, with its multitude of ethnic groups, each with its own unique language and cultural heritage. To preserve and promote linguistic diversity and protect the rights of linguistic minorities, the language policy aimed to ensure the use of the national language, Amharic, in government administration and schools while also recognizing and supporting federal, regional, and community languages. Federal languages, such as Amharic, Tigrinya, Oromo, and Somali, were designated for national administration, while regional languages were utilized for local administration and education. The EPRDF also prioritized education as a critical aspect of its language policy, implementing new programs and policies to improve the quality of education and incorporate regional languages into the education system, thereby enabling children to receive quality education in their mother tongue. Additionally, efforts were made to develop regional language textbooks and train teachers to instruct in these languages. The initiative aimed to address the issue of high dropout rates among children who could not understand the language of instruction in schools (Respondent no. 47, 2022).*

Thus, the education policy in general and the language policy in particular emanated from the EPRDF political ideology, formulated on the narrative of national oppression and ethnic nationalism. As stated by Lahra Smith (2008: 223), “.... language policy for EPRDF was an opportunity to assert its legitimacy in the eyes of the nations and nationalities of Ethiopia”. But Tekeste Negash, in his seminal work (2006), argued that the EPRDF language policy did not in any way contribute to the task of creating a sense of common citizenship. Rather, it did quite the contrary:

*The current language policy appears to produce citizens who will find it hard to communicate with each other. The fact that Amharic is taught in non-Amhara areas only as a subject is not sufficient to make Amharic a trans-ethnic media of communication. The unifying language is supposed to be English since it is the media of instruction all over the country from (officially) grade 7. The discussion on the state of English above has hopefully shown that English would not and could not function as a unifying language in Ethiopia (Tekeste, 2006: 50).*

Also, according to Teshome Wagaw (1999), the language policies governing education in Ethiopia emanated from the larger EPRDF national language and ethnic policies, related to its politics and power consolidation. He further contended that the education and language policies were weak in facilitating national identification:

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<sup>17</sup> Article 5 of the Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE).

*The language policies related to education and training will not lead to nation-building or serve the educational and training needs of the children and youth of any segment. Rather, the policies are designed to promote artificial divisions among Ethiopians, even at risk of creating hatred and divisiveness which might lead eventually to deep rancor and fighting. It is tragically ironic to see that Africans reinvent for themselves the policy of apartheid, notions that colonial powers have been forced to abandon everywhere in the world (Teshome, 1999: 11).*

In contrast to Teshome's perspective, Getachew and Derib (2006) argued that the EPRDF's language policy represented a departure from the language policies of previous regimes. They contended that the language policies of emperors Tewodros II, Yohannis IV, Menelik II (although these emperors did not have a specific 'language policy'), Haile Sellasie I, and the *Derg* regime were similar in practice, as they all enforced a one-language policy with Amharic as the established *lingua franca*. On the other hand, the language use policy of the EPRDF government was significantly different, based on a multilingual model, which the authors believed had both positive and negative aspects. Seidel and Moritz (2009) also supported the multi-language strategy in Ethiopia's elementary education, aligning with the nation's multi-ethnic composition. They saw the teaching of children in their mother tongue while incorporating ethnic languages as an effective educational strategy and a forward-thinking cultural and economic policy. They emphasized the importance of incorporating local socio-cultural themes into education to properly integrate the nation's multi-ethnic context and maintain its diversity. However, they did not address the political context of the policy. While EPRDF's language policy, thus, recognized existing linguistic diversity and made efforts to promote the use of regional languages in education and government administration and whatever pedagogical and representational advantages there may be in the initial phase, in lower rungs of the education system, the policy cannot be said to have fostered nation building. Politics and inequality along ethno-regional lines have come to overshadow the social, economic, and regional linkages established via historical connections and the recent infrastructure expansion, state economic investment, and progress in health and educational provisions. The latter was proven insufficient to contain division and national contestation, as evident from the protests and armed conflicts after 2017. The debate on language policy and its role in creating a shared common identity is still unresolved.

### 7.6.5 National Symbols and Nation-Building

Raymond Firth's classic study in 1973 revealed that national symbols significantly represent a nation's values. While these symbols are universally recognized and accepted by citizens, their interpretation and identification with the official meaning can vary. National symbols are meant to embody a nation's core beliefs and values as perceived by the dominant groups within the country. However, some people within the nation may not align with these values, leading to conflicting interpretations of the symbols due to their ambiguity and multiple meanings. For instance, the flag, nomenclature, and national anthem are tangible symbols in people's daily lives and in projecting the state's image externally. In a diverse society like Ethiopia, these symbols should reflect the allegiance of diverse cultural groups to the state. However, the dominant cultural group monopolizes these symbols. In that case, it can lead to resentment and discontent among other cultural groups who feel excluded or believe the symbols do not accurately represent their history and beliefs. These symbols may be seen as emblems of oppression rather than fostering national identification and personal devotion to the nation.

Ethiopia's national symbols have sparked controversy due to the nation's intricate and varied history. Many citizens believe certain symbols fail to accurately reflect their ethnic or cultural heritage, resulting in discord and debate. For example, the national flag and anthem have been sources of contention. The anthem composed during Emperor Haile Selassie's rule has been criticized for its exclusivity, as it emphasizes God and the emperor, seemingly neglecting the cultural traditions of other Ethiopian ethnic groups. On the other hand, the anthem adopted in 1992 does not contain any ethnic or religious references.<sup>18</sup>

In post-1991 Ethiopia, national symbols sparked debates and controversies among political leaders and the public. The ruling EPRDF elite rejected the pan-Ethiopian identity promoted by previous regimes, instead conceptualizing Ethiopia differently. They downplayed the significance of imperial heroes and symbols while elevating new ones to a foundational status. For example, Emperor Menilek II, once celebrated as a national hero for resisting European colonization, was now criticized for alleged 'genocidal campaigns' within the Ethiopian empire. The EPRDF narrowed the origins of the contemporary Ethiopian state to Emperor Menilek II's late nineteenth-century conquests, effectively deconstructing the Ethiopian identity represented by the national flag, anthem, shared history, values, and destiny. This deconstruction of symbols did not yield the

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<sup>18</sup> See: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ethiopia,\\_Be\\_Happy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ethiopia,_Be_Happy).

intended result. It further fragmented competing ethnic groups and fueled a sense of animosity among elites and even among the ethno-cultural groups themselves. According to one prominent academician from AAU:

*The long-term endeavor to forge an Ethiopian nation and create common ground for the country's multicultural and multi-ethnic population has been severely damaged by the EPRDF's decision to belittle historical events like the Adwa victory, national heroes, the national flag, and the long Ethiopian history. This bold decision was taken without any study. For the EPRDF, the deconstruction had caused collateral damage. It could not establish a unified nation. The Ethiopian polity was split rather than being brought together under the new nation-building project. The reason behind this damage was the recasting of the national symbols that were not supported by evidence (Respondent no. 37, 2022).*

According to Dawit and Haftu (2012), more than attempts were needed to recreate tangible references to shared national symbols, values, and history. This finding is consistent with the interviewee's perspective. Their study's conclusions suggested that Ethiopia's history be rewritten and subjected to fresh scrutiny. They claimed that little effort had been put into creating everyday national heroes and symbols to help the younger generation form an Ethiopian identity and be inspired by a shared 'destiny'. On the other hand, one of the key respondents who support the idea of ethno-nationalism put his view as follows:

*The traditional national symbols, such as the flag, official holidays, and historical events, continue to reinforce the legacy of past imperial rule. They stand as a reminder of oppression and the perpetuation of the old elite's power. These symbols do not accurately reflect Ethiopian society nor contribute to developing a unified identity among the nation's diverse ethnic groups. Therefore, it is necessary to re-examine the significance of these symbols and consider replacing them with new emblems that better represent Ethiopian society's aspirations, values, and unity. While there may be concerns about altering the national flag, which is viewed as a symbol of pan-Africanism and freedom for many African nations, it is essential to have an open and honest dialogue about the meaning of these symbols (Respondent no. 14, 2022).*

The abovementioned conversation highlights the divisive political issue of national symbols under EPRDF control. Through this study, it has become clear that there are distinct and opposing viewpoints. The pan-Ethiopians strongly support the current symbols. They argue that Ethiopia's rich history and patriotic culture have established common symbols that unite its diverse communities through shared historical events, such as the Adwa victory of 1896. They also emphasize that all Ethiopians have sacrificed for the nation's sovereignty and geographical integrity across multiple generations. The national flag is seen as a representation of Ethiopia's



long-standing domestic and international independence, symbolizing liberty, freedom and nationalism in countries across Africa and the Caribbean. However, parallel national symbols in EPRDF Ethiopia, including regional national anthems, flags, and heroes, have significantly undermined the national symbols. The debate around national symbols in Ethiopia reflects deeper issues of identity and representation, which are essential to the success of any nation-building. Some policymakers and commentators argue that greater efforts need to be made to ensure that national symbols, anthems, and other cultural artifacts are inclusive and reflect the broad diversity of Ethiopian society, while others say that this should be left to individual ethnic regions and that the country should celebrate its diversity rather than impose a one-size-fits-all identity.

## Summary

Following the removal of the military rule in 1991, Ethiopia underwent a significant shift towards ethnic-based politics. The ruling EPRDF implemented ethnic-based federalism to acknowledge previously marginalized communities and grant ethnic and cultural rights. While this approach resulted in material-economic successes, it also contributed to ethnic divisions, challenges to political liberties, human rights issues, and regional economic inequalities. Ethno-nationalist parties/movements further strengthened ethnic politics in Ethiopia, with various groups adopting separatist language and tactics. This dominance of ethnic politics marginalized the pan-Ethiopian political camp and (re)shaped the country's political order. The roots of ethnic politics in Ethiopia can be traced back to exclusionary policies during Haile Selassie I's rule and the success of the Eritrean nationalist movement in resisting the central state and ultimately realizing Eritrea's independence in 1991— thus inspiring other autonomy movements. The rise of ethno-nationalist groups in Ethiopia was largely fueled by the aspirations of educated rural elites seeking political power and economic gains. While ethnic-based federalism aimed to address historical exclusion, it created divisions and challenges. Balancing ethnic rights with broader political liberties, human rights, and economic equality is essential for Ethiopia's more inclusive and stable political environment.

The recruitment and empowerment of elites within the EPRDF followed specific patterns and criteria, leading to a decline in their competency and performance. The replacement of previous elites and the lack of continuity in leadership hindered the nation-building process in Ethiopia. The treatment of elites based on ethnicity fostered hostility and mistrust, exacerbating

divisions within society. The inability to find common ground among elites posed challenges to the nation-building process in Ethiopia.

Ethiopia's nation-building efforts have encountered obstacles due to the influence of ethno-elites, ethnic tensions, conflicting ideologies, and inadequate governance. Struggles for power and resources have hindered the emphasis on ethnic identity and autonomy in the nation-building project. Civil society organizations have played important roles, but their potential has been limited by government co-optation and ethnic rivalries. While infrastructure expansion, state economic investment, and progress in health and education have been critical in the country's social and political transformation, it is worth considering whether they have also contributed to 'nation-building' in the broader social and cultural sense. The overall record is mixed and leans towards the negative, with politics and inequality along ethno-regional lines overshadowing the established social, economic, and regional linkages, as evidenced by the protests and armed conflicts after 2017. Education and language policies have also contributed to ethnic divisions rather than primarily fostering a sense of national unity or national political community. The debate over national symbols has also reflected broader issues of identity and representation in Ethiopia.



## **CHAPTER EIGHT**

### **POST-2018 ETHIOPIA: THE ELITE CHANGE AND THE RISKS OF POLITICAL REFORM**

#### **8.1 Introduction**

This chapter focused on the recent political settlement and the proclaimed transition to democracy in Ethiopia since April 2018. Given the brief time, this can only be a preliminary assessment. The researcher wants to shed light on the circulation of the core governing elite constituencies that have shaped the new political landscape and the practical measures taken to address longstanding grievances, promote inclusivity, and reform key institutions in Ethiopia's political, security, and economic sectors. These efforts are crucial for fostering nation-building. An important aspect to consider is the consequence of these ongoing changes in Ethiopia's political system, democratization endeavors, and the nation-building process. Given the fluid nature of the political transition, any conclusions drawn must be seen as provisional.

However, it is imperative to examine the positive and negative consequences of the transition and elite reconfiguration since April 2018, specifically focusing on the role of the elite in nation-building. To evaluate effectively this role, assessing whether the elite reconfiguration has successfully addressed historical grievances, fostered inclusivity, and promoted a sense of national unity is necessary. Furthermore, it is essential to analyze the extent to which the elite has championed democratization, upheld human rights, and implemented inclusive policies. Evaluating the elite's contribution to drive economic reforms, reducing poverty, and creating better future opportunities for the population is also essential. Additionally, the elite's impact on social cohesion and ethnic relations should be considered. By investigating these dimensions, the researcher can gain insights into the positive contributions made by the post-2018 power elite in nation-building and identify potential challenges and pitfalls.

## 8.2 State Building Efforts and the Democratic Transition Dilemma in Ethiopia

State building involves establishing and strengthening political, economic, and social institutions essential for long-term socio-economic development and national-political survival. It encompasses creating new institutions and reinforcing existing ones, playing a crucial role in the forging of a national political community across regional, ethnic, and religious differences within a state. In several developing countries, particularly in Africa, state fragility, in extreme cases, state failure has been attributed to weak institutions, perpetuating widespread poverty, hindering democratic transition, and leading to governance failure (Fukuyama, 2004). According to Scott (2007), state building can be viewed as a subset of development, encompassing mechanisms for service delivery, tax reforms, civil service reform, infrastructure development, promotion of democratization, the establishment of a multi-party system, implementation of responsible public financial management, and development of effective conflict management mechanisms. Krasner and Risse (2014) argued that the success of state-building can be determined by factors such as the legitimacy of the actors involved, task complexity, institutionalization, and the availability of adequate resources.

Since 1991, the EPRDF has controlled the government. The party built a political structure centered on ethnicity as a political identity, purportedly with representation for each 'ethnic group.' Once in state power, the TPLF changed its political stance several times. Even though it was a party/front representing about 6.5% of the total population and one of the minority groups, it controlled national politics for almost three decades within and through the EPRDF (Medhane & Young, 2003). The coalition experienced multiple legitimacy and ideological crises throughout its three decades of dominance. Through moments known as *Tehadeso*, translated as 'renewal,' it overcame most of these crises.

As one of the interviewees (Respondent no. 45, 2021) noted, "... EPRDF's reign was successful because of its political platform's unity, its members' dedication, including the vanguard cadre and party members, and its ability to adapt to the dynamic situation". The EPRDF improvised its policies on the unfolding global political situation on separate occasions (Aalen, 2020). For instance, it discarded Marxism and embraced a free market economy (though it remained party-led) in response to the significantly changing global order (see Paulos 2003). It reduced the threat posed by the insurgent OLF, repelled Islamist incursions from Sudan and

Somalia, defeated Eritrea in the 1998-2000 war, achieved impressive socioeconomic development, took radical steps toward state decentralization based on the principle of (ethnic) self-determination, and initially made progress—though uneven—toward democratizing the nation (Medhane & Young 2003).

After seizing state power, the EPRDF maintained a 'closed-access' order, which involved politically excluding rival elites and monopolizing rents through ethnic patronage (Chanie, 2007). These changes created institutional barriers to growth that continue to impact Ethiopia today. One of the respondents from Prosperity Party gave the following argument:

*The EPRDF implemented a federal system to address longstanding power struggles arising from the centralization of political power and the marginalization of certain groups. This was achieved by decentralizing power to regional states, allowing for self-governance and the promotion of ethnic languages and cultures. In addition to establishing autonomous regional states to address local issues, the 1995 Constitution also emphasized the principle of shared governance in national affairs, ensuring fair representation in national decision-making bodies (Respondent no. 45, 2022).*

The theoretical emphasis on self-rule and shared rule was there, and the rights were protected by the Constitution, even though EPRDF's federalism had many flaws and was criticized for being a symbolic federalism because the regions did not have complete autonomy. However, the EPRDF party structure, which served as a control tool, replaced the function of state institutions at the regional and national levels. Self-contradictory practices marked EPRDF's reign because of competing interests in centralizing power through party structures and the devolution of authority to the regional states. These practices fueled the nation's cycle of instability and weak state institutions (Respondent 31, 2022). Another political figure in an interview asserted that:

*After over thirty years in power, the EPRDF's attempts to form a state failed to meet society's expectations. Neither had it established a system of shared governance that could promote national unity by tolerating diversity, nor did it produce a workable federalism that would strengthen regional autonomy. Instead, it fostered ethnic nationalism, which emphasizes diversity and 'multiculturalism.' Instead of addressing mutual respect for ethnicity and pan-Ethiopian political views as a way to reduce political polarization, the EPRDF used ethnicity as a patronage network to defend and preserve power against perceived rivals like the 'pan-Ethiopian groups. Protests began throughout the nation due to the ruling elite pursuing conflicting interests and being unable to satisfy social demands for peace, justice, a democratic system, and economic progress due to the coalition's inability to manage society's growing expectations for better life (social and economic) advances and a quest for Political reforms. Resistance and protests broke out in every part of the country, ultimately removing TPLF from the central seat of power (Respondent no. 8, 2022).*

The interviewee above asserted that failure in the EPRDF's attempt to establish state institutions that could accommodate the divergent interests of numerous political groupings and be capable of the needs of the general populace resulted in a political breakdown in the system. The political system as a whole has experienced volatility and turmoil as a result of the institutional failures that caused political decline since 2016. In conversation with a former diplomat, he revealed the following:

*Significant political deterioration had been going on for some time. The EPRDF attempted to address the issues at hand by implementing several internal political changes. However, it did not deal with the underlying problem, which was politicized ethnic tensions, which ultimately caused the breakdown of the system (Respondent no.16, 2022).*

As a result, many government institutions failed to meet their obligations, mainly due to corruption, nepotism, the influence of a select few and a lack of fairness. The government's structures, which consisted mainly of civil servants from certain ethnic groups, proved ineffective at carrying out their duties. As public dissatisfaction grew, protests erupted, ultimately leading to the TPLF-led EPRDF relinquishing its power (Respondent no. 16, 2022). The interviewee's reference to political deterioration underscores the challenges faced during the democratic transition promised by EPRDF in 1991. Although the party initially introduced a multiparty system, expanding the country's political landscape, the transition could have lived up to expectations. Despite implementing electoral politics and five consecutive election cycles, the balance of power remained unchanged throughout EPRDF's nearly three decades of rule. The violent political unrest from dissatisfaction with the democratic transition ultimately resulted in the ruling EPRDF elite relinquishing power in early 2018 (Merera, 2011). Regarding this, one seasoned EPRDF official noted that:

*The country's democratization process, which the EPRDF promised when it came to power and which could count on public support, faded over time, as did the revolutionary spirit of the party. As compared to the early EPRDF years, the elections, held every five years, were unable to bear legitimacy. The political space was gradually narrowed to the opposition political parties outside of the EPRDF network, leaving them vulnerable to coalition maneuvers (Respondent no. 15, 2022).*

According to the interviewee, the challenge of democratic transition worsened the legitimacy crisis of the EPRDF. The public quickly responded as the EPRDF failed to fulfill its earlier promises, such as strengthening democracy, promoting balanced and equitable economic

growth and ensuring political stability. The veteran Oromo political leaders Lencho and Hassan (2021)<sup>19</sup> emphasized that Ethiopia's main obstacle to democratization has always been the EPRDF's lack of internal democratic culture, as an undemocratic organization cannot promote democratization. They pointed out that the lack of internal party democracy not only hindered Ethiopia's democratic transition but also caused significant friction and ultimately led to the dissolution of the ruling coalition's power. The following section briefly discussed the push for political change within the ruling coalition.

### 8.3. The Quest to Reform and the End of TPLF Dominance in the EPRDF Coalition

#### 8.3.1. Struggle within the EPRDF

As Markakis (2021) asserted, the primary focus of the EPRDF coalition was to gain control of state power and uphold the Ethiopian state's political stability and territorial integrity. As mentioned in the preceding chapter, the EPRDF employed two narratives to solidify its power: firstly, by promoting peace and stability through the containment of violent hostilities by insurgent groups, and secondly, by establishing a political structure that ensures equality among Ethiopia's diverse ethnic groups. Later, a third narrative was introduced, emphasizing to eradicate poverty and accelerating economic growth (Lencho & Hassan, 2021).

EPRDF made headway in fulfilling these three pledges: it ensured the stability of the country, established an ethnic-based political system that gave priority to ethnic group rights and was able to accelerate economic growth that uplifted millions of people from the trap of poverty. However, regardless of these successes, discontent emerged about the growing authoritarianism by TPLF leaders vis-à-vis the other three members of the EPRDF coalition.

The party circle's struggle sparked a demand for 'equal status' and 'genuine partnership' instead of a patron-client relationship. After the 2005 elections, the problem became increasingly apparent. During these elections, the EPRDF suffered significant seat losses in almost all of the country's urban areas. After the elections, peer and party reviews suggested the party 'should work very hard' on the economic front, especially in urban areas. In addition, the electoral defeat

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<sup>19</sup> See: 'Ethiopia and EPRDF: reform or perish', in *The Reporter*, 3 March 2018 (at <https://www.thereporterethiopia.com/4415/>).



worsened the chasm between coalition members due to accusations and counter-accusations. EPRDF then decided to carry out two tasks: to increase the number of young and educated elites to join the party and initiate a quick economic growth program to win the public's hearts and souls.

