STATE-BUILDING IN POST-1991 ETHIOPIA: EPRDF'S PSEUDO FEDERALISM AND REINCARNATING AUTHORITARIAN CENTRALISATION, AN OVERVIEW AND CRITIQUE

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Introduction

EPRDF (Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front), which captured state power in 1991, restructured the state along ethnic federalism to answer the 'nationalities question'. Ethiopia's federalism is designed to share constitutional power with regional states. Ethiopia's federal exercise under EPRDF (1991-2018) resembles pre-1991 centralist regimes, except for unitary and assimilationist policies aimed at nation-building. Hence, EPRDF's state-building through federalism accommodated diversity, except for political participation and decision-making within the regions' jurisdiction. Andreas, one of the architects of Ethiopia's federalism and a legal philosopher, boldly argues that Ethiopian regional units with strong self-rule over their regions checked on the misuse of centralised power and the illegitimate application of government's power (Andreas 2010).

Andreas' assertion was, at best, narrowly interpreting the right and relative freedom of units in comparison to the pre-1991 political order, and

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at worst, legitimising the federal order from the guardian of jurisprudence. Arguably, compared to the pre-1991 order, power was shared between the centre and periphery, albeit theoretically. However, as far as the theory and praxis of federalism are concerned, there have been no such practices that warrant Andreas' assertion and other scholars vying to substantiate the constitutional practice of federalism. This has sparked political and theoretical debates, except among the pro-EPRDF camp.

States, whether they are small or big, homogeneous or heterogeneous, adopt federalism, considering their local context. In Ethiopia, federalism was adopted to save the country from disintegration, which had elements of holding together (Assefa 2013; Andreas 2013). Enfranchising Ethiopian nations and nationalities and rectifying historical injustices justified Ethiopia's federalism (Clapham 2013). Despite this objective of Ethiopia's federalism, the reality was that it strengthened the political centre's control over the periphery, far from answering the nationalities' questions. This has been a breeding ground for discontent, rivalries, and ethnic tensions, which undermined democratic state-building and constitutional order. Amidst scant scholarly works on the cause for the creeping of authoritarian and highly centralised rule in EPRDF's ethnic federalism, since most scholarly works focus on the effects and limitations of ethnic federalism, this paper examines why federalism lost its stated objective of democratic and constitutional empowerment of nations in post-1991 Ethiopia's state-building.

EPRDF argued that society should be conscious, organised, and empowered to decide its future. To this end, EPRDF sought dominant party status to transform Ethiopia, achieve middle-income status, and create a conducive environment for social or liberal democracy. Despite the EPRDF's objectives, no scholarly work has been produced that connects a dominant party, development, and authoritarian rule in Ethiopia's state-building. Furthermore, there had been major discontent between academia and the government since the latter sought the former to focus and highlight the need for a vanguard party for Ethiopia's transformation and development, which the late PM Meles Zenawi (2011) identified as one area where national consensus was required.

This article contends that the EPRDF's transition to a developmental state model, as well as its desire to become a development-oriented dominant party, forced it to adopt authoritarian elements, though Lata (1999) contends that northerners have embedded authoritarian and hierarchical political culture. EPRDF argued that its strong control over both federal and regional governments enabled it to craft uniform development policies across

the country, implying authoritarian re-centralisation of power at the expense of regional states' self-rule and autonomy. Given this, this article raises two interconnected questions: What ideological and pragmatic considerations/factors influenced the EPRDF's state-building in ethnically and culturally polarised post-1991 Ethiopia? Why did the EPRDF's state-building and alleged federalism fail, resulting in authoritarian re-centralisation and a *de facto* one-party system?

