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The Netherlands

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>

Version: Publisher's Version

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Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

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 19th 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 wagged '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.