In Chapter 7, the researcher observed a shift from the ideology of 'revolutionary democracy' to an aggressive economic growth program, based on the 'developmental state' ideology. This model allowed the party to focus on expanding infrastructure development, leading to increased agricultural productivity and rapid economic growth. Through direct foreign investment, the involvement of the diaspora in the economy, and the expansion of local businesses, Ethiopia has experienced significant economic growth supported by substantial domestic and foreign loans. This transformation led to Ethiopia being recognized as an 'African tiger' and a prime example of African economic success. Despite its remarkable achievements in economic development, EPRDF could not attain results in the dimension of social cohesion. One senior politician from the opposition camp confirmed that:

*The TPLF, the central figure of the EPRDF, was blamed for the violent incidents; because TPLF core members and their affiliates were portrayed as prime beneficiaries of the dividends of the rapid economic growth....This anti-EPRDF sentiment caused internal strife within the ruling class since some power elite members sought to change the system and others were devoted to preserving the status quo by externalizing the political problems resulting from the system's decadence and the EPRDF's poor leadership (Respondent no. 14, 2022).*

The EPRDF organized several unsuccessful meetings to contain the crisis. The coalition partners from the Oromo and the Amhara ethnic groups blamed the TPLF. This had been unimaginable in the past and marked a turning point. One of the interviewees articulated the lack of unity within the party as follows:

*The elites within the EPRDF coalition did not represent national interests but rather the interests of various ethnic groups. This lack of a unified platform meant that representatives of different nationalities could not come together for common causes. As a result, they were divided and needed more cohesion. Additionally, their conflicting interests, with Oromo and Amhara elites advocating for their respective groups, further fueled this fragmentation. The focus on ethnic-based political competition, rather than party or ideology, only exacerbated these divisions. Ultimately, this led to a situation where the competition between rival ethnic elites resembled that of elites from different countries, further contributing to their fragmentation (Respondent no. 37, 2022).*

According to the interviewee, the power struggle among the ruling elite began to affect the general public, leading to political and social unrest in different regions of the country. In a

departure from tradition, ruling coalition members publicly criticized and denounced their party. This shift in dynamics spurred youth protests and increased public calls for democratization and economic reforms. Economic grievances were fueled by a widespread belief that economic development benefits were primarily enjoyed by Tigray or corrupt elites working with the TPLF elite.

By October 2016, it had become apparent that the Ethiopian government was facing its most significant crisis since coming into power in 1991. The unrest and violence that began in Oromia, driven by disaffected youth, had spread to the Amhara region and had a profound impact across the nation. The youth movement exacerbated tensions between the established ruling party leaders and the emerging elite within the coalition party. The old guard, who sought to maintain the status quo, believed that things were generally going well, aside from some deficiencies in service delivery attributed to rent-seeking behavior among civil servants and political elites at lower levels of the government. The entrenched leadership disparagingly labeled the Oromo youth movement as petty narrow nationalist and the Amhara youth movement as chauvinistic and anti-federalist, in an attempt to discredit and marginalize their legitimate grievances and demands for change. Instead of addressing the root causes of the public's grievances, the EPRDF leadership largely attributed the protests to the influence of foreign governments.

The internal party rift between the party's old group and the newly rising young elites, who demanded reform, grew due to the widespread upheaval and pressure from the Ethiopian diaspora and the international community. In late 2017, EPRDF went to concede reforms in various sectors and ultimately accepted a change in leadership. As Yohannes Gedamu (2018) observed, the coalition unveiled a reform agenda focusing on broadening the political space, releasing political prisoners, and listening to the voices of the opposition. The disagreements among the member parties within the ruling coalition leadership ended in April 2018 (cf. Shoa & Gizaw 2021), when an internal election was held for a new chairperson for EPRDF and prime minister for Ethiopia replacing Hailemariam Desalegn who has been in power since the death of Meles Zenawi in 2012.

### 8.3.2 The Ascent of Abiy Ahmed to Power

The election of OPDO candidate Abiy Ahmed to the EPRDF chairmanship and premiership of the federal government meant a notable change within the political elite, as the hitherto dominant TPLF was unable to impose its candidate. Abiy's rise was facilitated by the then

Oromia Region President and the prominent party member Lemma Megersa, who was not a member of the parliament, and Abiy was elected with the essential, last-minute voting support of the Amhara ANDM bloc within the EPRDF. As Terrence Lyons (2019) and many others noted (cf. Abbink 2021a: 3), the rise of Abiy Ahmed to power occurred as a result of the popular uprisings *and* the internal party crisis in the EPRDF, which had led to a lack of direction and leadership in a moment of deep crisis, as evidenced by the declaration of the ‘state of emergency’ (cf. Abbink 2022: 308). The demands for change, equal participation, and autonomy from interference by the federal government in various regional matters per the 1995 Constitution guaranteed shared rule and self-rule rights for the two levels of government (cf. Bizuneh 2022).

The deep-seated animosity towards the TPLF led to a lack of trust and suspicion within the leadership, weakening the ability of law enforcement and other government institutions to address the needs of the people. The pressure from the public on the EPRDF leadership further strained the already fragmented relationships among ethnic elites, leading to increased unrest. The election of an OPDO candidate for the post of being prime minister with Amhara ANDM support marked a pivotal moment in dismantling TPLF dominance in Ethiopia's power structure. Prime Minister Abiy's unexpected major reforms signaled a significant departure from the EPRDF's traditions and were initially seen as a turning point in the nation's politics. However, experts in various fields argued that these rapid reforms exacerbated ethnic tensions in the country, fueled by ethno-national political movements influenced by past EPRDF policies.

## 8.4. The Reform Agenda of Abiy Ahmed: Elite Change or Redefinition?

### 8.4.1 Reform of the Executive Organs and other State Institutions

This section of the study examined whether the political transition within the EPRDF coalition since April 2018 constitutes a profound shift in the ruling elite and far-reaching, transformative consequences for Ethiopian and nation-building processes. The events of the past three years demonstrate that this transition has had a seismic impact on the country's political power dynamics sending shockwaves throughout the nation and remolding the very bedrock of its governance.

The new government and cabinet reflected a broadening of the base: there was an attempt to build a new ruling coalition, mainly based around the Oromo-Amhara alliance, but supported by other ethno-elites and aimed at reducing the influence and dominance of TPLF in the federal

power positions, the national army and the economy. Next to Abiy Ahmed's appointment as prime minister from OPDO, Demeke Mekonnen from ANDM became deputy prime minister. Furthermore, most of the cabinet positions were split between elites from these two ethno-political parties, with increased representatives from the previously underrepresented ethno-political forces in the south and the peripheries of pastoralist regions (cf. Meester *et al.* 2021).

Initially, the political transition under the new leadership allowed for the integration of new elite members from various backgrounds, including from universities, opposition political parties, and pastoralist regions with less political experience and weaker ties to the ruling coalition. Within the EPRDF circles, these elite members, previously not considered for higher-level positions, were appointed to key positions in the country's Cabinet. Following the 2021 national parliamentary elections, prominent opposition figures were appointed to the Ministries of Education, Science and Technology, and Culture and Sports under the Prosperity Party majority government (Mengistu T. 2021).

Since 2018, the new government has faced challenges in asserting control over state institutions and reshaping their composition and policies. The influence of TPLF networks within the state apparatus has been perceived as excessive and constraining, particularly in the early months of the Prime Minister's tenure. The new government has embarked on a course of action to address this issue. This has involved reorganizing the leadership of various government entities, including agencies, state-owned enterprises, and ministries, by bringing in a mix of experts, loyalists and political supporters. Additionally, a series of organizational changes have been implemented to enhance the effectiveness of state institutions while creating opportunities for the new ruling elite to weaken the established TPLF networks. Furthermore, Abiy's administration has adjusted financing arrangements to align with its new priorities, including increased budget allocations to critical ministries and centralized control over financial streams.

Being part of the ruling EPRDF coalition, holding key government and party positions, the researcher, as part of the governing political elite, attests that the appointment of new officials at critical positions helped the incumbents, on the one hand, paved the way to consolidate Abiy's autocratic power, and on the other hand to break the so-called reform obstacle in the existing power structure networks of the TPLF ruling elite and its affiliated parties. The appointment created space for new emerging leaders from different backgrounds, but their lack of experience and management capacity posed challenges in fully implementing unclear reform policies. Resistance

and lack of trust within institutions previously controlled by TPLF officials and civil servants were also characterized as if they hindered the early stages of the reforms. Using the dominant perception against Tigrayans Abiy shifting strategic portfolios away from TPLF control. However, reorganizing reporting lines to the new power elite was complex and slow due to entrenched power-resistant personnel in the system and a lack of competency and trust deficit incoming group.

Abiy's ongoing reform initiative was thought to be focused on appointing loyal and capable individuals to key positions within government institutions. However, this has led to rapid turnover and a loss of organizational memory and continuity. For example, in the last four years of Abiy Ahmed's tenure until the end of 2022, several ministries including Education, Justice, Innovation and Technology, Foreign Affairs, Defense, Agriculture, Revenues, Trade and Industry, as well as the National Security Service, the Army Chief of Staff, and other high-ranking officials and state ministers have experienced at least three times changes in leadership. This constant reshuffling has weakened the institutions and created instability within the state apparatus (Meester *et al.*, 2022).

#### 8.4.2 Reform of the Ethiopian Security Sector

After the *Derg* regime was overthrown in 1991, the TPLF had a strong grip on the security sector with control over the armed forces and main intelligence agencies. Tigrayan military elites held top leadership positions and the majority of middle-level positions were held in these institutions. This dominance dates back to the early days of the EPRDF post-1991 transition, when the TPLF armed forces dismantled the Ethiopian military, police, and security apparatus and replaced it with its forces, giving them an upper hand in the country's military and security structure. There were few attempts to balance the security sector's composition over the last 25 years, and the imbalance worsened after the 2005 elections. This led to hostility among different segments of society and served as a rallying cry for large-scale demonstrations.

In 2018, Abiy Ahmed and his group sought to establish themselves as the emerging political elite by taking control of the challenges posed by the TPLF group. This involved implementing significant reforms in the security sector to maintain authority at the federal level during the transition. The leadership in the security sector was replaced by loyalists from the Oromo and the Amhara ethnic groups/parties, resulting in the removal of Tigrayan officers from top security positions by early 2020. TPLF's attack on Ethiopia's federal army camps in November 2020 sparked a two-year war, causing significant harm to the country, its citizens, and the hope of

the people of Ethiopia to transition toward the system that realizes the rule of law in the country. Ultimately, the war began as a conflict between the TPLF and the newly emerging federal political elite for power struggle.

#### 8.4.3 Reforms in the Ethiopian Economy

Throughout the post-2018 transition, Ethiopia's economy turned into a critical arena where the new administration has sought to implement change. Improving the performance of the country's economy to deliver 'prosperity' to the population has been a key pledge of the new ruling elite since the early stages of the transition. As a result, economic reforms quickly became a domain where traditional elite interests and alliances were reconfigured. The government also sought to address the economic slowdown effects of 2016-17 and to increase the state's capacity to deliver economic benefits (UNDP, 2022). The changes taking place in the economic sector also had critical political implications. During the EPRDF era, the ruling elite and their allies had leveraged control over the economic sector.

The new administration in Ethiopia has the opportunity to implement significant economic reforms that could dismantle the existing patronage networks while also positioning itself within the state structure and kick starting economic growth. One key focus and showcase has been on professionalizing economic policy-making, with a commitment to prioritizing qualifications and experience over party connections when selecting new officials. The traditional appointment approach, which was heavily based on political considerations, has been criticized. To address this, the administration has established the National Macroeconomic Committee (NMC) to lead and coordinate economic policy-making efforts from the early stages of the transition.

Furthermore, the State-Owned Enterprises (SOEs) were placed under the direct oversight of a new institution called the Public Enterprises Holdings and Administration Agency (PEHAA). This new agency replaced the previous coordinating body, the Ministry of Public Enterprises (MoPE), and was made accountable to the Ministry of Finance (MoF). Additionally, a new public entity called the Liability and Asset Management Corporation (LAMC) was established to manage the SOEs' debt and placed under the MoF. As a result, the Ministry of Finance emerged as a powerful entity with increased authority to coordinate all federal-level SOEs, which collectively account for about 15% of the country's economy (Meester *et al.*, 2022). Another critical aspect of the reform involved changes to the management of the SOE. It also helped the government

dismantle the previous system that allowed the TPLF elite to exert undue influence over the economy.

The government's efforts to reform Ethiopia's economy have also included, at least in words, the privatization of several state-owned enterprises. This was propagated as a vital part of the Prime Minister's reform agenda in the early stages of the transition. There were several reasons behind these privatization promises. They served as instruments to show a political signal of a departure from the EPRDF's ideological framework of the developmental state towards a more mixed, liberal economic model. Additionally, privatization was a way to attract foreign investment to Ethiopia, aiming to close budgetary gaps and bolster the nation's foreign exchange reserves. The government's commitment to privatization helped garner support from Western (donor) nations and international financial institutions—until the conflict in Northern Ethiopia began in late 2020.

## 8.5 The Rapprochement of Ethiopia and Eritrea

Following the 2018 change of government and the introduction of a new leadership team at the EPRDF, there was a shift in approach to the longstanding Ethiopian-Eritrean war. This conflict, which took place between May 1998 and June 2000, resulted in a significant loss of life and was sparked by economic disagreements and a border dispute between the two states. Tens of thousands of young citizens from both sides tragically lost their lives in a war that ultimately proved to be paradoxical and pointless for both countries.

After two years of conflict, Ethiopia and Eritrea signed a comprehensive peace agreement in Algiers on December 12, 2000. The agreement called for an end to military hostilities and the use of force between the warring parties. It also mandated the creation of a neutral boundary commission to address claims from both sides and called for an independent investigation into the origins of the conflict. The decision of the Eritrea-Ethiopia Boundary Commission (EEBC) of the Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague was published in 2002.<sup>20</sup> However, Ethiopia refused to accept the decision, resulting in a stalemate and a "no war-no peace" situation until 2018. Despite the initial agreement to resolve the border dispute through a neutral arbitrator, both countries continued to engage in proxy conflicts and measures to undermine each other. This

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<sup>20</sup> See: <https://pca-cpa.org/en/cases/99/>. Also: Abbink 2021b.

ongoing tension led to the closure of the border, suffering among local populations, and blocked economic exchanges.

In 2018, Abiy Ahmed's government made a breakthrough by accepting the EEBC Decision. Abiy visited Asmara in July to finalize a broader normalization agreement with Eritrean President Isaias Afewerki. This move did not sit well with the TPLF leadership, adding another layer to the growing intra-elite conflict within the EPRDF.

Nevertheless, the post-2018 leadership perceived by the populations in both countries as a profound measure ended instability on the border. The normalization of relations was also considered by the international community as a positive move towards stabilization and prospects of the wider Horn region (cf. Woldemariam 2019). No one could have predicted that the 20-year deadlock would end so quickly, and the dynamism and speed of the normalization were welcomed. According to Dibaba and Ahadu (2020), the resolution of the stalemate between Ethiopia and Eritrea positively impacted stabilizing the Horn region. However, TPLF's elite were uncomfortable with the events, claiming that the reconciliation aimed to isolate Tigray and undermine TPLF's authority in the region.<sup>21</sup> The reconciliation between Ethiopia and Eritrea has raised hopes of the two peoples for a brighter future, including resolving long-standing conflicts, improving neighborly relations, creating a safer environment, promoting economic development and job opportunities, and strengthening people-to-people connections. Despite these positive expectations, the reconciliation also led to internal conflicts among Ethiopian political elites, resulting in mistrust and ultimately contributing to the deadly civil war in northern Ethiopia, preventing the desired stability from being achieved.

## 8.6 The Birth of the Prosperity Party and the Demise of the EPRDF

In December 2019, a significant shift took place within the ruling party in the form of the EPRDF announcing its disbandment and the formation of a new political party called the 'Prosperity Party' under the leadership of Abiy Ahmed. This decision was made at the 11<sup>th</sup> General Congress of the EPRDF coalition based on the proposal of the Central Committee (CC) following discussions that had been ongoing for over a decade. The party's General Congress, prompted by

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<sup>21</sup> Michael Woldemariam (2019) made much of this argument and suggested that Abiy and Isaias "shared the aim to dismantle the TPLF."



the top leadership, recommended a shift from 'revolutionary democracy' to a new, more pragmatic approach (See Chapter 7). Additionally, in September 2018, the constituent parties of the EPRDF changed their names, with the OPDO becoming the 'Oromo Democratic Party (ODP)' and the ANDM becoming the 'Amhara Democratic Party (ADP)'. Both parties showed a trend of distancing themselves from the previous political culture and values of the EPRDF coalition and its leadership style fundamentally.

Since assuming control, the new leadership has advocated for the EPRDF coalition's unification into a single, unified national party. This was achieved through decisions made at the EPRDF congress, which provided the rationale for the merger. However, some members of the Oromo Democratic Party (ODP) and senior members of the TPLF opposed this move in various ways. Despite objections, the new EPRDF leadership dissolved the 30-year-old coalition in November 2019 in favor of the new "unified" national party, the so-called Prosperity Party (PP), with its own new party program and party bylaws. The proposal for the merger was accepted by three EPRDF member parties (from the Oromo, the Amhara, and the South<sup>22</sup>) together with five other affiliated parties.<sup>23</sup>

The new party agreed to uphold Abiy Ahmed's new political ideology called *Meddemer*<sup>24</sup> which emphasized a form of synergy and unity among people, along with more market oriented economic policies as a core party program. TPLF rejected the party merger, describing it as an "illegal and reactionary aspiration towards centralization of power into the hands of few individuals"<sup>25</sup> (cf. Lyons 2021).

The move was also denounced by other prominent 'ethno-nationalist' political figures and activists, including some opposition leaders who identified themselves as 'federalists', as an effort 'to reinstate the old unitary system' in Ethiopia, overthrown in 1991. Some critics, such as the academician Awol Allo (2019) stated that many constitutional, ideological, and representational concerns that could have improved the legitimacy and representativeness of the new party were overlooked by the PP's supporters. For other critics, the Prosperity Party was the product of an

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<sup>22</sup> The Southern Ethiopian People's Democratic Movement.

<sup>23</sup> I.e., the Ethiopian Somali People's Democratic Party (ESPDP), the Afar National Democratic Party (ANDP), the Benishangul-Gumuz People's Democratic Unity Front (BGPDUF), the Gambela People's Democratic Movement (GPDM) and the Harari National League (HNL).

<sup>24</sup> See Abiy Ahmed's book *Meddemer / Ida'amu*, published in Amharic and Oromiffa in 2019.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. <https://addisstandard.com/news-tplf-cites-legal-procedural-shortfalls-to-decline-merger/>.

ideological crisis and a lack of competent leadership in the EPRDF coalition. Assefa Fiseha, in line with the above argument, also has argued:

*At the core of this is an ideological crisis within EPRDF, a power struggle among the coalition members, and a lack of competent leadership within the ruling party. The EPRDF was dissolved prematurely and rebranded as the PP, which turned the member coalitions into branches, centralizing the party structure without enough consultation and consensus. The TPLF saw that as a step towards centralization that would lead to the dissolution of the federal system and declined to join as the process liquidated the autonomous position of the members of the coalition. The federal government continued to target the TPLF, accusing it of human rights violations while the TPLF responded by characterizing the PP as a centrist regime (Assefa, 2022: 285).*

The emergence of the Prosperity Party signaled the end of the EPRDF as a political force. However, the party's impact on and influence on Ethiopia's political and economic landscape are enduring and will continue to be significant for years. Despite the elite reconfiguration represented by the Prosperity Party, it has not yet provided practical solutions to the longstanding issues of ethnic tensions, economic inequality, and political instability, as evidenced in the last five years since 2019. It remains to be seen whether the Party will be able to address these challenges effectively. However, the establishment of the Prosperity Party (PP) was viewed by many elite members and much of the general public as a positive step towards reunifying the long-divided nation.

## 8.7 Post-2018 Elite Change and Elite Action: Nation Rebuilding/Nation Disintegration?

This section discusses the political reform agenda post-2018 in Ethiopia. The shift in the political leadership and the subsequent implementation of the reform agenda have been hailed as a pivotal development in the country's political history. The reform was likened to a political 're-set' that brought about significant changes in Ethiopia's political landscape at the start of the reform period. It involved extensive restructuring of institutions, widespread rhetoric about constitutional amendments to protect rights and establish checks and balances, the promotion of political pluralism and citizen engagement, and reinforcing the rule of law. These comprehensive reform agendas have raised expectations for a bright future and the development of an inclusive and accountable political system, the strengthening of democratic foundations, and the promotion of social cohesion in Ethiopia. However, after implementing the reforms, the new government faced

unprecedented challenges, including drawbacks related to institutionalizing the reform agendas and increased ethnic tensions and nationwide strife. The country's economy also slows down, manifested by stagnating exports, mass youth unemployment, rising inflation, and a decline in foreign aid and foreign direct investment.

In this section, the researcher examined the political transition, its impact on nation-building, and the potential for nation disintegration following the elite change in 2018. The new political elite's efforts to implement reform agendas, improve democratic governance, promote peace and security, drive economic development, and strengthen social cohesion are crucial in achieving successful nation-building. However, due to the transition's fluid nature, only a preliminary assessment can be provided at this time.

#### 8.7.1 Elite Circulation and Institutionalization of the Reform Agenda

As noted by North (1990: 3), institutions refer to formal or informal structures ('rules of the game') that help establish orderly relations in the political, economic, and social interactions of individuals in a society. Political institutions help ease collective decision making processes and orient towards a common destination or outcome.

Institutions are often considered as building blocks for nation-building since they indirectly involve the construction of a national identity using the power of state institutions aimed at promoting social cohesion, predictability of procedures and relations, and unification of the people within the state so that it remains politically stable and viable in the long run. Furthermore, as Mylonas (2013) argued, legitimate authority in modern national states emanates from majority popular rule, and nation-building is the process by which these majorities are constructed and validated. Nation builders control legitimate authority and take initiatives to develop the national political community through government programs, including military conscription, a national education system, and building infrastructures that enhance social, harmony, and economic growth through state institutions.