This article explores the intricate nature of post-1991 Ethiopia's state-building process through ethnic federalism, which has significantly impacted Ethiopia's socio-economic and political structure. EPRDF's state-building has led to the "territorialization of ethnicity" (Clapham 2017, 73) and an ethnocratic regime and political economy, concentrating power and economic benefits in the dominant ethnic group of a specific region, marginalizing non-titular residents (Kefale 2012; Clapham 2017). Such a political economy has been sensitive and exacerbated ethnic tensions. Still, no redemptive measure is being taken to rectify the problems nor will have solutions soon. Moreover, the EPRDF's state-building efforts were criticized for encouraging rivalries and unequal distribution of political power and resources, as well as subordinating regions to the federal government. Therefore, it is vital to examine the ideological and pragmatic conditions that led to the authoritarian centralisation of power following the overthrow of the repressive *Därgue* regime in 1991, as well as the failure to address the country's fundamental contradictions through federalism, a new approach to state-building. Therefore, the article critically reviews EPRDF's state-building based on this background.

The article is organized in four sections. The first section situates the rationale for post-1991 Ethiopia's ethnic federalism. The second section discusses ideological and pragmatic factors that contributed to the reincarnation of authoritarian rule in the EPRDF's state-building. The third section presents a critical review of EPRDF's state-building. The last section provides a concluding remark.

Literature review

State-building in pre-1991 Ethiopia

Ethiopia has been a multinational and multicultural state since the late nineteenth century. According to Migdal (2004) the term "nation-states" implies people play a significant role in establishing and maintaining the

state. He argues that in multinational states, it was common for members of one sub-group to view others as dangerous, not fellow citizens (Migdal 2004). In pre-1991 Ethiopia's state-building, diversity was denied and considered a predicament. Bereket (2018, 23) argues that *It'yop'yawinät* "Ethiopianism" was made the only identity marker. Pre-1991 Ethiopia's state and nation-building objectives, which focused on winning loyalty and creating a cohesive society through assimilation and centralisation, failed and led to the nationalities question (Markakis 2011; Clapham 2017).

The 1974 Ethiopian revolution ended the 800-year-old "Solomonic Dynasty" due to the nationalities' question and failure to address "Land to the Tiller." The military *Därgue* "committee", which assumed power on the pretext of safeguarding the revolution, turned itself state-builder and adopted socialism. In both imperial and *Därgue* regimes, state-building was synonymous with central control, unitarism, and nation-building. Peripheral peoples had to adopt Amharic and integrate into the mainstream national culture of a single ethnic group (Markakis 2011). However, this ambition lacked the necessary cultural, political, economic, and social institutions (Andreas 2010).

Justifying post-1991 Ethiopia's new State-building: Ethnic federalism

Därgue's downfall in 1991 led to the breakdown of the centralized state machinery that had been in the making since 1889 (Clapham 1994). EPRDF introduced federalism and restructured Ethiopia ethnically. Constitutionally guaranteed federalism is Ethiopia's third state-building model after the imperial model of pre-1974 and Därgue's socialist model from 1975-1991(Markakis 2011). EPRDF presented political and historical evidence for ethnic federalism (Clapham 2013). Ethiopia's federalism aimed at addressing political and structural issues of pre-1991 Ethiopia (Lata 1999). In sharp contrast to post-colonial African states, which made the sanctity of the state sacrosanct and built the newly independent states from above, in post-1991 Ethiopia however, federalism, diversity, multiculturalism, and ethnicity have been recognized as the foundation of state-building from below (Clapham 2017). Hence, balancing ethnic demands with the continuity of the state became the agenda of post-conflict Ethiopia's state-building (Andreas 2010). It was from this pragmatism and historical perspective that ethnic federalism was adopted as a panacea to Ethiopia's basic contradictions and a new approach towards state-building.

Proponents of ethnic federalism argue that the old Ethiopian Empire focused on nation-building centred on the socio-cultural aspects of a single

dominant ethnic group. Ethiopia's attempt at centralisation and assimilationist policies starting from the promulgation of the 1931 constitution resulted in high centre-periphery tension and conflict culminated in the outbreak of the 1974 popular revolution and the seventeen-year civil war for self-rule and self-determination, which proved centralisation and assimilationist policy ultimately unsuccessful (Kefale 2003; Markakis 2011). However, the EPRDF's state-building focused on creating a "new Ethiopia" as a home for diverse nations and respecting their identities with their sovereign right to self-rule. Hence, since 1991 ethnic federalism has been seen as a deconstructive strategy aimed at creating a state of nations rather than nation-building (Nahum 1997; Vaughan 2003).