Solid and vibrant institutions are crucial for any society's peaceful and harmonious coexistence and development. According to Yeraswork Admassie (2006), one of the critical problems hindering a democratic transition in Ethiopian society is the lack of viable institutions that foster social, political, and economic development. The fragile institutions exacerbate 'bad governance' due to a lack of clarity of purpose and of organizational structures that ensure stability

and continuity, as well as structures that fit with national diversity. Therefore, he suggested that the elites should invent new institutions that foster social, political, and economic transformation in Ethiopia.

According to Lyons' (2021) argument, the post-2018 power elite, under the leadership of Abiy Ahmed, promised to implement political reforms with remarkable scale and speed to respond to longstanding popular questions. These promised reforms were notable for their ambitious nature, as they aimed to bring about significant changes in the political landscape. However, while the initial phase of reforms involved quick actions and proclamations from the top, the transition towards establishing a more enduring democratic system faced challenges and progressed at a slower pace and with little result in the beginning. The first phase of political reform spearheaded by Abiy Ahmed's administration was considered by the people as an impressive commitment to change. Proclamations were made, and perception grew as if decisive actions were taken to address longstanding political issues and promote democratic values. The rhetoric dictated a rapid and comprehensive approach that allowed for the implementation of various reforms that were previously unimaginable, indicating the determination and vision of the post-2018 power elite.

Despite the initial momentum, the subsequent phase of the reform process encountered difficulties in transitioning from top-down changes to the establishment of a sustainable democratic order. One of the major problems is the failure to circulate the power elites. The reform agenda and the task of institutionalizing these reforms was undertaken by an elite that was largely continuous with the established (former EPRDF) elite, especially at the middle ranks of government. However, the elite was incapable of realizing the intended transition, which proved to be a complex and delicate process that required careful navigation and consensus-building among various competing elite groups and stakeholders.

The slower and tentative progress in moving towards a more sustainable democratic order can be attributed to several factors. Firstly, the entrenched nature of the pre-existing political value in the system posed challenges in terms of dismantling the existing power structures and establishing new ones. These obstacles necessitated a measured approach to avoid destabilizing the country further. Furthermore, the transition from autocracy to democracy requires the creation of robust institutions that can safeguard democratic principles and ensure accountability. This process takes time, as it involves designing and implementing new legal frameworks, electoral systems, and governance structures. The cautious approach taken during this phase was likely

driven by the need to ensure the effectiveness and durability of these new institutions. Additionally, the reform process faced resistance from vested interests and competing political factions, which further contributed to the slow and tentative nature of the transition. Navigating these complex dynamics required strategically determined leadership maneuvering and negotiation to build consensus and overcome opposition which was in huge deficit in post-2018 political power elite in Ethiopia. The post-2018 Abiy administration posed challenges that weakened Ethiopian institutions in the name of reform.

Medhane *et al.* (2021) admit that there are institutional building challenges in Ethiopia. The problem of functional institution-building emanates from the political culture of the elites which is engrained with the attitude that ‘the winners take all’:

*Given the nature of state formation, contradictory narratives, radicalized ideologies, and divisive history, the single political practice that characterized Ethiopian politics has always remained to be the exclusion of rival elites, repression, and control. As a result, the state and peace-building conversation of the country has never been inclusive, predictable, and free of violence. The ultimate result of this has been the lack of institutionalization of a functioning state and durable peace, without which the aspirations of Ethiopians would not be realized (ibid. 2021: 17).*

As Medhane *et al.* (2021) explained above, the political culture of Ethiopia's elites, characterized by a prioritization of power consolidation over the development of functional institutions, has obstructed the country's progress in nation-building. The quality of the elite itself, lacking competence and integrity, further hampers the establishment of effective governance structures. Despite political reforms introduced in 2018, persistent institutional problems remain, as the elites use institutions as instrumental for their benefit, impeding inclusive and accountable governance. While these reforms initially showed positive outcomes such as increased political participation, they have also exacerbated ethnic divisions and weakened social cohesion. The weak performance of the elite and the absence of a common purpose within the Ethiopian federal state ruling elite hinder the nation-building process. To overcome these challenges, fostering an inclusive and accountable political culture is essential for Ethiopia's successful path toward nation-building.

#### 8.7.2 Elite Change and Democratic Governance

Following the change of power elite in 2018, there was a shift towards prioritizing promoting human rights and democracy in the political landscape. The post-2018 government

announced the implementation of a series of political reforms aimed at improving the political atmosphere. These initiatives included the removal of the state of emergency, the repeal of restrictive anti-terrorism and civil society organization laws, the encouragement of political parties, the establishment of an independent electoral commission, and the opening up of the media by granting access to previously restricted websites, blogs, radio stations and TV shows (cp. Temin & Badwaza, 2019).

Furthermore, amnesty was granted to rebel groups that were previously labeled as terrorists by the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), as well as to prominent political activists and leaders who were imprisoned. The government extended a welcoming gesture to the rebel groups, urging them to pursue a non-violent political struggle. Many armed groups responded positively and disarmed, returning to their homes. However, it is worth noting that some factions resumed armed struggle despite the invitation (cp. Fisher & Meressa, 2019).

Before the sixth national elections scheduled for 2021 (which were delayed from 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic and other political reasons), there were widespread arrests of opposition activists. Political party members were detained in some instances, indicating a regression in the government's commitment to democratic practices. The democratization process in Ethiopia, under the leadership of the Prosperity Party, initially held the promise of political openness and liberalization. However, the country's political landscape has become characterized by mobilization around ethnic identities and grievances that perpetuate ethnic conflicts. The Prosperity Party seeks to address these political challenges by emphasizing military and security forces that aim to suppress the opposing voices across Ethiopia. The execution of this approach exacerbated the polarization problem, undermined the legitimacy of the government, and tested the inability of the ruling group to reconcile the diverse aspirations and concerns of different ethnic groups in the country.

### 8.7.3 Elite Change and Peace and Security

Before the recent change in Ethiopia's power structure, the state appeared relatively stable for several decades. It possessed a solid military force capable of handling internal and external threats. However, this stability came at the cost of strict control and suppression of dissenting voices. The state successfully quelled internal threats from various rebel groups, such as OLF and ONLF, through its military and security forces, establishing its monopoly on the use of force.

Despite the focus on security sector reforms after 2018, the state's monopoly on the use of force faced significant challenges from armed groups, leading to political turmoil and conflicts in regions such as Tigray, Oromia, Amhara, Benishangul-Gumuz and Gambella. The war in Tigray exposed elite discord and the government's inability to resolve political issues through dialogue and negotiations while also highlighting its limited capacity to control its territory and monopolize the means of violence.

Abiy Ahmed's appointment as Prime Minister in 2018 was initially seen as a significant moment for Ethiopia, marking the end of the TPLF's long-standing control over the EPRDF coalition and state power. However, the Tigrayan elite rejected the transition, claiming marginalization and exclusion from the new federal administration. This disagreement led to political and military tensions between the TPLF and the federal government, with each side mobilizing support and engaging in a media war. The TPLF criticized the Abiy administration as a threat to Ethiopia's ethnic federal system, while the Prosperity Party portrayed the TPLF as obstructing much-needed reforms. These tensions were further inflamed by a territorial dispute with Eritrea on the exact border, political reforms, and the Tigrayan authorities' decision to hold a regional election against the central government's wishes. Many believe that the TPLF's motivation for war was to prevent accountability for its past wrongdoings and regain federal power. The exclusion of Tigrayan elites from the federal government and the use of anti-Tigrayan rhetoric further escalated tensions, ultimately leading to a devastating civil war.

Similarly, over the past five years, the Oromia Region has emerged as the focal point of persistent ethnic and political unrest, resulting in the loss of numerous lives and the displacement of tens of thousands of individuals and ethnic Amhara cleansing in various parts of Oromia especially in Wollega. As of mid-2023, significant portions of the region remained in the grip of the 'Oromo Liberation Army' (OLA), an insurgent group, leading to a breakdown of governmental institutions and services within the area. Furthermore, the conflict between the federal government and the regional anti-Abiy administration forces is not only limited to the Tigray and Oromia regions but is also rampant in other regions, most recently in the Amhara region.

The failure to resolve political problems using peaceful means and to maintain a monopoly over the use of force in Ethiopia has severely impacted the state's ability to provide basic security and protection to its citizens, as well as control criminal activities. Despite the theoretical establishment of the state's monopoly on the use of force nationwide, it has been continuously

challenged by armed groups, local and regional rebel factions, and politicians from both the federal and regional governments. This has resulted in a persistent and widespread occurrence of communal clashes, inter-communal conflicts, border disputes, expulsions, and attacks on minority groups since 2019.

The armed conflict in the northern regions of Tigray, Amhara, and Afar from 2020 to 2022 stands out as the most devastating, accompanied by the violent campaigns of the 'Oromo Liberation Army', marked by mass killings and 'ethnic cleansing' of civilians. These conflicts have led to the loss of hundreds of thousands of lives and immeasurable social and economic destruction. Throughout the country, the manipulation of identity politics has further fueled ethnic violence, causing the displacement of millions of innocent civilians. The magnitude and trends of conflict, as well as the number of internally displaced persons (IDPs), are evident from the available data. Despite these grave challenges, the federal and regional governments have failed to effectively resolve the conflicts, resulting in a continuous growth in conflict trends over time.

The complex conflict in Ethiopia has not only ravaged the social fabric of the nation but also exerted a considerable influence on the wider Horn of Africa region. Ethiopia's precarious state of national integration raises concerns about the viability of nation-building efforts. The lack of basic security and stability threatens the well-being of its citizens and hampers the progress of the country. The severity and complexity of the situation are underscored by Ethiopia's ranking as the top country globally in the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data (ACLED) project's 2021 report, based on eleven conflict factors. Urgent and effective measures are needed to address these conflicts and restore peace and stability in Ethiopia for the benefit of its people and the region as a whole. The following graphs in Fig. 3 and Fig. 4 below show the number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the country, as well as the (armed) conflict trends (which are undiminished up to 2024).



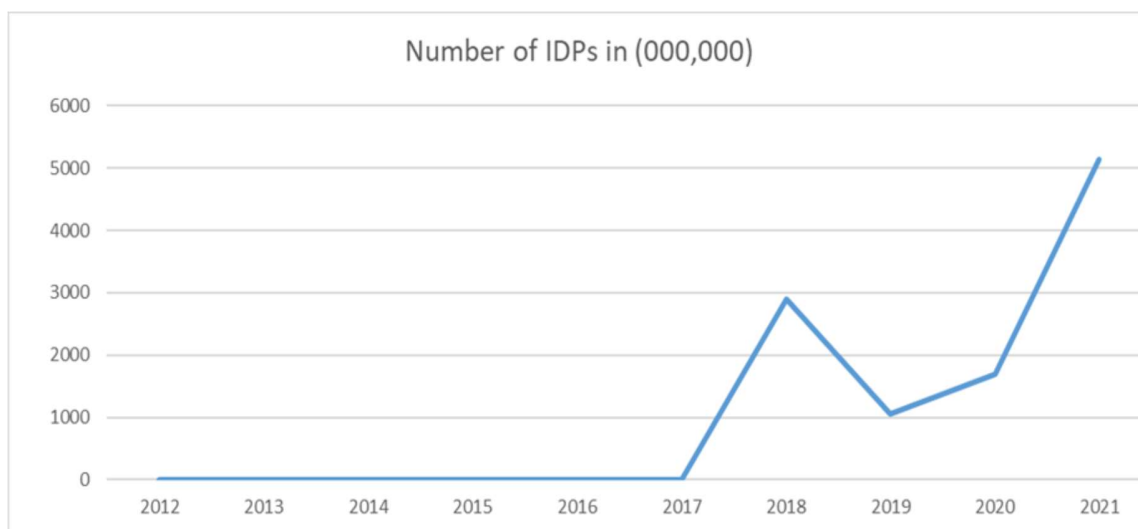


Figure 2: Trends of IDP numbers in Ethiopia from 2012 to 2021: Source: Data organized by the researcher from the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) (See: <https://www.internal-displacement.org>).

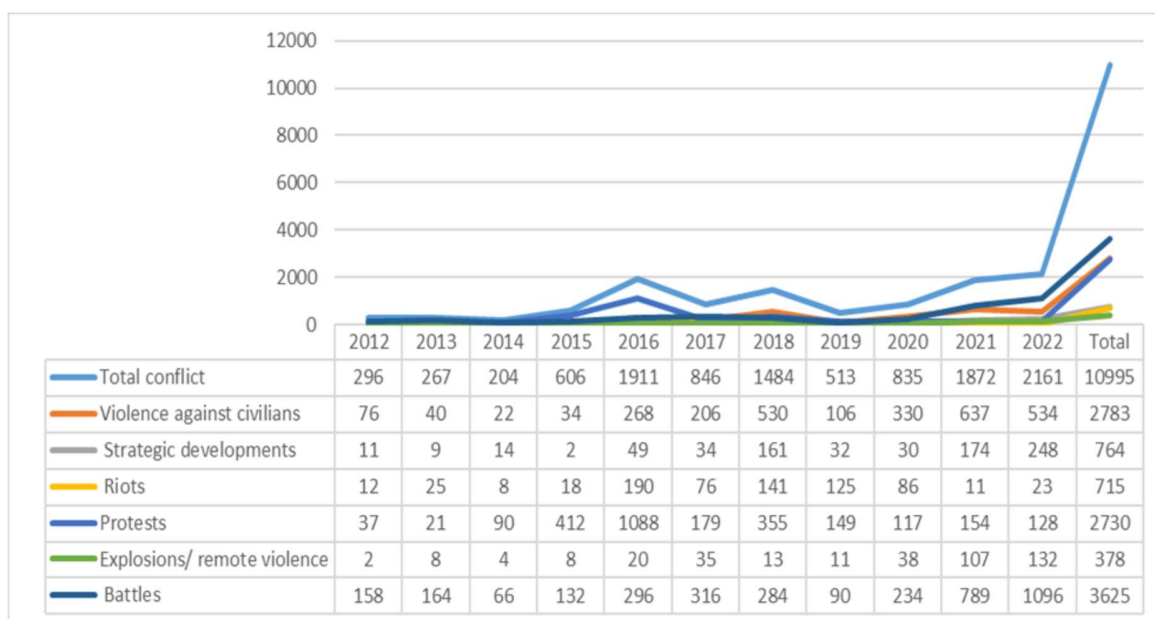


Figure 3: Conflict trends in Ethiopia in recent years: Sources: Data organized by the researcher from Armed Conflict Location and Event Data project (ACLED 2012-2022; see: <https://acleddata.com>. See also on 2023: <https://acleddata.com/2023/08/10/fact-sheetcrisis-in-ethiopias-amhara-region/>)

The two graphs above show that the trends of both the internal conflicts and internal displacement trends have alarmingly increased in recent years. Semir Yusuf (2019), among others, has put forth the argument that the root causes of conflict in Ethiopia are closely intertwined with ethnic politics. He posits that the rise of competing ethno-nationalisms has weakened the structure of the ruling party and undermined state institutions, leading to an escalation of ethnic mobilization. This pattern was observed in the past also and has persisted and intensified since 2018. As the ruling party and government have struggled to maintain peace and order in the country, self-appointed ethno-elites have exploited these circumstances to further aggravate the conflicts for their own opportunistic gains. The economic downturn has also played a role in fueling the conflicts. It has provided a source of grievances and facilitated ethnic mobilization, while also creating an environment where certain elites, who may have felt they had little to lose, find it easier to resort to violence.

#### 8.7.4 Elite Change and Economic Development

Although Ethiopia's economy has become a crucial battleground in the post-2018 era, the primary commitment of the emerging ethno-elites since the early stages of the transition has been to enhance the country's economic performance and bring more prosperity to its population. With a focus on elite-driven initiatives and reforms, the ruling elite sought to address intricate challenges and steer Ethiopia toward a trajectory of comprehensive economic growth and the welfare of its citizens.

However, a recent UNDP (2022) report indicated that Ethiopia experienced a reverse impact on its macroeconomic balances due to combined shocks compared to the baseline in 2019. The country's ability to mitigate the adverse effects of these shocks is limited, affecting fiscal space, debt capacity, and external accounts. Ethiopia's vulnerabilities are further exposed by widening fiscal and current account deficits and weakened reserves, exacerbated by high food and fuel prices. While the report highlights the potential for future economic prospects, it also recognizes the challenging decisions that policymakers face in addressing immediate priorities without jeopardizing the progress made in important reforms. The report underscores the risk of adopting measures, driven by necessity rather than choice, which may undermine medium to long-term growth and development objectives, particularly in a constrained fiscal and external financing environment.

In addition, the reports from the International Monetary Fund (IMF, 2022) also indicated that Ethiopia's GDP growth has slowed down in recent years, with a projected decline for the fiscal year 2021/2022. This deceleration can be attributed to several factors, such as the impact of COVID-19, the internal conflict, lower agricultural production, sluggish growth in industry and services, reduced donor financing, intensifying Foreign Exchange shortages, and spillovers from the war in Ukraine have collectively contributed to this economic downturn.

According to Hausmann *et al.* (2022) and African Development Bank (2023), in recent years Ethiopia has experienced a notable stagnation in its economic growth, which has had adverse effects on the country's ability to expand, export and generate employment opportunities. This slowdown gave rise to a range of macroeconomic challenges, most notably the emergence of high levels of inflation that are volatile and constantly escalating. As a consequence, the living conditions of the population have worsened, exacerbating the already difficult circumstances. The economic downturn also contributed to an increase in unemployment rates.

#### 8.7.5 Elites, Social Cohesion and Nation-Building

Ethiopia is a diverse country with over 70 ethnic groups, each with their languages, culture, and traditions. While this diversity can be a source of strength, it also poses significant challenges to social cohesion, which is the degree to which people within a society feel connected, share values, and work together towards common goals. Some of the challenges to social-to-social cohesion in Ethiopia include historical division based on ethnicity and region, this has led to feelings of mistrust, resentment, and hostility between different groups as well as political polarization also another challenge. Ethiopia's political landscape is highly polarized, and political parties are usually organized along ethnic lines. This has contributed to a sense of 'us versus them' mentality that has undermined social cohesion. In addition to the aforementioned challenges, economic disparities, conflict, violence, and lack of proper communication and dialogue are pertinent to Ethiopia's future peace and stability. Zelalem Moges (2022), argued how the social cohesion in Ethiopia in a challenging situation in the following way:

*In the last four years alone, tens of thousands (or more) have died, millions have been displaced, the country's international standing is severely weakened, national security is threatened, the economy is in shambles, and social cohesion is at an all-time low. The elites of the country are also divided, and the political scene is extremely polarized along ethnic and religious lines. Some of the root causes for these pathetic realities can be attributed to*

*recent events but most others go back decades and perhaps centuries, having left traces in the country's early state formation (Zelalem, 2022: 56).*

The former ruling EPRDF coalition was constructed, ethnically based parties formed under the political influences of the TPLF. Tensions went deep between the four ethno-regional components that participated in the EPRDF coalition and other satellite parties that represented the remaining regions never truly represented the will of the corresponding people. In addition to the internal conflict within EPRDF, the return of previously exiled politicians to Ethiopia allowed for a new political dynamism in the country.

Yonas Adaye (2022) asserts that the polarization and fragmentation in current Ethiopian politics stem from the ideology of linguistic politics and the system of ethnic federalism. These issues trace back to the pre-1991 Ethiopian nation-state-building processes, which the EPRDF perceived and articulated. The emphasis on ethno-nationalism as the organized principle for resolving Ethiopia's longstanding political problems led to a "mono-causal approach" to conflict resolution, exacerbating political polarization and social fragmentation.

Targeting a nation marked by profound diversity, boasting over 70 ethnicities and a plethora of languages, Abiy Ahmed's reform agenda sparked not only widespread mobilization and grassroots politicization across all regions but also led to the fracturing of local and regional representation structures. Furthermore, this agenda contributed to the unsettling phenomenon of "displacement and violent dispossession" of numerous external peasants-individuals perceived as non-native or 'non-indigenous' by other rural residents of distinct ethnic or linguistic backgrounds, primarily in the Southern and Western regions of the country (BTI 2022:14). Indeed, ethnic tensions escalated in various locales, often fueled by border disputes, typically manipulated by politicians occupying high-level governmental positions. These ethnic conflicts, purportedly centered on Indigenous community concerns regarding the reclaiming of land and pastures allocated by the government to individuals from different regions, erupted in different parts of the nation. Moreover, the newly established government grappled with a legitimacy crisis exacerbated by its inability to effectively address human rights violations.

These violations included arbitrary arrests and detentions, disproportionate use of force against peaceful demonstrators, inadequate resolution of conflicts, lack of a clear strategy for rebuilding infrastructure and aiding internally displaced persons (IDPs), and ineffectual economic policies. Another indication of state fragility or failure is the government's incapacity to furnish

citizens with sufficient public services. This encompasses ensuring access to fundamental necessities such as education, healthcare, clean water, and infrastructure, as well as effectively managing unforeseen crises like pandemics, natural disasters, food shortages, or refugee influxes.

However, the government's ability to deliver these public goods was severely hindered by ongoing warfare, recurrent conflicts, and ethnic tensions across various regions of the nation. Despite efforts to provide services in relatively stable areas, critics contend that the quality and quantity of these provisions have declined since 2018. Additionally, corruption and poor governance are cited as significant obstacles impeding the delivery of public goods. It is acknowledged, though, that the government's limited capacity has constrained its ability to expand services as anticipated.

## Summary

Ethiopia has undergone significant political, economic, and institutional reforms since 2018 with multidimensional consequences. The Ethiopian government under the leadership of Abiy Ahmed has initiated a series of political reforms aimed at promoting democratic governance, fostering political pluralism in the country, and enhancing the rule of law. These reforms have led to the release of thousands of political prisoners, the reopening of political space and the formation of new political parties, and rapprochement with Eritrea, at the beginning of the new administration tenure. However, the political situation in Ethiopia remains fragile, and it has been characterized by ethnic conflicts and political instability in much of Ethiopia as well as the civil war in the northern part of the country.

The consequences of the economic reform that has been undertaken by Abiy Ahmed's administration have resulted in the opposite direction of the government's initial promises and the expectations of the people of the country. As it is explained above, Ethiopia's economy has been one of the fastest-growing economies in Africa in recent years, with an average annual growth rate of over 9 percent between 2014 and 2018. However, the country faces significant economic challenges, including high levels of poverty, unemployment and inflation.

On the other hand, the Ethiopian government has also initiated a series of institutional reforms aimed at promoting functional state institutions at least in rhetoric. These reforms established new institutions. However, these institutions faced significant challenges related to capacity, proper leadership directions, lack of stability, and availability of resources.

The political reforms introduced in Ethiopia in 2018 have generated both positive and negative outcomes regarding social cohesion within the nation. Initially, these reforms facilitated enhanced political engagement and freedom, contributing to a reduction in intergroup tensions. This facilitated increased dialogue and interaction among diverse factions, fostering trust and bolstering social cohesion. However, the trajectory of reforms since 2018 has predominantly yielded adverse effects. They have fueled heightened ethnic and regional divisions, posing a threat to social unity. Ethnic polarization has intensified, exacerbating political and social fragmentation among various ethnic communities. This polarization has fueled discord and disputes between different ethnic groups. Additionally, the reforms have escalated regional tensions, with certain areas feeling marginalized or excluded from the political sphere, leading to localized unrest and demonstrations. Consequently, trust in governmental institutions has waned, as segments of the population perceive unfair exclusion from the political process. These developments have posed challenges for the government in upholding or furthering social cohesion.

Overall, the reforms have thus had both positive and negative consequences for social cohesion in Ethiopia. While they initially led to greater political inclusion and freedom, they have also increased ethnic and regional polarization and reduced trust in institutions. Eventually, the problems related to the post-2018 reforms, coupled with the old historical grievances and the new challenges emanating from local, regional, and global arenas, exacerbated the Ethiopian nation-building challenges and may threaten the existence of the Ethiopian state.



## **CHAPTER NINE**

### **CONCLUSION: SYNTHESIS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **9.1 Synthesis**

##### **9.1.1 The Evolution of Ethiopian Political Elites**

In this thesis, the researcher has considered the emerging formation and roles of elites in Ethiopia as politically relevant and related to 'nation-building'. The researcher also chose this subject for study given the major challenges that the country faces and that have continued to threaten public order and stability. This was recently evidenced by the war in northern Ethiopia (in Tigray, Afar, and Amhara Regions, 2020-2022). The war unfolded as this project was carried out and has had fallout elsewhere in the country (with continued armed rebellion and disorder into 2023, notably in the Oromia and Amhara Regions).

The preceding chapters were primarily descriptive-comparative, but they have referred in particular to the broader theoretical framework of Andreas Wimmer's path-breaking book on the subject (2018) mentioned above. In the chapters above, the researcher has focused on the three factors that he has considered essential (cf. also Wimmer 2022) in fostering nation-building processes, seen here as the forging of durable political ties of leading groups/elite across ethnic or ethnic-regional lines. The three factors are adequate public goods provision by the state to citizens, a form of linguistic homogeneity in the running of the state, and the spread and activities of voluntary organizations. The researcher has not rigorously 'tested' these elements quantitatively, but he treated them descriptively based on social-historical analysis (aided by his experience as an active politician in Ethiopia for more than three decades). The researcher also discussed two additional factors such as 'ideology', and national symbols and historical referents elites use to foster national identity.

The elites of contemporary Ethiopia emerged through complex political and historical processes. Historically, since Aksumite times two millennia ago, the kings/emperors, regarded as divine agents, held unlimited power and governed Ethiopia in its various geographical and political



shapes until the 1970s. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, Ethiopia, governed by Emperor Menelik II (r. 1889 to 1913), saw the first more or less centralized government. Due to his modernization efforts, a new layer of elites next to the traditional court nobles and military commanders emerged under his reign: government officials, administrators, artisans, technicians, other educated groups, and wealthy merchants/entrepreneurs. As it was shown in Chapter 4, *Ras Balcha Safo*, *Ras Gobena Dache*, *Ras Habtegiorgis Dinagde*, and many other prominent political figures in the service of Menelik II rose to prominence due to the imperial expansion to the South. Most of these influential elite members were originally not members of the nobility. However, they proved themselves essential political and military actors due to their merit to the emperor. Along with the empire's expansion, the Adwa victory over Italian forces (1896) was a significant milestone that elevated several commoners and low-ranking soldiers to the power structure. Including such new members in the power elite changed the imperial power structure and the tradition of elite integration.

This process continued during the reign of Emperor Haile Selassie (r. 1930-1974) but became more dependent on the Emperor's preferences. He put much effort into building a modern Ethiopian state. He created a more sophisticated bureaucracy and education system and allowed the participation of able people of many more ethnic groups in the administration. Despite these initiatives, Ethiopia's elites were still primarily dominated by members from the Amhara and the Tigrayan ethnic groups, who held vital top positions in business and government sectors. Members from other ethnic and ethno-regional backgrounds were less connected to literate traditions, and the state religion (Orthodox Christianity) came to feel excluded from the political and economic domains. Partly, as a result of this, feelings of disadvantage and resentment emerged, and from the 1960s onwards, several political organizations with an ethnic/ethno-regional basis and an emancipatory agenda emerged.

The analysis in Chapters 4 and 5 suggested that the power struggles between the traditional and educated elites were far more intense than the ethnic-based grievances against the ruling class. The country's aristocracy held state power. Coupled with a lack of democratic representation and profound inequality, this caused societal discontent and inspired educated and progressive elites from different ethnic groups and religious backgrounds to work together for change. As a result, influenced by global protests in the 1960s, a Marxist, pan-Ethiopian student movement emerged, mainly with a single voice independent of ethnicity. About this movement, as it has been illustrated

in Chapter 6, national political organizations were also created to oppose the existing power structures and foster greater inclusion and representation for all sections of the Ethiopian society.

However, the inability of the national political elite to effect changes at the national level in Ethiopia also sparked the creation of political parties with an ethnic or ethno-regional focus (Chapter 7). These groups were motivated by pervasive marginalization and exclusion from the nation's political and economic power structures. As a result, the political landscape became more fractured, with ethnic identities beginning to influence political processes heavily. It is important to note that in the mid-1970s, i.e., after the Ethiopian revolution, the dismantling of 'pan-Ethiopian' forces of the political movements from the 1960s and 1970s headed by the student movement and political parties that arose from it produced leadership voids in the political arena that were later filled by ethnic-nationalist political forces.

The overthrow of Emperor Haile Selassie in 1974 by widespread revolutionary turmoil marked a new phase in the development of contemporary elites. In December 1974, military officers, in the guise of the *Derg* Council, usurped power and instituted a Socialist-oriented regime. After 1997, it became a Marxist-Leninist regime and ruled Ethiopia until 1991. It implemented radical nationalization and land reform policies to create a 'classless society'. However, these policies yielded unintended consequences, including the demise of the private business elite and the exile of numerous professionals and intellectuals. The *Derg* policies created an economic meltdown, structural problems, repression and political stagnation, and a leadership vacuum in the country. This was only partially filled by the military leaders and new educated elite members who emerged within and around the *Derg*. The regime's systematic persecution of intellectuals, professionals, and members of the aristocracy further exacerbated the gaps in leadership. Power remained concentrated in the hands of a few military leaders, and their policies ultimately led the country into authoritarianism and economic decline.

Next to the loss of the well-educated and experienced (business and educational) elites (see Chapter 6), *Derg*'s policies paved the way for ethno-political elites' emergence and eventual dominance. These ethno-elites took advantage of the 'purging' of the educated 'pan-Ethiopian' elites by the Socialist regime as an opportunity to monopolize state power. They introduced their narratives without facing significant challenges from organized political forces advocating a more nation-oriented, pan-Ethiopian stand. One might say that ethno-nationalist political forces - which have controlled and dominated state power for the last three decades in the form of the EPRDF

and ethnic-based insurgent movements- were the result of autocratic rule and the failures of 'pan-Ethiopian' revolutionary political movements such as the insurgent EPRP and AESM, the *Derg* regime's Workers' Party of Ethiopia, and others.

The overthrow of the *Derg* regime in 1991 by the insurgent Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) via a military victory marked a significant shift in Ethiopia's political landscape. The EPRDF, comprised of leaders from different ethnic groups, claimed to establish a federal, democratic, and developmental state to foster a more inclusive society. However, the dominance of the Tigray elites within the power structure of EPRDF had significant implications. The perceived concentration of power and resources in the hands of a particular ethnic group led to feelings of marginalization and exclusion among other ethnic group leaders, contributing to conflicts and struggles for power within the party. The issue of ethnic representation and inclusivity thus became a contentious challenge in Ethiopian politics, with implications for the country's stability, governance, and development.

The political landscape became hostile to 'pan-Ethiopian' political organizations, which advocated for national cohesion and unity. The animosity between the pan-Ethiopianists and the ethno-elites divided the people and put the country at risk of disintegration. The ruling EPRDF coalition advocated ethnicity as an organizational, political principle that precluded societal integration and aggravated polarization among the political elites. The tensions arising from the perceived dominance of Tigray elites within the EPRDF also had significant social implications. Ethnic-based conflicts and power struggles coupled with ideas of resource competition and inequality further divided society and undermined the vision of a more inclusive Ethiopia. The lack of inclusivity and equitable representation in the political domain even hindered governance and development efforts, impeding progress towards a democratic and inclusive society.

In April 2018, the appointment of Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed after a period of profound political and social turmoil in 2016-2017 was initially met with hope and anticipation, both within the country and abroad. Based on Abiy Ahmed's statements, the new government was expected to usher in a more democratic, inclusive, and diverse leadership to create a unified and peaceful Ethiopia. The new leader's political reforms meant restructuring the EPRDF, changing political and economic institutions, and ushering in a new group of leaders less tied to the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) elite. Indeed, the elites from the Oromo and the Amhara parts of the EPRDF took effective power in 2018, and significant political reforms were announced and partly

initiated. However, despite this good start in 2018, the reality of ‘ethnic’ tensions and ethno-political posturing continued. After five years of the new government, most observers have concluded there has not been much progress made in favoring more equitable representation, diversity, rule-of-law and democratic reforms, and solid institution-building towards a new nation-state. The new administration and the ruling Prosperity Party (since November 2019) have even been accused of encouraging ethnic politics, polarizing the country, and not having developed a new inclusive formula for regional state cooperation and national cohesion– despite the new pretext *Meddemer* philosophy expounded by Abiy Ahmed.

The contemporary political elites of the past century across four regimes emerged through various historical and political processes and experienced similarities in their character. One common feature has been a legitimacy crisis. Except perhaps for Emperor Haile Selassie's rule, which was established on a centuries-old inherited traditional power and succession system, all other ruling elites encountered problems of (re)founding their legitimacy; their power bases were considered as the result of 'self-appointment,' using various methods. For instance, *Derg*'s political power fell to it accidentally as the only organized societal institution after the collapse of the monarchy in 1974. Early that year, in Addis Ababa, a group from the lower military echelons had assembled to voice their complaints to the ruler. However, due to the leadership vacuum caused by the student movement's massive antimonarchy demonstrations and other public unrest and protests, they were suddenly in charge of the government. Except for the support from the military, it had little to do with the popular vote or democratic representation. The *Derg* then attempted to establish its legitimacy during its rule by utilizing various strategies, such as popular revolutionary rhetoric on being the 'voice of the masses', pro-Socialist propaganda, and measures like nationalizing land and businesses, but it was unsuccessful. When they started using coercive and violent force, any legitimacy rapidly dwindled.

In 1991, central political authority was acquired by force by the EPRDF coalition, predominantly controlled by the TPLF (see Chapter 7). In turn, it initiated radical reforms, such as state rebuilding through ethnic-based federalism, new regional units, loosening the state economic system of the *Derg*, infrastructure expansion, and the implementation of development projects. The stabilization of the economy and the developmental trajectory, notably since 2005, had a significant impact on the lives of millions of Ethiopians, and the EPRDF attempted to establish its legitimacy based on this (as a ‘developmental state’). However, in the political and social domains,

there were problems of lack of representation and accountability, repression, and inequality. Overall, the Ethiopian people never accepted the EPRDF rule as legitimate. It also continued to be perceived as predominantly the representative of Tigray, not the larger Ethiopian population. Prosperity Party and its president set their 'ambitious reform agenda' in 2018-19. However, despite announcing the so-called new ideas and initiatives, the new leadership was often said to operate without a clear road map and made only limited institutional or political-legal reforms. Many of the EPRDF policies were continued under the newly emerging ethno-nationalist elite. In addition, a severe blow was dealt to the government in 2020-22 by the armed insurgency of the TPLF, based in the Tigray Region, causing a devastating war in the North that set the country back in many respects and aggravated ethnic group tensions. In these years of war, the promises and policies of inclusive and democratic governance were severely hampered (despite a relatively successful parliamentary election in September 2021 that yielded the PP an absolute majority). Also, the aftermath of the Northern War still needs to be effectively dealt with. As a result, the initial popular support that Abiy Ahmed and the PP government enjoyed dissipated, and ideas of a more unified and democratic Ethiopia became elusive. Hence, the leadership attempts to regain broad political support and legitimacy have yet to produce a positive outcome. The legitimacy crisis of the Prosperity Party was worsened by its unmet promises and its approach and engagement in ethnic outbidding. To sum up, Ethiopian political elites never acquired full bottom-up legitimacy nor expressed the people's will, as competitive elections and consent never installed them. Rather, they controlled political power through 'self-appointment' using coercive force and manipulation. This has hurt 'nation-building'.

#### 9.1.2 The Characteristics of the Ethiopian Elites

In Chapters 4-8, the researcher contended that the nature and characteristics of Ethiopian elites varied from regime to regime, reflecting changes in society and the political system. Generally speaking, Emperor Haile Selassie's elites were divided into two groups: the traditional aristocracy, the core elite, the military officers and intellectuals/higher civil servants who constituted the newly emerging educated elite. The aristocratic group and the newly emerging educated elite had divergent interests influenced by their social status and origin. The traditional aristocracy and nobility possessed considerable political and economic influence and tended to uphold the status quo. They sought to preserve the rigid hierarchical system based on birth and

blood relations and were primarily conservative and averse to social and political change. The newly emerging educated elite, many of whom originated from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, obviously sought to bring political change: modernization and more democracy and progress. They were small in number but played a vital role in the Haile Selassie era. They had a big role in (re)shaping the country's political and social landscape and contributed to political and intellectual discourse in Ethiopia. Many were involved in political activism for excellent political representation, social justice, democracy and were key players in political movements. They also were driven by a strong sense of Ethiopian nationalism, reflecting the broader nationalistic movement in the country. They saw their education as a means to realize Ethiopia's potential and to resist foreign interference. At the same time, they came to enjoy high social status, with many of them occupying positions of influence in the government, the military, and the private sector. They were instrumental in establishing private sector enterprises and contributed to the growth of Ethiopia's economy, and they were pioneers in establishing modern business in their time.

These new elite members also faced criticism (as it is mentioned in Chapter 5) for being 'disconnected' from the majority of the rural and impoverished population, having become 'elitist' and not addressing the needs of the wider population. Looking for an urban middle-class lifestyle, they tended to adopt Western-style educational models without considering the country's unique cultural, social and economic contexts. They tended to impose Western style development models without fully understanding the local realities, which led to policies and practices not tailored to the needs of the Ethiopian people. All in all, they were blamed for cultural insensitivity, economic elitism and political bias.

Despite that, historical events are complex and influenced by multiple factors. The study may need to capture the full complexity of the situation. However, the researcher's assessment entailed that Ethiopian elites during Haile Selassie, notably after the 1960 attempted coup, displayed characteristics of militancy, rigidity, intolerance towards diversity of ideas, and a too enthusiastic embrace of Marxism-Leninism without proper assessment of its compatibility with the Ethiopian context. This resulted in aggressive and confrontational behavior, inflexibility in adapting to changing circumstances, stifling of political discourse, and policies that were not well-suited to Ethiopia's needs. Despite their adherence to leftist political principles, these younger Ethiopian elite, in general, and the educated elites, in particular, tended to develop a sense of self-acclamation for the country's political problem.

During the *Derg* regime, the military elites had significant power and influence in Ethiopian politics, and the characteristics were an authoritarian style and reliance on coercive (violent) methods to govern. The military elites adopted Marxist ideology from the student movements and Leftist parties and considered themselves the ‘vanguard of the revolution’ seeking to establish a socialist state. They ruled the country with an iron fist, suppressing dissent and often using brutal methods, particularly against students, intellectuals, and the imperial regime's high-ranking officials.

Another characteristic of the military elites was their highly nationalistic attitude: they were devoted to Ethiopian nationalism. They considered themselves prime defenders and protectors of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the state. Their violence and chaotic policies belied their alleged aim to build an egalitarian society. Their control over the economy, with many businesses and industries being nationalized and placed under their control brought decline and impoverishment. Also, internal factionalism led to power struggles within the government, often aggravating violence and instability. Their recruitment methods were to appoint loyal elite members to the power circle, disregarding merit and relevant experience.

EPRDF rule after May 1991 was known for its ethno-elite-oriented policies that prioritized the interests of certain ethnic groups over others. The governing power elites were primarily drawn from the Tigrayan ethnic group (ca. 7% of the total population) but wielded disproportionate power. The EPRDF system of ethnic-based federalism, granting significant autonomy to Ethiopia's various ethnic groups, was initially seen as an innovative approach. However, over time, the EPRDF's ethnocentric policies became increasingly divisive, with the party accused of favoring certain ethnic groups over others and using ethnic identity as a means of divide-and-rule and political domination. EPRDF rule was also highly authoritarian, paradoxically operating power devolution to regions and centralization of power using the ruling party structure. The party controlled all branches of government, the military, and the media and engaged in widespread repression of political opponents and dissidents. The EPRDF elites were also widely accused of engaging in corruption and embezzlement, helped by their significant control over the economy and their position of power to direct resources towards their networks. The ethnic elites under EPRDF rule thus did not evolve into national elite or create space for other national political elites to join it. The EPRDF's emphasis on ethnicity led to a fragmented political landscape and limited

representation of diverse groups. The power elite were characterized by incompetence, fragmentation and loyalty primarily to their respective ethnic groups.

As a conclusion of this section, the Ethiopian elite across successive regimes exhibit consistent traits, though the composition of these power elite varies from regime to regime. Despite these shifts, certain shared characteristics persist among all power elites:

*Unwavering Loyalty:* Members of the elite class consistently display staunch allegiance to the regimes they serve, rarely voicing dissent. Their commitment to the ruling regime is evident in their compliance with its directives and suppression of criticism. This loyalty is often attributed to their historical educational deficiencies, reliance on imported technology, and a lack of initiative in scientific and technological innovation. Rather than challenging the system, they conform to its policies and practices, thereby perpetuating their subservience. This adherence to authority inhibits progress and independent thought within Ethiopian society.

*Inflexible Dogmatism:* Ethiopian elites exhibit a rigid adherence to their political beliefs and are resistant to change. Unlike the essence of compromise inherent in politics, Ethiopian elites demonstrate an aversion to yield ground or accommodating opposing viewpoints. Their conservative stance monopolizes political discourse and impedes the transition to democracy and the acceptance of pluralism. This obstinacy has historical roots, evident in past conflicts where a winner-takes-all mentality prevailed, further exacerbating societal divisions and political instability. The entrenched nature of this behavior obstructs constructive dialogue and inhibits the resolution of conflicts.

*Suppression of Competing Perspectives:* Ethiopian power elites exhibit a proclivity for silencing opposing viewpoints and ideas, perpetuating a culture of intolerance towards dissent. This inclination towards ideological hegemony traces back to the aftermath of the 1960s student movement, which saw the adoption of Marxist-Leninist principles and the subsequent dismantling of rival factions. This pattern of ideological suppression has persisted through successive regimes, manifesting in the stifling of dissenting voices and the destruction of competing ideologies. Such tactics undermine the potential for inclusive dialogue and consensus-building, perpetuating a cycle of conflict and discord.



### 9.1.3 Elite Recruitment and Integration

As outlined above, the characteristics of the respective elites already indicate the criteria on which their recruitment and consolidation by the power holders took place. Specifically, elite recruitment and integration refers to how its members are selected, placed, promoted/demoted, and interact with one another. As far as the two regimes of the *Derg* and EPRDF are concerned, we could say that they started by 'self-recruitment': the *Derg*-the military council of 120 members-self-selected and usurped power in a power vacuum; the TPLF-EPRDF in a somewhat similar manner assumed power by military victory of the country, and upon entering Addis Ababa they replaced the entire previous elite. From the moment of their taking power, the two new regimes then expanded and recruited additional members for the lower rungs of power and executive authority via the education and training institutions (and cadre schools) according to their (political) wishes and preferences, added to by experts and 'technocrats'. Only the Haile Selassie regime showed continuity with previous regimes (of Menelik and Zewditu) in that the elite (political, social, economic and ecclesiastical) largely remained in place. It continued to be formed and recruited over a more extended period and increasingly based on merit and qualifications - even though a primary loyalty to the Emperor was required.

In short, recruitment patterns differed in the details. However, they followed a similar course, influenced by the historical legacy, ethnic diversity, regional inequality and ideological dynamics of the particular regime's worldview. While mostly with every regime change, an initial process of political elite replacement occurred. However, depending on the type of regime, policies for recruiting and integrating professional elites differed; during the reign of Emperor Haile Selassie, emphasis was placed on elite loyalty to the Emperor and merit-based qualification. Under *Derg's* rule, ideological loyalty received primary attention, and under the EPRDF administration, ethnic representation and ideological-political loyalty were deemed the most crucial factors. A body of loyal elite members and interest groups was recruited and consolidated in all cases. However, the political order always had to be backed up or secured with coercive force. If social, regional, and economic inequalities became too problematic for overall stability, the system came under pressure, and the regime crumbled or was transformed (as in 1974, 1991, and 2017-18). Overall, elite recruitment in successive regimes shared certain common traits (see above) but had some distinctive features. Loyalty to the regime and ethno-geographic preference are two standard recruitment features across the regimes. The power elites of the imperial era were rooted in Shewa,

the *Derg* mostly from Addis Ababa, and Wollega, those of the EPRDF from Tigray. While education and the merit system became more emphasized during Haile Selassie's reign, under the *Derg* ideological loyalty, 'anti-feudal' sentiment, and adherence to Marxist-Leninist principles were the most important criteria for recruitment. Finally, the commitment to 'ethnic politics' and ethnic federalism during the EPRDF centered on 'anti-Amhara dominance' (as was already written in the 1976 TPLF program), has been the basis of elite recruitment during EPRDF's period in power. The party strongly emphasized ethnicity in its recruiting practices, both 'to promote diversity' and to establish agents within that specific ethnic community. This indicates that the critical feature was creating an 'agent master' relationship rather than the goal of establishing a partnership based on the idea of equality. Additionally, all three regimes adopted standard criteria of personal loyalty to individual leaders and sometimes more than political allegiance to the state when recruiting and integrating elites. This shows that the goal of building a partnership operating based on equality should have been prioritized, but rather one based on an agent-master relationship.

#### 9.1.4 The Role of Elites in Nation-Building under Various Regimes

As Francis Fukuyama (2014) highlighted, a critical aspect of nation-building is the development of a shared national identity that can supersede local loyalties. This identity is connected to the idea of being a shared political community. This entails the presence or creation of national symbols, historical narratives, and cultural referents that foster this sense of shared identity among diverse groups. The state does not solely drive the nation-building process but also involves non-state actors such as poets, philosophers, religious leaders, novelists, musicians, and other influential individuals who shape and promote national identities from the bottom up.

The success of a state relies heavily on effective nation-building, as the state often calls upon its citizens to sacrifice their lives on its behalf. Citizens are unlikely to be willing to make such sacrifices if they do not perceive the state as worthy of their ultimate loyalty. As discussed in the literature review by Hippler (2005), the term 'nation-building' is used in various ways, ranging from socio-political development to forging loosely linked communities into a cohesive society with a corresponding nation-state over a long historical period. This process involves multiple political, economic, social and cultural factors. At its core, it involves the idea of national identity or identification and inclusionary power configuration (cf. Wimmer 2022).

Successful nation-building processes may involve various instruments and dimensions, such as economic integration, cultural integration, political centralization, bureaucratic regulation and control, military conquest or subjugation, creation of common interests, democratization of decision-making, establishment of common citizenship, or even repression and ethnic reconfiguration. Nation-building can be pursued as a political objective or strategy to achieve specific political goals. Therefore, depending on the political context and actors involved, it can be seen as a developmental or imperial strategy.

Scholars have different interpretations of nation-building. Some argue that it primarily involves national identification, where citizens develop a sense of belonging and loyalty to the national community. In contrast, others emphasize the political inclusion of diverse groups through exchange relationships between the state and its citizenry. Nation-building also intersects with ethnicity, religion, language, and regionalism, as states may adopt policies related to these factors to shape national identities or address existing tensions and conflicts.

In the following sections, the researcher summarizes the five indicators discussed in Chapters 5 to 7: a) the existence or promotion of a compelling and cohesive ideology, b) national symbols as integrative elements, c) the establishment of effective state institutions capable of providing public goods, d) the existence of voluntary associations that foster integration among diverse groups across cultures, and e) a common or shared linguistic and education policy (the last three taken from Wimmer, 2018). These factors have served as criteria for comparing the regimes in Ethiopia since 1960.

#### 9.1.5 A Compelling and Cohesive Ideology

Until 1974, imperial Ethiopia was heavily influenced by Emperor Haile Selassie's rule. Despite subsequent regimes' efforts to erase his dominant presence from the historical record, Haile Selassie played a crucial role in shaping modern Ethiopia and was seen as synonymous with the country in the eyes of the international community. Although complex and debated, his legacy remains central to Ethiopia's history.

The Emperor maintained Ethiopia as a non-party state, navigating a delicate balance between traditionalism and modernism, stability and change, and direct and indirect forms of control. Thus, his leadership was characterized by a careful tightrope walk as he reconciled Ethiopia's independent cultural heritage with the need for material progress and development.

Emperor Haile Selassie's influence extended beyond Ethiopia's borders. He was known for his efforts to establish Ethiopia as a respected member of the global community. He advocated for African unity and decolonization before and when many African nations gained independence from the colonial powers. His diplomatic efforts helped put Ethiopia on the world map and garnered him respect on the international stage.

However, Haile Selassie's reign was not without controversy. His rule was marked by allegations of political repression, human rights abuses, and economic inequality, which led to criticism from various quarters. His autocratic style of governance and resistance to political pluralism also drew criticism from those who sought more significant democratic reforms and economic development in Ethiopia. Despite this mixed and contested legacy, Haile Selassie's rule shaped the country's political, social, and economic landscape for many years, and his influence extended far beyond its borders. Today, historians continue to assess his complex role in Ethiopia's history.

During his reign, Haile Selassie's status as 'the elect of God' in a long line of monarchs was the ideological foundation of his legitimacy of the regime, allegedly divinely ordained to unify the country. As the 1955 constitution said: "By His imperial blood, as well as by anointing which he received, the person of the Emperor is sacred, His dignity inviolable and his power indisputable." Haile Selassie's divine mandate remained the foundation of his authority and the key to his control. The belief that God chose him to lead the nation created a strong sense of religiously supported legitimacy for his regime, serving as a cohesive instrument that helped to bring together the various factions and ethnic populations in the country. This 'divine mandate,' going back to the medieval text *Kibrä Nägäst*, in theory, gave the Emperor unparalleled power and authority in the eyes of his subjects. Thus, there was an ideology of rule, but due to its links with the Orthodox Christian tradition, it did not equally appeal to all citizens. Neither was the state capable of projecting its ideology effectively in all areas of the country.

The *Derg* administration radically changed this after 1974. The monarchy and its symbolism were abolished, and the state became secular. The attempt at nation-building in Ethiopia took a new twist by adopting socialism as the guiding ideology. The *Derg* first announced *Ye-Itiopia Hibretesebawinnet*, or 'Ethiopian socialism,' which emphasized self-reliance, the dignity of labor, and the unity of Ethiopia as its core values. The political motto of Ethiopian socialism was *Ethiopia Tikdem* or 'Ethiopia First.' Under this ideology, the government

implemented various political and economic reforms and policies, including nationalizing key economic sectors and a land reform proclamation in March 1975. This proclamation nationalized all rural land, abolished landlords and tenancy, and placed peasants in charge of land granted to them for cultivation by the state (The state remained the owner). Peasants were prohibited from having plots larger than ten hectares, and hiring farm workers was prohibited. Peasant associations were organized, with one association for every 800 hectares, headed by executive committees responsible for enforcing the new order. In July 1975, urban land, rentable houses, and apartments were also nationalized, all in the name of 'the people.' This was part of a nation-building policy, marking a massive departure from the previous regime. The new government argued that socialism was necessary to address the embedded economic and social inequality in Ethiopian society resulting from feudalism. Ignoring historical reality, they drew on the examples of Russia and China to support the claim that socialism was the best course of action. In 1976, the *Derg* proclaimed the 'National Democratic Revolution Program' (NDRP), which focused on addressing Ethiopia's 'question of nationalities'. The NDRP granted nationalities (ethno-linguistic groups) the right to self-determination, although it was limited to regional autonomy rather than independence and acknowledged equal rights for all groups. This was meant as another ideological instrument for 'nation-building.' Any further cultural-historical content of nation-building was rarely raised. The proponents of the new nation-building approach advocating socialism were divided into two schools of thought. The 'pan-Ethiopian' leftist School viewed as the main contradiction the hierarchical class division in society -with a small aristocratic ruling class at the top and the majority of poor peasants at the bottom, along with unequal political and economic relations between them. They argued that eliminating the ruling class was essential to 'solving' Ethiopia's fundamental political and economic problems. They saw 'class struggle' as the fundamental issue. Ethiopian leftist groups such as AESM, EPRP, and student movements supported this School of thought.

On the other hand, the 'ethno-nationalists' contended that exploitation and inequality in Ethiopia were based on ethnic and linguistic disparities. They argued that the government and economic establishment of the country favored one ethnic group, the Amhara. They also called for the abolition of Amhara cultural hegemony and the establishment of multiculturalism/multi-ethnicity. The proponents of this School of thought saw Ethiopia's core political and economic problem as the 'unequal ethnic relations and cultural hegemony that favors northerners'.

These competing claims continue to shape Ethiopian politics and serve as ideological roots for the evolution of various opposing political perspectives. In their present forms, neither successfully fostered a cohesive and acceptable form of ideology supporting nation-building or restructuring the national political community.

The EPRDF's approach to reconstructing Ethiopia's nation was a bold experiment and differed profoundly from other regimes. EPRDF, particularly the Tigray People's Liberation Front, started from a 'negative' premise and proposed a new theory of Ethiopian nationalism based on the 'national oppression thesis.' This thesis argued that Ethiopia's nation, nationalities, and peoples (i.e., assumed pre-existing ethno-linguistic groups) were to be at the center of the process of reconstructing the nation and that their identities should be honored. The TPLF leadership remained committed to their criticism of 'Ethiopianness' as the root cause of Ethiopia's problems. The leadership was influenced by primordial notions of nation, nationality, and peoples (NNPs) and defended a conception of Ethiopian nation-building that prioritized identities of various ethnic groups. In this rhetorical conception of fixed identities and anti-pan-Ethiopian identity, the emphasis was placed on recognizing and respecting the diversity of ethnic, religious and linguistic identities. The political ploy involved was transparent: not only 'respect' for existing group diversity but also divide-and-rule.

The EPRDF added to this the ideology of 'revolutionary democracy,' a Leninist concept, which it portrayed as a way out of 'national oppression.' It took this over from the Ethiopian student movement as an approach to address political, social, and economic problems of the 'nations, nationalities, and peoples.'

Implementing different ideological policies, such as ethnic federalism and the developmental state, reflected its vision of a new Ethiopian state based on revolutionary democratic principles. The introduction of ethnic federalism was seen as a pragmatic tool to consolidate power within the central party. At the same time, the launch of the developmental state in the early 2000s provided legitimacy for further centralization of power in the hands of the central party state. The EPRDF's utilization of revolutionary democracy as a guiding principle helped it consolidate its power and transform the political landscape of Ethiopia. The restructuring of the country into nine ethnic regional administrations, each with its own elected legislatures, executives, and judiciary, was accompanied by the mobilization of new ethnic elites within these communities, who aligned themselves with the EPRDF coalition.

However, using the revolutionary democracy concept and the developmental state as a unifying ideology could not prevent inherent contradictions between the two. They emerged in the power dynamics of the new central and regional power arrangements. Federalism calls for the devolution of power to regional administrations, while the developmental state requires centralized control. This contradiction led to tensions, including internal divisions within the EPRDF and widespread protests during its rule. Nation-building was not a prime concern of the EPRDF regime; only state-building was based on ethno-regions hoping the federal center would hold. While EPRDF successfully consolidated its position as a dominant authoritarian party, its ideology hindered political reform and pluralism, preventing long-term solutions to the political failures that brought the party to power in the first place.

The EPRDF's approach to nation-building could have been more varied and precise, but it faced criticism from various quarters. The over-emphasis on ethnic identities caused the polarization of Ethiopian society, fueling inter-ethnic tensions and conflicts that became more numerous as time went by and resulted, among others, in the TPLF war of 2020-2023. Critics also argue that the party's authoritarianism undermined democratic governance and human rights in the country and aggravated inequalities and marginalization of certain groups. The widespread protests, particularly in the Oromia and the Amhara regions since 2015, were further signs that the 'nation-building' project under EPRDF (if any) was unsuccessful.

#### 9.1.6 National Symbols and National History as Integrative Elements

Connected to the preceding, it is better to discuss national symbols and their possible importance for stimulating national identity and fostering pride and unity among citizens. The importance of national symbols varies depending on the nation's strength, history, and political environment. National symbols are easily recognized and selectively communicate a nation's history and culture.

Emperor Haile Selassie effectively utilized symbols for nation-building in Ethiopia: he employed flags, currency, emblems, and historical artifacts to portray himself as the father of the modern nation and guardian of its sovereignty. One example is the metaphorical and narrative expression of the Lion of Judah emblem. The Ethiopian flag, known for its tri-color of green, yellow and red, became one of the most recognizable flags in the world under Emperor Haile Selassie. It symbolized freedom, patriotism and solidarity, and many African nations adopted

similar flags after gaining their independence. The flag has been seen as a unifying tool, representing cooperation among diverse groups of people and redefining collective consciousness.

During the *Derg*, the government continued promoting national symbols like the flag and anthem. The flag was given heightened prominence as a symbol of the nation. The government tended to use the flag in official ceremonies and public events. Similarly, the national anthem was used and taught in schools, played at official events, and broadcasted in media. In addition to promoting national symbols, the *Derg* emphasized teaching Ethiopian history in schools as part of nation-building efforts. The government sought to create a shared national identity through history, although with an anti-elitist perspective ('the masses'). This was done to broaden a sense of pride and 'ownership' among all Ethiopians regardless of ethnic background and to create a shared historical narrative that could bind the diverse ethnic groups together.

EPRDF, on the other hand, was seen as downplaying national symbols. The party was uncomfortable with the inherited national symbols of a 'pan-Ethiopian' origin. Imperial-era heroes and symbols were denigrated, while new ones were considered founding myths. For instance, 'King of kings' Menilik II (r. 1889–1913), who had previously been hailed as a national hero and a symbol of Ethiopia's resistance to European colonization, was denounced by few ethno-nationalists as they thought the King waged 'genocidal campaigns' within the Ethiopian Empire during his state formation endeavor. In 1996, a five-pointed blue star symbol was added in the middle of the Ethiopian flag to symbolize the multi-ethnic character of the country. The new regional states were also allowed (if not forced) to have their flags. Pan-Ethiopian identity thus was de-emphasized.

Across successive regimes, different groups viewed national symbols, particularly the national flag, as controversial. Some viewed them as signs of victory and independence, while others saw them as a representation of exploitation and dominance. This controversy remains present and divisive, preventing the establishment of a successful nation.

#### 9.1.7 Public Goods Provision as the Glue of Nation-Building

Public goods are goods and services that are non-excludable and non-rivalrous. Public goods include public healthcare, education, transport infrastructure, national defense, public parks, and clean air and water. In the context of nation-building, public goods are essential for several reasons. First, they play a role in promoting economic development and growth. For example,



investment in infrastructure such as roads, bridges, and railways can facilitate trade and commerce, leading to increased productivity and economic growth.

Similarly, investment in education and healthcare can improve a nation's human capital, leading to more incredible innovation and economic success. Second, public goods can promote social cohesion and reduce inequality. By making public goods available to all citizens, regardless of their income, location, or social status, governments can help to reduce disparities in access to essential services and opportunities. This can promote a sense of shared identity and purpose, fostering social cohesion and reducing the likelihood of social unrest and conflict.

Public goods are essential for the survival and proper functioning of society. They are typically provided by the government and funded through taxes. According to Wimmer (2018, 2022), the capacity to provide public goods is one of the critical indicators of prosperous nation-building. When a government can provide public goods across all regions of a country, it becomes more acceptable and legitimate to rule, and there is greater interest among the elites to establish alliances and integration with the political center regardless of ethnic origin.

During the 1950s and 1960s, the ruling elite, led by Emperor Haile Selassie, played a pivotal role in fostering nation-building by expanding public goods (Chapter 5). Despite the strong influence of traditional values and institutions in Ethiopian society, the Emperor recognized the need for modernization. He took severe steps to bring transformation by introducing new social and economic practices. Comprehensive modernization was introduced, providing (new) public goods at the center of state efforts. He expanded the modern bureaucracy needed to manage the supply and development of public goods: education, health services, and infrastructure coverage. The Emperor used this modernization project as a flagship of nation-building and, starting from a low base, made significant progress in this.

The government implemented five-year development plans, with the first (1957-1961) focusing on infrastructure development in transportation, construction, and communications to connect urban centers and resource-rich areas with the capital city. The second plan prioritized industrialization, agricultural growth, and social services like education and healthcare. The third five-year plan aimed to enhance agricultural productivity for small-scale farmers and improve access to education, leveraging international support from initiatives such as CADU and WADU. While these initiatives showed promise, they were criticized for their cost and potential bias towards commercial agriculture over small farmers.

Following the Ethiopian revolution of 1974, the military government struggled to provide its citizens with essential public goods and services. Despite some progress in expanding elementary schools and healthcare services, the overall provision of public goods needed to be improved and fell short of expectations. One key area that suffered was physical infrastructure, particularly the road network. Compared with the imperial era, the road expansion was modest. The total road length, quality, and inter-linkages could have been better. This low road network hindered regional integration and connectivity between rural and urban areas and hardly furthered the nation-building process.

Similarly, the demand for increasing secondary school coverage still needed to be met. The government's efforts to improve education were hampered by the economic crisis, the ongoing war against insurgents, and the failure to deliver other public services. Plans for healthcare expansion were also hampered by limited budget spending. Rural areas, in particular, were left with inadequate hospitals and healthcare facilities and limited access to healthcare services.

The relationship between the state and citizens could be conflicting. The government needed to garner legitimacy to collect taxes and secure political loyalty. Citizens who receive public goods in exchange for loyalty are more likely to embrace nationalist rhetoric. The military government's limited ability to provide public goods and services, including physical infrastructure, education, and healthcare, hindered any nation-building process.

After 1991, the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) was much more successful in providing public goods. Through successive development programs such as ADLI (Agriculture *et al.*), PASDEP (Plan for Accelerated and Sustained Development to End Poverty), GTP I (Growth and Transformation Plan I), and GTP II (Growth and Transformation Plan II), the EPRDF reduced poverty, improved infrastructure, and created an economic and political environment materially benefitting the Ethiopian population as a whole.

Public investment, especially in infrastructure, was one of the critical drivers of Ethiopia's rapid economic growth since 2000. The EPRDF capitalized on the peace dividend and with renewed support from the 'donor' countries, and new players like China, focused on expanding road networks, constructing hydroelectric power plants, airports, telecommunication systems, health and education facilities and other infrastructure facilities across the country. These efforts resulted in significant improvements in access to essential services, such as transportation, electricity, healthcare, and education, which positively impacted the lives of many Ethiopians,

especially those living in rural areas. Education was a priority, with increased student enrolment at all levels and the expansion of schools, universities, and other training institutions. However, the expansion went on a regional-state basis, and there were serious concerns about the quality of education. Overall, there was significant improvement regarding public good/service provision under successive governments. However, it is not easy to see how the process led to nation-building, as a fragmented ethno-linguistic political landscape emerged simultaneously, notably under the EPRDF, limiting the inclusionary effects of public goods provision. So, all governments failed to realize their nation-building project using public goods provision as an integrative instrument. Experience indicated that much work remained to be done to translate public goods provision mechanisms as an effective way to build a well-integrated nation.

#### 9.1.8 Voluntary Associations Fostering Integration among Diverse Groups

Voluntary associations, such as political parties, religious groups, civic groups, self-help organizations, and the like, are held to play a vital role in fostering connections and relationships across ethnic lines. These associations act as bridges, communication nodes, and platforms for meeting diverse ethnic backgrounds (Wimmer, 2018). They enable the forging of political alliances and promote collaboration among different ethnic groups, thereby contributing to nation-building. Whether formal or informal, these voluntary organizations play a crucial role in shaping political alliances and fostering common identity and shared interests.

During imperial rule, the activity of political parties was strictly prohibited. This prohibition during Haile Selassie's reign had profound implications for the evolution of Ethiopian elites. The absence of political parties severely narrowed the political space where elites could actively participate. With no organized political parties representing their interests, the elites could not effectively participate in formal political processes or engage in meaningful political discourse. Furthermore, the prohibition of political parties also impeded the development of a vibrant political culture and democratic transition in Ethiopia. Political parties are crucial to democratic systems as they provide platforms for diverse perspectives, foster competition among ideological groups and facilitate checks and balances. Without political parties, Ethiopia's political landscape lacked the necessary mechanisms for asking for accountability, opportunities for political pluralism, robust democratic values and institutions. This contributed to the concentration of power in the hands of the ruling elite and hindered the transition to a democratic political environment.

In addition, the ban on political parties resulted in a need for more institutionalized political mobilization and engagement channels. Ethiopian elites had to resort to alternative means to pursue their interests without formal political parties, such as informal networks, patronage systems, or underground movements. This led to a less transparent or inclusive political environment, with limited opportunities for broader participation and representation of diverse perspectives.

Moreover, the prohibition of political parties also had implications for developing leadership skills and political acumen among Ethiopian elites. Political parties offer platforms for aspiring leaders to gain experience in organizational management, coalition-building, policy formulation, and electoral campaigns. With such opportunities, Ethiopian elites had limited exposure to formal political processes and needed more skills and experience to effectively engage in political leadership roles.

Likewise, the civic associations and NGOs could have been more effective in promoting the nation-building process due to various impediments under the imperial government. For example, labor unions advocating the interest of the workers were not recognized until 1955 in Ethiopia, and the Confederation of Ethiopian Labor Unions (CELU) was only established in 1962. The government was reluctant to grant various labor and trade unions the right to association because they were perceived as a progressive force that could challenge the Emperor's authority. The government feared labor unions could become a formidable political force that was difficult to control and subdue. As such, the recognition of labor unions was delayed, as the government viewed them as threatening its power and modernizing efforts.

Moreover, if they existed, civic associations such as labor unions never became the voice of voiceless workers, as they were never free from the power elite's influence. In the imperial era, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church saw itself as having a role in nation-building and connected people in many communities across the country on the local level. Their nation-building message did not always appeal to other believers, like the Muslims.

The imperial government generally suppressed the birth of vibrant civic associations that might have played an active role in nation-building processes across ethnic and regional divides. As a result, there needed to be more opportunities for meaningful political engagement or inclusionary policies.

Following the 1974 revolution and the rise of the military to power, the role of voluntary institutions, such as political parties and civil society organizations, was insignificant or virtually non-existent due to the Marxist ideology of the regime claiming all power in the name of 'the people'. The *Derg* banned political parties. It viewed them as a threat to its authority and sought to coopt or prohibit them from maintaining the monopoly on power. Again, political pluralism and the ability of Ethiopians to engage in peaceful political activities were curtailed.

In addition to restricting political parties, it also systematically undermined civil society organizations from taking root. The regime uprooted civil society organizations, including non-governmental organizations (NGOs), human rights groups, and other voluntary associations. This included the religious organization, both Muslims (who were, however, accorded more freedoms to express their faith) and the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, whose properties were nationalized, and which was the victim of sustained anti-religious campaigning by the (Marxist) *Derg*. The absence of political parties, civil society organizations, and religious associations' suppression of public activities left a significant gap in civic participation, open community organization, political representation, and democratic governance. This repressive atmosphere and the absence of free voluntary civic organizations profoundly affected the later emergence and proliferation of ethnic-based groups and ethnic politics. Understanding these consequences can provide insights into the complexities of today's ethnic politics in Ethiopia and the unmet need for inclusive and participatory civic organizations as critical pillars of democratic governance.

The pattern of control and targeted repression was continued under the EPRDF. However, more freedom was accorded to religious organizations (as long as they were under the control of the government). The EPRDF also formally established a competitive political system and provided wider space for many civil society organizations (as per the 1994 Constitution). Political parties could be formed and were allowed to operate. Multiparty electoral democracy (with every five years a parliamentary election) was instituted. However, EPRDF remained the unquestioned dominant party and never lost an election. The most critical election was that of 2005, which saw an unexpectedly good showing of opposition parties. However, the suspected manipulation of the vote count and resulting turmoil led to the killing of almost 200 demonstrating people in the streets of Addis Ababa that year. So, repression ultimately prevented political parties' formation and cross-cutting role; the EPRDF elite closely manipulated the political system.

Regarding civil society, even if it seemed entitled to certain rights, they were tightly controlled by EPRDF, and the restrictions grew over the years. The EPRDF enforced draconian laws to curtail the role and existence of civic organizations. Thousands of opposition members, journalists, and human rights activists were also arrested and accused of crimes. Instead of allowing or promoting cross-cultural/ethnic civic organizations that could foster interactions and collaborations across different cultural lines, the EPRDF often encouraged ethnic-based civic organizations. It may indicate that the party always prioritized ethnic identity and division over broader civic engagement and cooperation, with the effect of potentially reinforcing or intensifying ethnic divisions within the country.

Overall, one of the primary reasons behind the repeatedly failing nation-building process was the need for more meaningful opportunities for voluntary associations to operate in the country. The imperial and the *Derg* regime's policy against political parties certainly stifled the birth and growth of any multiparty system in Ethiopia. Even if EPRDF formally introduced such a multiparty system, the role of opposition parties remained nominal and insignificant because they were closely monitored and controlled. Some were prohibited, and others were undermined from within. In conclusion, the politically impacted weak civil society organizational structures in the country prevented any lasting role in the nation-building process. Also, they led to complicating it due to their gradual ethnic fragmentation.

#### 9.1.9. Using Linguistic and Education Policy as an Integrative Element

According to Wimmer (2018), another factor that facilitates effective nation-building is using linguistic and education policy as an integrative instrument. This does not necessarily mean enforcing unitary language at all levels but using one or more shared languages as larger common denominators. The role of national education in nation-building is paramount: the educational system influences the country's development in its socioeconomic, technical, political, and cultural aspects. Education shapes people's preferences through socialization and persuading dissenters to connect and find a place within the nation. Education via teaching one or more common languages can create opportunity structures and a national outlook, with effects improving the 'infrastructure' for communication and social mobility.

Under Emperor Haile Selassie, the education system took great strides (from a shallow base), especially after 1941 when he returned to power. Moreover, he saw it as a top priority and

considered it a tool for nation-building and promoting national identity among Ethiopians. In a country with diverse ethnic and cultural groups, apart from the intrinsic value of education as empowering and offering more social mobility for all, he believed that education could foster a sense of trans-group patriotism and loyalty. He promoted the teaching of the Amharic language, the historically most widespread language in the country and considered the official language of Ethiopia, to help unify the nation and create a sense of shared identity. English was the medium of instruction in higher education, while Amharic was used for educational purposes at lower levels of schooling and administrative tasks. These initiatives aimed to improve relationships among Ethiopians, develop national pride, and advance societal integration. This policy showed similarities with the path of other African post-colonial governments, e.g., using one dominant language as a tool for cohesion.

However, the education system in Ethiopia was also expected to support the Emperor's dominance. Despite Haile Selassie's efforts to promote modern education and make it more accessible, he struggled to connect it to national development. The curriculum ultimately failed to produce citizens who could adapt to changing conditions, leading to frustration and conflict with the ruling elites as the number of educated youth increased in the late 1960s-1970s; Emperor Haile Selassie's educational policy was criticized for not establishing a cohesive national ideology. A more comprehensive and flexible plan was needed to guide the country's educational efforts during that time.

During the *Derg* regime (see Chapter 6), the importance of linguistic and education policies as integrative elements in nation-building was also underlined. The policy was crucial in transforming a multi-ethnic, regionally diverse society into an integrated nation.

The *Derg* government implemented several policies to address linguistic diversity in Ethiopia. One significant effort was the decision to conduct adult literacy programs in fifteen ethnic languages, starting in 1979 and continuing until the fall of the socialist government in 1991. It was aimed at promoting literacy among minority language speakers and elevating the status of their languages. Additionally, the *Derg* government pushed for transcribing various previously unwritten languages into the Ethiopic (Ge'ez) script. However, the use of these languages mostly remained limited to the non-formal education sector, and the government needed to actively promote their use as instructional languages in the formal education system.

Under the socialist ideology of the 1976 National Democratic Revolution Programme (NDRP), the *Derg* government aimed to restore equality among ethno-linguistic groups in Ethiopia and ‘promote’ their languages and cultures. The principle of ‘self-determination’ of all nationalities and equal recognition of their languages and cultures (a notion inherited from the leftist student movements) was emphasized in the program to grant regional autonomy to ethnic groups to decide on matters concerning their internal affairs, including language use. Establishing the ‘Institute of Ethiopian Nationalities (ISEN) in 1983 was a progressive step toward promoting diversity and inclusivity. It researched the ethnic makeup of Ethiopian society, politics, and economy, including its languages.

The *Derg* government also established the Ethiopian Language Academy in 1985, tasked with monitoring and researching language-related issues in the nation, developing writing systems for unwritten languages, creating dictionaries, grammar books, and literary works, and expanding language vocabulary. These initiatives aim to promote multilingualism in Ethiopia's multi-ethnic setting and empower minority languages.

As a result of these policies, the *Derg* regime saw a decrease in the illiteracy rate from almost 93% in 1974 to around 23% in 1989 through widespread adult education campaigns using multiple languages as instruction mediums. The Constitution of the People's Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (PDRE) of 1987 explicitly recognized the equal status of all languages and the right of speakers to use their mother tongues. *Derg*'s language and education policies have taken significant steps toward recognizing diversity, inclusivity, and integration among Ethiopia's ethno-linguistic groups.

The political party's political ideology influenced the educational philosophy during the EPRDF period, underscoring the creation of a younger generation that embraced the hegemony of 'revolutionary-democratic' ideals. The education system was viewed as a means to install these ideals from childhood through civic and ethical education at all levels. The educational and language policy took the basis of ethnic and linguistic recognition laid by the *Derg* to its extreme. It focused on promoting ethnic identities rather than fostering a common national identity based on shared history and values. This was evident in civic and history education, where textbooks contributed to deepening students' ethnic identity over and above their Ethiopian identity. The textbooks encouraged students to have a solid attachment to ethnic values and behavior, emphasizing ethnic identity as the core value for human beings. Overall, the language and



education policy of successive regimes failed to produce an agreeable format and medium of linguistic and educational communication among various ethnic groups and was not successful in stimulating cohesive nation-building. The national language issue has continued to be a point of contestation in the debates and efforts to construct a nation-building project.

#### 9.1.10. Post-2018 Elites and Nation-Building

Finally, the researcher wants to say a word on Ethiopia's post-2018 political reform agenda and its relation to nation-building. The new ruling elite that emerged from the EPRDF in early 2018 brought about significant changes in the political and economic domain and the national political rhetoric. There was the release of political prisoners, the opening of political space, more media freedom, commitment to free and fair elections, and an invitation to all opposition forces (armed and non-armed) outside the country to return and participate in politics. Economic reforms include privatization of state properties and more freedom to the private sector. However, after five years, it appeared that these reforms faced significant challenges, such as increased ethnic tensions, ethnic elite politics, economic volatility, armed contestation, rising inflation, decreased foreign aid and investment, criticisms of the government in its handling of the conflict in the country and especially the war in Tigray, Amhara, and Oromia regions, and a growing crackdown on opposition groups and the media. These challenges even raised concerns about the future of Ethiopia, and questions were posed about whether it was heading towards 'nation-rebuilding' or 'nation-disintegration.'

One of the critical challenges faced by the Ethiopian government in its post-2018 political transformation is a legitimacy crisis. The narrative of national 'synergy' or *Meddemer*, as propagated by the Prime Minister, was initially popular but could not contain the effects of three decades of ethnic politics and ethnic elite defense of vested (self-) interests. The government's handling of ethnic and regional conflicts was insufficient. Notably, the insurgency in different parts of the country and the war with the TPLF in Tigray regional state which was expanded to Amhara and Afar regional states has caused significant destruction of infrastructure and cost hundreds of thousands of lives eroded the legitimacy of the federal government. In recent years, human rights abuses, media controls, and policy unpredictability have led to undermining stability and the rule of law, raising further questions about the federal government and the activities of various regional state governments. While there has been a glimmer of hope for improvements in

some essential services since 2018, overall public service provision remains weak, contributing to the perpetuation of poverty, poor living conditions, and insecurity.

The issue of nation-building has seemingly been put on hold. Ethiopia's diversity, with numerous ethnic groups, still challenges social cohesion due to political polarization, economic disparities, conflict and communication gaps, and against a background of perceived and natural historical divisions. Recent events, which are not the subject of this thesis, have exacerbated these challenges, with significant loss of life, widespread displacement, and a struggling economy. The continued reliance on ethnicity in politics has deepened tensions between regions, as ethnic federalism has contributed to polarization and fragmentation. This focus on ethnicity limits the political space for broader citizenship identity and hinders the development of a unified Ethiopian identity. Thus, the emergence and intensification of ethno-nationalist movements further complicated the nation-building process. The change of ruling elites has perpetuated a fragmented political arena, a lack of clarity of purpose, and a process of 'ethnic outbidding,' affecting nation-building.

## 9.2. Conclusion

The Ethiopian elites have undergone a complex evolution shaped by historical and political factors. From emperors who considered themselves divine figures to traditional and modernist elites to socialist regimes and ethnic-based coalitions, Ethiopian elites have evolved in response to shifts in power, ideologies, socioeconomic transformations, and regional dynamics. Understanding these historical and political influences is crucial in comprehending Ethiopian elites' role in their country's nation-building efforts.

The educated elites entered the power structure under Haile Selassie, as chapters 4 and 5 have demonstrated. Despite being small, they became a powerful elite group in society. They had a strong interest in politics and wanted to modernize and advance their nation. They were frequently viewed as forces for development and change. The lengthy struggle for social justice and equality pitted the educated elite against the traditional ruling class. The imperial regime's effort to construct a nation under the banner of modernization was ended by this conflict. The traditional elite's hegemony crumbled, and a wider society accepted the idea of an educated elite.

The 1974 revolution, led by the educated elite, resulted in the overthrowing of the monarchy and the restructuring of power and elite strata in Ethiopia. The traditional and partly

modernized elites were replaced by new power elites, mainly from the military, promoting Ethiopian socialism and later Marxism-Leninism as a means of nation-building. However, this approach did not lead to a successful nation-building project. The subsequent EPRDF ethnic federalist regime also struggled in its nation-building efforts, leading to the exclusion and marginalization of certain elite groups, particularly the broader educated elite. This elite fragmentation has contributed to political unrest and disputes, with elites disagreeing on the best course for nation-building projects. The general population is now feeling the impact of elite polarization.

This research concludes that the behavior of Ethiopian elites, characterized by unwavering loyalty to the ideology they support, rigidity, and suppression of dissent, significantly impacts the process of nation-building. Their loyalty to ruling regimes often prioritizes maintaining the status quo over addressing underlying societal issues, hindering the nation's progress. Moreover, their reluctance to compromise and engage in inclusive dialogue undermines efforts to build a cohesive national identity and promote unity among diverse ethnic and cultural groups. The suppression of competing perspectives further exacerbates divisions within society, impeding the formation of a shared vision for the nation's future. Consequently, the inability of elites to transcend their narrow interests and embrace pluralism impedes the foundational principles of nation-building, perpetuating cycles of instability and hampering Ethiopia's development as a unified and prosperous nation.

The study underscores that elite polarization in Ethiopia since the 1960s has engendered a detrimental cycle, perpetuating autocratic regimes instead of fostering democratic governance. Rooted in historical grievances and exacerbated by competition for power and resources, this polarization has fragmented the political elite along ethnic, regional, and ideological lines, impeding consensus-building and compromising national unity. Consequently, autocratic leaders exploit these divisions to consolidate power through repressive measures, exacerbating societal tensions and undermining prospects for democratic reform. This cycle not only deepens social cleavages and erodes trust in political institutions but also hampers the establishment of inclusive governance structures, perpetuating a system where authoritarianism thrives at the expense of democratic principles. Addressing this challenge necessitates concerted efforts to bridge elite divides, promote dialogue, and build inclusive political institutions that prioritize the interests of all Ethiopians.

As we saw in Chapters 4 to 7, the power elite of succeeding regimes elites' recruitment was based on in-group loyalty and top-down control. Criticism or accepting novel ideas or compromises to the repair of the system was not accepted. A dogmatic and rigid mentality, coupled with vested material interests, reigned among the ruling elites, who have long been characterized by this mentality, leading to prolonged conflict and a winner-takes-all approach to settling disputes. Because of this, peaceful power transfers rarely happened, and political unrest and conflict were perpetuated. A multifaceted strategy emphasizing inclusive, context specific, participatory governance, constructive criticism, and ethical leadership would be necessary but seems structurally challenging.

The intricate relationship between elite recruitment, placement and the cyclical circulation of elites by different regimes in Ethiopia has played a pivotal role in undermining the provision of public goods, which is crucial for successful nation-building. Historically, the recruitment of elites in Ethiopia has often prioritized loyalty to the ruling regime over meritocracy, leading to the appointment of individuals who may lack the requisite skills or qualifications for their positions. This phenomenon has resulted in a governance structure plagued by inefficiency and corruption, as key decision-making roles are occupied by individuals chosen primarily for their allegiance rather than their ability to govern effectively. Consequently, the quality of public goods provision, including essential services such as healthcare, education, and infrastructure development, has been compromised.

Moreover, the cyclical circulation of elites among different regimes further exacerbates this issue. As regimes change, there is often a reshuffling of elites, with individuals loyal to the incoming regime being appointed to key positions while those associated with the previous regime are sidelined or replaced. This practice perpetuates a cycle of instability and inconsistency within state institutions, hindering the continuity and effectiveness of policies and programs aimed at delivering public goods. Additionally, the displacement of elites contributes to a lack of institutional memory and expertise, as experienced personnel may be sidelined in favor of politically aligned individuals, further diminishing the capacity of state institutions to provide public goods efficiently.

The consequences of these dynamics are profound for nation-building efforts in Ethiopia. Public goods provision is essential for fostering social cohesion, promoting economic development, and building trust between the state and its citizens. However, when elite recruitment

and placement prioritize loyalty over merit, and when elites are subject to frequent turnover due to political changes, the delivery of public goods becomes inconsistent and unreliable. This not only hampers efforts to address pressing socio-economic challenges but also erodes public confidence in the government's ability to meet the needs of its citizens.

Various variables, including ideology, ethnicity, educational qualification, favoritism, and geographic factors, thus affected the recruitment of elites. These factors frequently excluded the majority from the power structure, consolidating the concentration of power in the hands of a small number of individuals.

Based on the five indicators used to assess nation-building processes (three from Wimmer 2018 and the other two added by the researcher), the need to enhance nation-building more robustly shows that Ethiopia grapples with a profound deficit in nation-building processes. As evidenced by its incapable state institutions unable to provide public goods equitably across the nation, a glaring absence of voluntary associations transcending cultural lines to foster unity, the lack of a unifying ideology promoting social cohesion beyond internal divisions, linguistic diversity posing barriers to effective communication among ethnic groups despite a common working language at the federal government level, and the absence of a consensus on history exacerbating ethnic tensions rather than fostering national identification. These challenges underscore the imperative for comprehensive reforms aimed at promoting inclusivity, intercultural dialogue, and the cultivation of a shared national identity founded on common values and aspirations.

This can conclude that the nature of elite maneuvering—their authoritarian, exclusionary *modus Operandi*, led by zero-sum game thinking -has been a fundamental factor in the failure of nation-building initiatives. As was seen in Chapters 4, 5, 6, and 7, the capability of the elite also drastically declined, exposing the nation to leadership crises and political instability. The ethnic elites that came to power in the years following 1991 due to problematic politics described in Chapter 7 have evolved into increasingly ethnicity politicized and sectarian elites with little or no concern with nation-building in Ethiopia and weakened its national structure. Finally, as the researcher explained in Chapter 8, the post-2018 change of power elite was initially considered by the Ethiopian population and the international community as a hopeful moment opening up towards democratization and an inclusive political environment. However, this was not to be due to the growing influence of ethno-nationalists' polarized politics, inconsistent and incompetent

leadership engaged in ethnic outbidding, and lack of shared national vision which has been leading the country into a deep crisis.

### 9.3. Recommendations

Power elites play a crucial role in nation-building processes, although often in contested and incomplete ways. In Ethiopia, the various power elites have been involved in defining the state and the nation but hardly in an all-inclusive manner or acceptable to the entire population. Historical processes (expansion, conquest), territorial conflict, economic inequality, and ethno-cultural diversity have been limiting factors for any stable inclusionary power configuration to form (cf. Wimmer 2022: 193). While academic work is not bound to give recommendations, the researcher adds a few here due to the researcher's full involvement in the Ethiopian politics in the past and his keen concern for the future. Based on the study's findings, the researcher suggests the following recommendations to rethink and address the significant problems related to nation-building in Ethiopia.

#### *Elite Reconfiguration*

One of the key conclusions of this study is that previous nation-building initiatives started badly. Despite the execution of several initiatives and approaches over the past 60 years, elites have been unable to forge a nation representing all citizens. Some observers even note that Ethiopia is currently on the verge of disintegrating. Elite reconfiguration must be used to solve this difficulty. The capability and makeup of the elites that the nation created over the past 40 years have something to do with the failure of nation-building. The country needs a competent power elite that can act as agents of renewed nation-building and lead the country's transition to democracy.

#### *Grand Elite Bargain*

One of the key findings of this study is the widespread dissolution of the elite class across various administrations. The dynamic between the power elite and other segments, such as the computing political elite, commercial, educated, and traditional elite, has been characterized by conflict, discord, and distrust. This presents a significant obstacle to the process of nation-building. The nation building initiatives introduced by the ruling elites of different regimes often

encountered opposition from other elite groups, particularly the educated elite. Except for imperial rule, every regime excluded the educated elite that became increasingly disconnected from the nation's political framework. Both the military and EPRDF governments made minimal efforts to address and accommodate the concerns of the educated classes, often favoring individuals who aligned with their own political beliefs. The lack of participation of various professional, educated, and other elite groups in the political system has led to instability, political unrest, and the removal of consecutive administrations. Based on the experiences of other countries, successful nation-building efforts rely on the ongoing and inclusive involvement of the elites of the country. Genuine political collaboration and agreement are crucial for integrating and uniting the elite class. Ethiopia would benefit from a transparent and inclusive agreement that involves all elite groups based on democratic representation and effective rule of law. Addressing ideological and material-based conflicts between ethno-elites and pan-Ethiopianists through a comprehensive elite agreement will enable open discussion and negotiation.

#### *Consensus on the Nation-Building Project*

The research shows significant and seemingly irreconcilable differences over ideology, language, educational policy, shared history, and national symbols. Along with these essential components of nation-building, disagreements have been noted over the political system, the state structure, and even the country's Constitution. The ruling elite, the society, and other elites beyond the political ones should all share a common understanding of a planned nation-building trajectory. All elites ought to communicate on equal terms. The public, civic society, and other pertinent stakeholders should be consulted over the proposed nation-building effort, in addition to the elite in power. The only way to prevent a potential national collapse is through genuine and honest national consensus.

#### *Lowering Elite Circulation*

The researcher's analysis underscores the significant impediment posed by the recurring turnover of elites in recent Ethiopian political history to the nation's efforts toward successful nation-building under successive administrations. This perpetual churn has hindered the establishment of a reliable elite structure crucial for fostering stable nation-building endeavors, fueling animosity among elites across different epochs. Moreover, the turnover has thwarted the

development of robust professional elite groups over time, perpetuating the dominance of ethno-elites since 1991. Despite the inclusive integration of elite members from diverse ethnic backgrounds into the power apparatus, the quality of these ethnic-regional elites remains notably deficient, compromising meritocracy and hindering national development. The overwhelming dominance of ethnic elites has also led to new phenomena of sectarian state capture, necessitating concerted efforts to foster dialogue among elite factions and re-engage with the broader populace for a more inclusive and effective governance framework.

### *Some Future Research Themes*

Research on power elites and their role in nation-building, as the researcher mentioned in chapters 1 and 2, is rare. More detailed research is needed to thoroughly explore and understand the elites' nature, role and strategies in successive nation-building projects in Ethiopia. Research should also examine post-2018 political changes that are now in progress, which, as we saw above, are in a crisis despite auspicious beginnings. In the realm of future research, there is a pressing need to delve deeper into the process of nation-building, specifically in countries where self-proclaimed political elites have utilized ethnic politicization as a means of gaining political legitimacy from their corresponding or presumed constituency rather than obtaining representation through democratic elections. This usually resulted in a lack of stability. One potential area for future research involves exploring reconciling the competing demands of ethnic-based and individual-based citizenship rights. This may involve investigating different strategies, policies and approaches that can help to promote a more democratic culture while also respecting the rights and needs of different ethnic groups. Such research could have important implications for the ongoing development of Ethiopia and other multi-ethnic societies facing similar challenges in similar contexts.





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NB Ethiopian authors are as a rule cited by first name.

For government documents, party statements, UN reports, etc., refer to Section II below.

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#### IV. Interviews (See detailed information about respondent respondents in Annex 2)

1. Interview with respondent no.30, July 16, 2022, in Addis Ababa.
2. Interview with respondent no. 27, March 25, 2022, in Addis Ababa.
3. Interview with respondent no. 18, January 31, 2022, in Addis Ababa.
4. Interview with respondent no. 26, June 25, 2022, in Bahir Dar.
5. Interview with respondent no. 25, April 30, 2022, in Addis Ababa.
6. Interview with respondent no. 24, May 12, 2022, in Addis Ababa.
7. Interview with respondent no. 14, February 22, 2022, in Addis Ababa.
8. Interview with respondent no. 11, May 6, 2022, in Addis Ababa.
9. Interview with respondent no. 37, June 12, 2022, in Addis Ababa.
10. Interview with respondent no. 31, July 2, 2022, in Addis Ababa.
11. Interview with respondent no. 4, March 21, 2022, in Addis Ababa.
12. Interview with respondent no. 8, May 5, 2022, in Addis Ababa
13. Interview with respondent no. 9, May 7, 2022, in Addis Ababa.
14. Interview with respondent no. 13, February 20, 2022, in Addis Ababa
15. Interview with respondent no. 21, April 21, 2022, in Addis Ababa.
16. Interview with respondent no. 45, June 07, 2022, in Addis Ababa.
17. Interview with respondent no. 39, February 19, 2022, in Addis Ababa
18. Interview with respondent no. 3, March 20, 2022, in Bahir Dar.
19. Interview with respondent no. 46, April 15, 2022, online.
20. Interview with respondent no. 01 March 25, 2021, in Addis Ababa

21. Interview with respondent no. 33, June 15, 2022, in Addis Ababa
22. Interview with respondent no. 32, June 17, 2022, in Addis Ababa
23. Interview with respondent no. 02, March 25, 2022, in Addis Ababa
24. Interview with respondent no. 05, March 24, 2022, in Addis Ababa
25. Interview with respondent no. 06, April 29, 2022, in Addis Ababa
26. Interview with respondent no. 10, April 22, 2022, in Addis Ababa
27. Interview with respondent no. 12, April 05, 2022, in Addis Ababa
28. Interview with respondent no. 16, March 28, 2022, in Addis Ababa
29. Interview with respondent no. 29, January 20, 2022, in Addis Ababa
30. Interview with respondent no. 15, February 01, 2022, in Addis Ababa
31. Interview with respondent no. 19, March 12, 2022, in Addis Ababa
32. Interview with respondent no. 22, May 12, 2022, in Jigjiga
33. Interview with respondent no. 47, March 20, 2021, in Hawassa
34. Interview with respondent no. 41, September 14, 2022, in Addis Ababa
35. Interview with respondent no. 42, July 15, 2022, online

## **Annexes**

### **Annex 1: Interview questionnaire: on elites and nation-building in Ethiopia**

#### *Introduction to the Interviewee:*

This research project is to investigate the role of political elites in nation building of contemporary Ethiopia, 1960-2018. You are believed to have experience and knowledge on the subject of the study. The information that obtained from you is essential to achieve the purpose of the study. Therefore, you are kindly requested to provide accurate information to the best of your knowledge. Your interview answers will not be used for other purpose other than this research work.

I thank you very much for your time.

#### *Detailed initial questions*

1. How do Ethiopian political elites appear? A. Who are the elites?
  - B. How do you evaluate the Knowledge/skills and characteristics be revealed in successive governments?
  - C. What are the common characteristics of elites in successive regimes since 1960?
  - D. How do Ethiopian elites compare to African and other countries' elites? Is there significant differences?
2. Recruitment of elites; what strategies used in elite selection and development by successive Ethiopian governments?
  - A. What techniques of recruitment and placement of elites implemented by successive governments
  - B. How do you explain the balance of power; Separation of powers; Power structure in successive regimes?
  - C. How elite continuity maintained following the change of government, and how the process of succession of elites has affected the country's politics?
  - D. Why has Ethiopia failed to create effective elite that have capability to transform the country?

3. How the role of the Ethiopian elite evaluated in building common identity so as to achieve successful nation building?
  - A. In terms of creating a common political and economic system
  - B. In terms of institution building
  - C. In terms of developing common values
  - D. In terms of promoting Ethiopian nationalism over regional or ethnic nationalism
4. What did the major elite's negotiations look like in successive governments?
  - A. Do Ethiopian elites attempted to resolve long lasting political problems through negotiations?
  - B. What obstacles were that led to the failure of elite negotiations? How related with:
    - ☐ Differences in basic political and economic questions
    - ☐ Lack of strong political parties
    - ☐ Lack of participatory political culture and enabling political environment
5. Why have Ethiopian elites failed to develop or appeal to common national values? Why polarized views on:
  - A. Disagreement on national symbols, common history, and national heroes and heroines
  - B. Disagreement on state design and state structure,
  - C. The inability to create an acceptable and governing ideology
  - D. A series of governments to create a unified political and economic society
  - E. Why did we fail to bring political stability, rapid economic growth, social justice, and inclusive politics?
  - F. Why did we fail to build effective institutions that could facilitate a successful nation?
6. What are the main key problems observed in the negotiations between the leaders of successive governments:
  - A. Irreconcilable political and economic demands and interests / distribution of wealth and power
  - B. Differences between rural and urban elites
  - C. The problem of drafting an inclusive and acceptable constitution
  - D. The construction of democracy has failed
  - E. Identity; nation, language and culture questions?

7. What was the impact of nation-building ideas and efforts implemented by successive governments?
- A. The idea of 'greater Ethiopia' (imperial Ethiopia).
  - B. The idea of 'Ethiopia First' (socialist Ethiopia).
  - C. The idea of the Nation: nations, nationalities and peoples of Ethiopia (National union of Ethiopia).
8. What should be done to solve the current nation-building crisis in Ethiopia?
- A. What alternative ideas and strategies do you propose in order to resolve the current polarization?
  - B. What will be the role of various stakeholders?



## Annex 2. List of respondents and short descriptions

Code of interviewees	Description of individual interviewees	Place of interview	Date and time of interview
01	One of Ethiopia's top politicians. Military officer during Haile Selassie, He was a member of the <i>Derg</i> Committee, and served as high political figure, including as Vice President of Ethiopia and executive committee member of the Ethiopian Workers' Party under the <i>Derg</i> government.	Addis Ababa	March 25, 2021. Time: 11:30-12:30 A.M
02	He served his country as a young diplomat and later was engaged in research as consultant on the Horn of Africa region's security and geopolitics	Addis Ababa	March 15, 2022  Time 10:30-
03	One of the researchers in ecology and an author of many books focusing on culture and social values. He is also one of the influential elite members in the country. He has been working in one of the local NGOs as CEO.	Bahir Dar	March 20, 2022  Time: 4:30
04	An EPRP member during the student movement era; participated in the EPRP armed struggle. Since 1991 he was in different political parties including in the EPRDF government as well as in opposition parties at top key leadership positions. He is a well-known politician and author of many books on Ethiopian politics and history. Now he is a retiree.	Addis Ababa	March 21, 2022  Time: 2:30

05	One of the business elite members, engaged in various business activities related to the Ethiopian diaspora community. He resided in USA for a long time.	Addis Ababa	March 24,2022 Time: 9:30
06	A lecturer at Addis Ababa University, currently leading one of the opposition political parties and serving the government of Ethiopia as a Minister in a Ministry allotted to the opposition.	Addis Ababa	April 29, 2022 Time: 9:25
07	A member of the business elite. He served in the Chamber of Commerce at the top leadership position.	Addis Ababa	April 20, 2022. Time: 2:00
08	Served as a professor at various universities abroad and in the country, including Addis Ababa University. One of the influential political leaders in Ethiopia and currently Chairman of one of the opposition parties. He also has been serving in the government as a cabinet member.	Addis Ababa	May 5, 2022 Time: 3:00
09	One of the prominent OLF leaders who served the organization for a long during the armed resistance. Currently he lives in Ethiopia and works as a member of the House of People's Representatives.	Addis Ababa	May 7, 2022. Time: 10:00
10	A lecturer at Addis Ababa University and active participant in Ethiopian politics; served as a political appointee during EPRDF time in one of the regions. He is a member of Addis Ababa City Administration Council	Addis Ababa	April 22, 2022 Time 9:30
11	One of the historians working in private business and NGOs. He also served as lecturer at Addis Ababa University.	Addis Ababa	May 6, 2021. Time: 9:00

12	A politician who has been serving the government in various capacities. He was a lecturer at Addis Ababa University, a Deputy Regional Administrator, and a State Minister.	Addis Ababa	April 5, 2022
13	One of the top military officers and four-star generals in Ethiopia. He served the country for many years since 1991 and during EPRDF entire tenure. Had participated in the armed resistance in the northern Ethiopia against the <i>Derg</i> regime.	Addis Ababa	February 20, 2022 Time: 4:30
14	A political activist now working for one of the local NGOs. He resided in Europe for a long time.	Addis Ababa	February 22, 2022, 2:30

15	One of the top EPRDF officials and serving the EPRDF for many years as party Executive Committee member and Minister in different ministries. He also was an ambassador. Currently he serves the government in his capacity as adviser, with the rank of Minister.	Addis Ababa	February 01, 2022 Time: 9:30
16	A prominent Ethiopian diplomat who served the country in various capacities since his time as fresh graduate until his retirement.	Addis Ababa	March 28, 2022
17	One of the scholars from Addis Ababa University. He was a lecturer and he participated in social and religious events, including in the reconciliation process among religious leaders at the Islamic Supreme Council and in other national affairs	Addis Ababa	April 23, 2022
18	One of the prominent politicians and one of the influential leaders of the OLF. From a young age he has lived in exile. Now he lives in Ethiopia as a retiree.	Addis Ababa	January 31, 2022

19	Prominent politician and political activist from the opposition camp. He also has a business and is author of many books on Ethiopian politics.	Addis Ababa	March 12, 2022
20	A top political figure during EPRDF time and served the country in various positions as member of the Executive Committee of the EPRDF coalition and as Minister.	Addis Ababa	February 25, 2022
21	A long-serving politicians from the opposition camp. He worked as a professor at Addis Ababa University and at the same time was chairman of one of the opposition political parties. He was a member of the House of Peoples' Representatives for more than two terms as opposition party leader.	Addis Ababa	April 21, 2022
22	One of the younger politicians in the country. Currently he is a regional president and an Executive Committee member of the ruling Prosperity Party.	Jigjiga	May 12, 2022
23	One of the elderly elite, who thoroughly understands the power dynamics of Ethiopian politics. He experienced the leadership among different regimes in Ethiopia since the Emperor Haile Selassie period.	Bahir Dar	April 15, 2022
24	A young scholar who works in one of the international organizations. He now lives abroad but is also still an active participant in Ethiopian affairs.	Addis Ababa	May 12, 2022
25	One of Ethiopia's young diplomats, currently working at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Served the country in different diplomatic missions in other countries.	Addis Ababa	April 30, 2022

26	One of the young politicians in an opposition political party and member of House of Peoples' Representatives. He is also a political activist.	Bahir Dar	June 25, 2022
27	An influential politician and political activist. He has been working in one of the political parties at a top leadership position.	Addis Ababa	March 25, 2022
28	A well-known politician from the Ethiopian diaspora and working as an opposition party figure.	Addis Ababa	April 28, 2022
29	A politician working in a top leadership position of the ruling Prosperity Party. He was a State Minister in one of the ministries.	Addis Ababa	January 20, 2021
30	One of the more well-known historians and scholars from Addis Ababa University. One of the most influential professors in the field.	Addis Ababa	July 16, 2022
31	An influential scholar on Ethiopian history and contemporary politics. He is the author of many authoritative books in the field.	Addis Ababa	July 2, 2022
32	She is a journalist and also the author of various books on Ethiopian politics and history	Addis Ababa	June 17, 2022
33	One of the top military and political leaders during the <i>Derg</i> period. He served in various positions at the time, including as Executive Committee member of the Ethiopian Workers' Party and chief of staff of the Ethiopian armed forces.	Addis Ababa	June 15, 2022

34	One of the top-level officials during the <i>Derg</i> period. He served the country in various capacities, including member of Standing Committee of the <i>Derg</i> , provincial administrator, Politbureau member of the Ethiopian Workers' Party, and Minister.	Addis Ababa	May 4, 2022
35	An influential elder in Gondar. He served the country in various capacities, including as a provincial chief judge in various places during Emperor Haile Selassie's and the <i>Derg</i> regimes. He is now retired.	Gondar	January 31, 2022
36	An elder civil servant who experienced various regimes in Ethiopia, including the Haile Selassie, <i>Derg</i> , and EPRDF regimes.	Arba Minch	January 13, 2022
37	One of the professors from Addis Ababa University and a well-known scholar in political science.	Addis Ababa	June 12, 2022
38	A long-serving professor of political science at Addis Ababa University.	Phone call	June 14, 2022
39	One of the former top leaders of the EPRP, an active participant in the student movement. He stayed long in exile abroad. Currently, he serves in civil society organizations.	Addis Ababa	February 19, 2022
40	A journalist of one the more influential Ethiopian news weeklies		April 19, 2021
41	A young politician who has been serving the country as a State Minister.	Addis Ababa	September 14, 2022
42	An Ethiopian scholar in political science and analyst on current affairs Ethiopia. He is a lecturer at one of the colleges in the USA	Online	July 15, 2022
43	A scholar-lecturer in philosophy at Addis Ababa University, and an active participant in Ethiopian politics.	Addis Ababa	March 02, 2022

44	A young, educated politician, who was working in various civic organizations and research institutions.	Addis Ababa	February 20, 2021
45	One of the young politicians from the Prosperity Party and Executive Committee member of the party. He also was a Minister in the PP government.	Addis Ababa	June 07,2022
46	One of the military elite (a four-star general), until recently in active service	Addis Ababa	April 15, 2022
47	A lecturer at Hawassa University in the field of political science and regional development	Hawassa	March 20, 2021
48	A member of the elite engaged in the media sector	Addis Ababa	February 14, 2021

### Annex 3: Table of road sector indicators

	Indicators	During	Haile Selassie until 1974	During <i>Derg</i> Regime until 1991
1	Length of asphalt roads	3360	4109	8295 km
2	Length of gravel roads	5900	9298	14136 km
3	Length rural roads	00	5610	29611 km
4	Total road networks in km.	9260	19226	36496 km (up to 2004)
5	Coverage of road network per km <sup>2</sup>	0.00756 km/square km	0.0157 km/ square km	0.033 km/square km

### Annex 4: Table of education sector indicators

	Indicators	During Haile Selassie, until 1974	During the <i>Derg</i> Regime until 1991	During EPRDF until 2020
	Number of Primary schools	3174	9219	37750



2	Number of secondary schools	113	279	3688
3	Number of universities	1	2	45
4	Number of primary school teachers	21875	80539	537596
5	Number of secondary school teachers	2955	11174	127741
6	Number of primary school students	961579	2204697	20419152
	Number of secondary school students	81296	363686	3466972
8	Number of university students	7234	12935	1106367
9	Primary education coverage in percent	12	32	95.1

## Annex 5: Table of health sector indicators

	Indicators	During the Haile Selassie era until 1974	During the <i>Derg</i> regime until 1991	During EPRDF until 2020
1	Life expectancy at birth	34.45	46.13	65.37
2	Birth rate per 1000 persons	49.6	49.8	32.9
3	Death rate per 1000 persons	24.9	18.9	6.6
4	Health service coverage	15%	49.10%	100%
5	Number of hospitals	85	89	353
6	Number of health centers	93	157	3735
7	Number of health post/stations	650	2125	17975
8	Number of physicians	374	1658	10090
9	Number of health officers	213	94	13447
10	Number of nurses	700	3575	59063
1	Number of midwives	192	9576	18396



## Summary

This dissertation explores the role of elites in the nation-building efforts of Ethiopia from 1960 to 2020. It examines the political history of the country since 1960 primarily focusing on elite bargaining and problematizes the issues and factors in the process of nation-building vis-à-vis modern state formation. The nation-building effort in any country exclusively depends on the quality and composition of elites. The modalities and approaches that emerge to accommodate the interest of elites are also vital driving factors in nation-building. All elite bargains and political settlement deals are implemented under the overarching framework of these modalities.

The study aimed to answer the following core questions: how did the formation and circulation of elites affect nation-building endeavour? What were the major elite bargains and their respective outcomes? Why did successive governments fail to create an integrative ideology? What were the contending approaches employed by successive governments to form an integrative model for society? Why did governments fail to establish a functioning state apparatus or institutions that would enable political stability, economic development, and social justice? Why did elites fail to reach agreements over national symbols and the history of the country?

The project thus explored the trajectory of Ethiopian state formation since the 1960s, focusing on studying the specific role of elites in nation-building. It applied a combination of elite circulation and elite bargain theories as a conceptual framework for the analysis. It is an explanatory and cross-sectional study by its design. It also employs mixed methods of using a descriptive research approach, in-depth interviews, and document analysis. The thesis used Andreas Wimmer's three essential factors and two other factors regarding nation-building as a basic conceptual framework and tested it in the Ethiopian context: the emergence of a common communication medium, the early development of voluntary associations/civic society organizations across cultural lines, and the development of functional state capable of providing public goods equitably for the people in the territory of the nation to foster inclusivity and belongingness to the nation. Two other factors added here are the use of a unifying ideology and the existence/promotion of national symbols that might guide the actions of the ruling elites and shape the collective identity of the nation as a political community.

This study argues that the trajectory of Ethiopian elites has undergone a nuanced evolution shaped by historical and political dynamics. This journey spans from the era of emperors who perceived themselves as divine figures to the coexistence of traditional, modernist, socialist, and ethnic-based coalitions. Changes in power structures, ideologies, socioeconomic transformation, and regional dynamics have influenced shifts in elite composition. An understanding of this historical and political context is essential for grasping the role played by Ethiopian elites in their country's nation-building endeavours, based on elites' nature and characteristics, basis of recruitment, and their roles in nation-building.

The nature and characteristics of Ethiopian elites varied across different regimes, reflecting societal and political changes. During emperor Haile Selassie's reign (1930-1974), elites were divided into the traditional aristocracy and the emerging educated elite, with divergent interests. The educated elite played a key role in reshaping the political and social landscape, contributing to political movements and economic growth. However, they faced criticism for cultural insensitivity, economic elitism, and political bias. Under the *Derg* regime since 1974, military elites held significant power – with an authoritarian style relying on violent methods, and adopting Marxist ideology. They displayed a highly nationalistic attitude, presenting themselves as defenders of sovereignty but causing economic decline and internal factionalism. EPRDF rule after 1991 prioritized ethnic interests and their model of ethnic-based federalism initially seemed innovative but became divisive, accused of favouritism and of using ethnicity for political domination. The EPRDF was authoritarian, controlled all branches of government, and engaged in widespread repression, corruption, and embezzlement. The emphasis on ethnicity resulted in a fragmented political landscape and limited representation of diverse groups, with elites characterized by incompetence, divisiveness, and loyalty primarily to their respective ethnic group (elites).

In these successive regimes in Ethiopia, elite recruitment exhibited common traits, including loyalty to the regime and ethno-regional preferences. While in Haile Selassie's era education and the merit system were predominantly emphasized, the *Derg* prioritized ideological loyalty and adherence to Marxist-Leninist principles for recruitment. During the EPRDF's period, the commitment to ethnic federalism and 'ethnic politics' became the basis for elite recruitment. The practice involved creating an 'agent-master' relationship rather than emphasizing equality or inter-ethnic cooperation. Across all regimes, personal loyalty to individual leaders often took precedence over allegiance to the state when recruiting and integrating elites, highlighting a preference for the agent-master relationship over an equal partnership.

Nation-building encompasses various dimensions, including economic integration, cultural integration, repression or ethnic reconfiguration, and, the creation of common interests, as well as 'instruments' like political democratization, political centralization, bureaucratic control, military strategies, and establishment of common citizenship. The pursuit of nation-building can serve as a political strategy to achieve specific goals, and its interpretation varies among scholars. Some emphasize national identification and a sense of belonging, while others highlight political inclusion through state-citizen relationships. Nation-building intersects with factors like ethnicity, religion, language, and regionalism, as states may adopt policies related to these elements to shape national identity and address tensions or conflicts. The approach to nation-building can be developmental or imperial, depending on the political context and actors involved.

As the thesis proceeds, the researcher provides a summary comparative-descriptive analysis based on the five indicators – the three adopted from Andreas Wimmer's study (2018) and the two other additional ones, which serve as criteria for comparing the regimes in Ethiopia since 1960. These indicators are essential for assessing and comparing the governance and integration strategies of Ethiopian regimes over the specified period.

- a) The presence or promotion of a compelling and cohesive ideology.

This study traces Ethiopia's political evolution from Haile Selassie's reign to the EPRDF regime. Emperor Haile Selassie's rule balanced tradition and modernism, anchored by a myth of divine mandate, but faced criticism for repression and inequality. The post-1974 *Derg* embraced socialist ideals and resulted in nationalizing economic sectors and efforts to address the issue of 'nationalities'. Ethiopian leftists differed on class struggle and ethnic disparities. The EPRDF, taking over power in 1991 after the insurgent war, implemented ethnic federalism and 'revolutionary democracy,' leading to tensions, protests, and criticism for exacerbating polarization and authoritarianism which affect nation-building attempts.

b) The use of national symbols as integrative elements.

Across successive regimes, different groups viewed national symbols, particularly the national flag and other elements like dominant historical narratives, as controversial. Some viewed them as signs of victory and independence, while others saw them as a representation of exploitation and dominance. This controversy remains present and divisive, preventing the establishment of a successful national identity.

c) The establishment of effective state institutions capable of providing public goods.

Public goods, which must be non-excludable and non-rivalrous, encompass essential services like healthcare, education, infrastructure, defense, and environmental resources to a country's citizenry. In the context of nation-building, these goods contribute to economic development by enhancing productivity and fostering human capital through investments in education and healthcare. They also promote social cohesion by reducing inequality, creating a shared identity, and mitigating social unrest. The fair provision of public goods is crucial for successful nation-building by enhancing government legitimacy and can encourage political integration across diverse regions and ethnicities. While there has been notable progress in public goods and service provision by successive governments, the correlation with nation-building is unclear. The emergence of a fragmented ethnolinguistic political landscape, particularly under the EPRDF, has limited the inclusive impact of public goods provision. Despite efforts, no government has successfully used public goods provision as an integrative tool for nation-building.

d) The existence of voluntary associations fostering integration among diverse groups across cultures.

The repeated failure of nation-building in Ethiopia can also be attributed to a lack of meaningful opportunities for voluntary associations to operate. The restrictive policies of past regimes, such as the imperial and *Derg* regimes, against political parties hindered the development of a robust multiparty system. Although the EPRDF formally introduced a multiparty system, opposition parties had limited influence as they were closely monitored and controlled, with some even being prohibited. Weak civil society organizational structures further impeded their lasting role in nation-building, contributing to complications through gradual ethnic fragmentation. e) The implementation of a common or shared linguistic and education policy.

Successive regimes in Ethiopia have struggled to establish an effective language and education policy that fosters communication and unity among diverse ethnic groups. The failure to create an agreeable format has impeded cohesive nation-building, and even the issue of a national language remains a contentious point in ongoing debates and efforts to construct a unified national identity.

Currently, the issue of nation-building in Ethiopia has been stalled due to challenges that arose from the exclusionary nature of the power elites. These challenges include political polarization, economic disparities, conflict, and communication gaps. Recent events have worsened these issues, leading to significant loss of life, widespread displacement, and economic struggles. The persistent use of ethnicity in politics, fuelled by ethnic federalism, has heightened tensions among regions, contributing to polarization and fragmentation. This emphasis on ethnicity restricts the political landscape for a broader citizenship identity, hindering the development of a unified Ethiopian identity. The rise of ethno-nationalist movements has further complicated the nation-building process. Changes in ruling elites have thus perpetuated a fragmented political arena, a lack of clarity of purpose, and a process of 'ethnic outbidding,' negatively impacting the nation-building efforts.

The study suggests a set of recommendations derived from its findings to address these challenges. These include advocating for elite reconfiguration to establish a competent power elite capable of representing all citizens and steering the nation towards democracy. A grand elite bargain is put forward to address conflicts and mistrust among various elite groups, promoting consensus and inclusivity. Fostering consensus on nation-building among ruling elites, society, and stakeholders is emphasized to prevent potential national collapse. Other recommendations involve reducing the frequent circulation of elites, mitigating the dominance of ethno-elites, and fostering collaboration with other elite groups and the general population. These recommendations collectively aim to overcome historical challenges, encourage elite cooperation, and establish a more inclusive and stable foundation for nation/state-building in Ethiopia.

## Samenvatting

Deze studie onderzoekt de rol van elites in de pogingen tot natievorming in Ethiopië van 1960 tot 2020. Het volgt de politieke geschiedenis van het land sinds 1960, waarbij de nadruk vooral ligt op onderhandelingen/overeenkomsten tussen elites, en problematiseert de factoren in het proces van natievorming tegenover de moderne *staatsvorming*.

De inspanningen tot natievorming in welk land dan ook zijn vooral afhankelijk van de kwaliteit en samenstelling van de elites. De modaliteiten en benaderingen die naar voren komen om tegemoet te komen aan de belangen van de elites zijn ook cruciale drijvende factoren bij de vorming van naties. Alle elite-onderhandelingen en politieke schikkingsovereenkomsten worden gevoerd binnen het overkoepelende raamwerk van deze modaliteiten.

Deze studie had de volgende kernvragen: hoe beïnvloedde de vorming en circulatie van elites de inspanningen tot natievorming in Ethiopië? Wat waren de belangrijkste eliteonderhandelingen (*bargains*) en hun respectieve uitkomsten? Waarom zijn opeenvolgende regeringen in het land er niet in geslaagd een integratieve ideologie te creëren? Wat waren de conflicterende benaderingen die door opeenvolgende regeringen werden gebruikt om een integratief model voor de samenleving te vormen? Waarom zijn regeringen er niet in geslaagd een functionerend staatsapparaat of functionerende staatsinstellingen op te zetten die politieke stabiliteit, economische ontwikkeling en sociale rechtvaardigheid mogelijk zouden maken? Waarom slaagden de elites er niet in overeenstemming te bereiken over nationale symbolen en geschiedenis van het land?

Het project volgt daarmee het traject van de Ethiopische staatsvorming sinds de jaren zestig, met de nadruk ligt op het bestuderen van de specifieke rol van elites bij natievorming. Het combineerde elite-circulatie- en elite-onderhandelingstheorieën als conceptueel raamwerk voor de analyse. Het is door zijn opzet een verklarende en transversale studie. Er is gebruik gemaakt van *mixed methods*: een beschrijvende onderzoeksaanpak, diepte-interviews, geschreven bronnen en documentanalyse. Het proefschrift gebruikte de drie essentiële factoren van Andreas Wimmer en nog twee andere factoren met betrekking tot natievorming als een fundamenteel conceptueel raamwerk en testte dit in de Ethiopische context: de opkomst van een gemeenschappelijk communicatiemedium (taal), de vroege ontwikkeling van vrijwillige /maatschappelijke organisaties in culturele en culturele contexten, en de ontwikkeling van een functionele staat die in staat is om publieke goederen op rechtvaardige wijze te verstrekken aan de mensen op het grondgebied van de natie om inclusiviteit en verbondenheid met de natie te bevorderen. De twee andere factoren die hier werden toegevoegd zijn: het gebruik van een verenigende ideologie en het bestaan/de bevordering van nationale symbolen die de handelingen van de heersende elites zouden kunnen sturen en de collectieve identiteit van de natie als politieke gemeenschap vorm zouden kunnen geven.

Deze studie betoogt dat het traject van de Ethiopische elites een genuanceerde evolutie heeft ondergaan, gevormd door historische en politieke dynamiek. Dit strekt zich uit van het tijdperk van de keizers die zichzelf als goddelijke figuren beschouwden tot het naast elkaar bestaan van traditionele, modernistische, socialistische en etnisch gebaseerde coalities. Veranderingen in machtsstructuren, ideologieën, sociaal-economische



transformatie en regionale dynamiek hebben verschuivingen in de samenstelling van de elite(s) beïnvloed. Een goed beeld van deze historische en politieke context is essentieel voor het begrijpen van de rol die de Ethiopische elites speelden – en spelen - in de pogingen tot natievorming, gebaseerd op hun aard en kenmerken, de basis van rekrutering en hun rol in de natievorming.

De aard en kenmerken van de Ethiopische elites varieerden tussen verschillende regimes en weerspiegelden maatschappelijke en politieke veranderingen. Tijdens het bewind van keizer Haile Selassie (regerend van 1930 tot 1974) waren de elites verdeeld in de traditionele aristocratie en de opkomende ontwikkelde elite, met uiteenlopende belangen. De opgeleide elite speelde een sleutelrol bij het hervormen van het politieke en sociale landschap en droeg bij aan politieke bewegingen en economische groei. Ze kregen echter kritiek vanwege culturele ongevoeligheid, economisch elitarisme en politieke vooringenomenheid. Onder het *Derg*- regime (1974-1991) hadden de militaire elites sinds 1974 aanzienlijke macht – met een autoritaire stijl die steunde op gewelddadige methoden en op marxistische ideologie. Ze toonden een zeer nationalistische houding, presenteerden zichzelf als verdedigers van de soevereiniteit, maar veroorzaakten economische achteruitgang en intern factionalisme. Het EPRDF-bewind na 1991 gaf prioriteit aan etnische belangen, en hun model van etnisch federalisme leek aanvankelijk innovatief, maar veroorzaakte verdeeldheid, werd beschuldigd van vriendjespolitiek en het gebruik van etniciteit voor politieke overheersing. De EPRDF was autoritair, controleerde alle takken van de regering en werd ook gekenmerkt door wijdverbreide repressie, corruptie en verduistering. De nadruk op etniciteit resulteerde in een gefragmenteerd politiek landschap en een beperkte vertegenwoordiging van diverse groepen, waarbij de elites steeds meer werden gekenmerkt door incompetentie, verdeeldheid en loyaliteit, voornamelijk aan hun respectieve etnische groep (elites).

In deze opeenvolgende regimes in Ethiopië vertoonde de rekrutering van de elite gemeenschappelijke kenmerken, waaronder loyaliteit aan het regime en etnisch-regionale voorkeuren. Terwijl in de tijd van keizer Haile Selassie vooral de nadruk werd gelegd op onderwijs en een loyaal maar ook meritocratisch systeem, gaf de *Derg* bij rekrutering prioriteit aan ideologische loyaliteit en het vasthouden aan marxistisch-leninistische principes. Tijdens de periode van het EPRDF werd de toewijding aan etnisch federalisme en 'etnische politiek' de basis voor de rekrutering van elites. De praktijk bestond uit het creëren van een 'agent-master'-relatie in plaats van de nadruk te leggen op gelijkheid of interetnische samenwerking. In alle regimes kreeg persoonlijke loyaliteit aan individuele leiders vaak voorrang boven trouw aan de staat bij het rekruteren en integreren van elites, wat de voorkeur benadrukte voor de agentmaster-relatie boven een gelijkwaardig partnerschap.

Natievorming omvat verschillende dimensies, waaronder economische integratie, culturele integratie, repressie of etnische reconfiguratie en het creëren van gemeenschappelijke belangen, evenals 'instrumenten' zoals politieke democratisering, politieke centralisatie, bureaucratische controle, militaire strategieën en het vestigen van gemeenschappelijk burgerschap. Het nastreven van natievorming of -opbouw kan dienen als een politieke strategie om specifieke doelen te bereiken, en de interpretatie ervan verschilt onder wetenschappers. Sommigen leggen de nadruk op nationale identificatie en het gevoel ergens bij te horen, terwijl anderen de nadruk leggen op politieke inclusie via relaties tussen staat en burger. Natievorming kruist factoren als etniciteit, religie, taal en regionalisme, aangezien staten beleid kunnen voeren dat verband houdt met deze elementen om de nationale

identiteit vorm te geven en spanningen of conflicten aan te pakken. De benadering van natievorming kan ontwikkelingsgericht of imperiaal zijn, afhankelijk van de politieke context en de betrokken actoren.

De onderzoeker geeft een samenvattende, vergelijkende-beschrijvende analyse op basis van de vijf indicatoren – de drie overgenomen uit de studie van Andreas Wimmer (2018) en de twee andere aanvullende indicatoren, die dienen als criteria voor het vergelijken van de regimes in Ethiopië sinds 1960 tot 2020. Deze indicatoren zijn essentieel voor het beoordelen van de bestuurs- en integratiestrategieën van Ethiopische regimes gedurende deze periode.

a) De aanwezigheid of promotie van een dwingende en samenhangende ideologie. Deze studie volgt de politieke evolutie van Ethiopië vanaf de regering van keizer Haile Selassie tot en met het EPRDF-regime. Het bewind van de keizer poogde traditie en moderniteit in evenwicht te brengen, verankerd in een mythe van goddelijk mandaat, maar kreeg te maken met kritiek vanwege repressie en ongelijkheid. De *Derg* van na 1974 omarmde socialistische idealen en dit resulteerde in de nationalisatie van economische sectoren en pogingen om de kwestie van 'nationaliteiten' aan te pakken. Linkse Ethiopische oppositiebewegingen verschilden van mening over het belang van klassenstrijd en etnische verschillen. De EPRDF, die in 1991 na 17 jaar gewapende verzetsstrijd de macht overnam, implementeerde etnisch federalisme en een 'revolutionaire democratie', wat leidde tot spanningen, protesten en kritiek vanwege de verscherpte polarisatie en autoritarisme, die de pogingen tot natievorming negatief beïnvloedden.

b) Het gebruik van nationale symbolen als integratieve elementen.

In opeenvolgende regimes beschouwden verschillende groepen nationale symbolen, met name de nationale vlag en andere elementen zoals dominante historische verhalen (*narratives*), als controversieel. Sommigen zagen ze als tekenen van overwinning en onafhankelijkheid, terwijl anderen ze vooral betitelden als representaties van uitbuiting en overheersing. Deze controverse blijft aanwezig en zorgt voor verdeeldheid, waardoor de vorming van een succesvolle nationale identiteit nog steeds wordt verhinderd.

c) De oprichting van effectieve staatsinstellingen die in staat zijn publieke goederen te leveren.

Publieke goederen, die niet-exclusief en niet-rivaliserend moeten zijn, omvatten essentiële diensten zoals gezondheidszorg, onderwijs, infrastructuur, defensie en natuurlijke hulpbronnen voor de burgers van een land. In de context van natievorming dragen deze goederen bij aan economische ontwikkeling door de productiviteit te vergroten en het menselijk kapitaal te bevorderen via investeringen in onderwijs en gezondheidszorg. Ze bevorderen ook de sociale cohesie door ongelijkheid terug te dringen, een gedeelde identiteit te creëren en de sociale onrust af te remmen. De eerlijke levering van publieke goederen is van cruciaal belang voor een succesvolle natievorming door de legitimiteit van de overheid te vergroten en kan de politieke integratie tussen verschillende regio's en etnische groepen tevens bevorderen. Hoewel er door de opeenvolgende regeringen opmerkelijke vooruitgang is geboekt op het gebied van de publieke goederen- en dienstverlening, is het verband met de vorming van de natie onduidelijk. De opkomst van een gefragmenteerd etno-linguïstisch politiek landschap, vooral onder het EPRDF, heeft de inclusieve impact van de voorziening van publieke goederen beperkt. Ondanks inspanningen heeft geen enkele regering met succes de voorziening van publieke goederen voldoende gebruikt als een integrerend instrument voor natievorming.

- d) Het bestaan van vrijwillige verenigingen die de integratie tussen diverse groepen uit verschillende culturen bevorderen.

Het herhaaldelijk mislukken van de natievorming in Ethiopië kan ook worden toegeschreven aan een gebrek aan zinvolle mogelijkheden voor vrijwillige organisaties om te opereren. Het restrictieve beleid van vroegere regimes, zoals het imperiale regime en *het Derg*- regime, bv. tegen politieke partijen, belemmerde de ontwikkeling van een robuust meerpartijenstelsel. Hoewel de EPRDF formeel een meerpartijenstelsel introduceerde, hadden de oppositiepartijen zeer beperkte invloed omdat ze nauwelijkt in de gaten werden gehouden en gecontroleerd, en sommige zelfs verboden waren of werden vervolgd. Zwakke organisatiestructuren van het maatschappelijk middenveld vormden een verdere belemmering voor een blijvende rol in de opbouw van de natie, en droegen bij aan complicaties door de geleidelijke etnische fragmentatie.

- e) De implementatie van een gemeenschappelijk of gedeeld taal- en onderwijsbeleid. Opeenvolgende regimes in Ethiopië hebben moeite gehad om een effectief taal- en onderwijsbeleid tot stand te brengen dat de communicatie en eenheid tussen diverse etnische groepen zou bevorderen. Het onvermogen om hiervoor een geschikte formule te creëren heeft coherente natievorming belemmerd; en zelfs de kwestie van een nationale taal bleef (en blijft) een controversieel punt in de voortdurende debatten en pogingen om een verenigende nationale identiteit te construeren.

Momenteel is de kwestie van de natievorming in Ethiopië tot stilstand gekomen vanwege uitdagingen die voortkwamen uit het 'uitsluitende' karakter van het handelen der machtselites. Deze uitdagingen omvatten politieke polarisatie, economische verschillen, conflicten en communicatiekloven. Recente gebeurtenissen hebben deze problemen verergerd, wat heeft geleid tot aanzienlijk verlies aan mensenlevens, wijdverbreide ontheemding en economische machtsstrijd. Het aanhoudende gebruik van etniciteit in de politiek, aangewakkerd door etnisch federalisme, heeft de spanningen tussen regio's vergroot, wat weer heeft bijgedragen aan polarisatie en fragmentatie. Deze nadruk op etniciteit beperkt het politieke landschap in de vorming van een bredere burgerschapsidentiteit, waardoor de ontwikkeling van een verenigde Ethiopische identiteit wordt belemmerd. De opkomst van etnisch-nationalistische bewegingen heeft het proces van natievorming nog ingewikkelder gemaakt. Veranderingen in de heersende elites hebben dus een gefragmenteerde politieke arena, een gebrek aan duidelijkheid over het doel en een proces van 'etnisch overbieden' in stand gehouden, wat een negatieve invloed heeft gehad op de inspanningen om de natie op te bouwen.

De studie suggereert een reeks aanbevelingen, afgeleid van de bevindingen, om deze uitdagingen aan te pakken. Deze omvatten onder meer het pleiten voor een reconfiguratie van de elites om een competente machtselite te vestigen die in staat is alle burgers te vertegenwoordigen en de natie richting democratie te sturen. Er wordt een groot/overkoepelend elite-akkoord voorgesteld om conflicten en wantrouwen tussen verschillende elitegroepen aan te pakken en consensus en inclusiviteit te bevorderen. Het bevorderen van consensus over natievorming onder de heersende elites en andere belanghebbenden in de samenleving wordt benadrukt om een mogelijke nationale ineenstorting te voorkomen. Andere aanbevelingen betreffen het verminderen van de frequente circulatie van elites, het verzachten van de dominantie van etno-elites en het bevorderen van samenwerking met andere elitegroepen en de bevolking als geheel. Deze aanbevelingen zijn gezamenlijk bedoeld om bestaande historische uitdagingen te

overwinnen, samenwerking tussen de elites aan te moedigen en een meer inclusieve en stabiele basis te leggen voor natie-/staatsopbouw in Ethiopië.

## Curriculum Vitae

*Gedu Andargachew Alene*, born on August 16, 1963, in Wollo, now part of the Amhara Region in Ethiopia. He attended the Chet Primary and Junior Secondary School in the region from 1979-1985 and subsequently attended his secondary education at Wogel-Tena Secondary Comprehensive School, from 1987-1989. He holds a BA degree in development administration from Civil Service University, Addis Ababa (1998-2001). He then pursued organizational leadership studies, obtaining an MA degree from Azusa Pacific University, CA, in May 2007. As a long-serving Ethiopian politician, he recently served as the National Security Advisor to the Prime Minister of Ethiopia (Nov. 2020-early 2022). Before this role, he was the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE) from 2019 to the end of 2020. His extensive political career includes significant roles in the Amhara Regional State, the second most populous regional state in Ethiopia: Deputy President from 2008 to 2013, and President from 2014 to early 2019. In these positions, he played a pivotal role in shaping public and socio-economic policies for the region. Beyond his regional responsibilities, Gedu actively participated in the then ruling party's affairs, contributing to the ANDM at the regional level and to the EPRDF coalition at the national level: he held key positions as a central and executive committee member, including serving as the deputy chairman of ANDM. His contributions have left a lasting impact on both state institutions and party affairs. Gedu also served as an elected people's representative in the Amhara Regional Council (1995-2021), a member of the House of Federation (2001-2022), and, most recently, a people's representative in the Ethiopian Parliament. From 2020 to 2023, he conducted doctoral research at the African Studies Centre in Leiden. The focus of his PhD project was on examining the role of political elites in the process of nation-building in contemporary Ethiopia, from 1960 to 2020.