The july 1991 Peace and Democracy Conference and institutionalization of self-determination

At the London conference on May 27, 1991, EPRDF, EPLF (Eritrean People's Liberation Front), and OLF (Oromo Liberation Front) agreed to hold an inclusive transitional conference (Berhe 2020). Despite the OLF's unsuccessful attempt to persuade EPRDF to hold a referendum on Oromo self-determination, it agreed to participate in the two-year transitional period (Shinn 2009; Berhe 2020).

In the transitional conference, sixteen armed liberation movements participated (Berhe, 2020). Lyons (1996) notes that being ethnically based movement was laid as a condition for participation. Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party (EPRP) and All Ethiopian Socialist Movement (MEISON), multinational and pan-Ethiopianist parties, were excluded from the transitional conference since they refused to renounce armed struggle. Instead, they formed the Coalition of Ethiopian Democratic Forces (COEDF) abroad and organized a conference for a transitional government (Berhe 2020). An agreement with MEISON was unsuccessful due to MEISON's rejection of EPRDF's demand for ethno-nationalities' right to self-determination and secession (Gebru 2014). The introduction of self-determination, including secession, was considered to undermine pan-Ethiopian patriotism and identity (Lata 1999).

The transitional period failed to maintain pluralistic political views between pan-Ethiopianist and ethno-nationalist forces due to political intransigence, short-term gains, and necessity; though, power was already slanted to the latter. Abebe (2014) argues that multinational forces were systematically excluded from the transition process to prevent them from challenging the new *status quo*. MEISON and EPRP, despite their weak organizational and

military capacities, should have participated in the transitional process and interim administration until the people rejected their political agenda (Gebru 2014). Ethno-nationalists' dominance of the transition created discontent among political elites and discredited and delegitimized the Transitional Conference.

The Transitional Conference made self-determination a key point, addressing the root cause of Ethiopia's national contradiction and conflict, marking the end of the war and "peace-building" in post-conflict Ethiopia (Lata 1999). Lata argues that the transitional peace and democracy conference and the charter recognized self-determination as a crucial roadmap for peace and peace-building. Specifically, EPRDF argued that addressing armed liberation movements' demands and ensuring peace in Ethiopia required ensuring their right to self-determination (Bereket 2018). EPRDF argued that it was in this context that Eritreans held a referendum, and the right to self-determination is explicitly included in the Transitional Charter (Art. 2) and the current FDRE (Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia) constitution (Art. 39). The EPRDF regime prioritized peace and democratization as the pillar of the Ethiopian state, aiming to prevent disintegration after the Därgue regime's downfall (Bereket 2018).

The Transitional Conference was a missed opportunity for a consociational approach and democratic state-building. It disregarded this imperative and the fundamental reality by primarily focusing on the 'right of nationalities' or the victors and ignoring pan-Ethiopian nationalism that had been developing (Abebe 2014). EPRDF excluded multinational parties since it believed that the *Därgue's* defeat in the battle validated its strategy of placing the cause of Ethiopian nationalities on the right track of the struggle (Young 1996). This had bolstered and hardened the TPLF (Tigray People's Liberation Front)/EPRDF's stance to repeat its military strategy and discipline in the realm of state-building. Consequently, EPRDF's state-building hindered Ethiopian nations' autonomy and self-rule, resulting in an authoritarian and centralist regime in a different form and structure.

The Transitional Charter and restructuring of the State along ethnicity

The 1991 Transitional Charter marked a significant shift towards democratic constitutional deliberation, involving diverse political forces, civil society, and independent individuals, excluding pan-Ethiopianist and multinational organizations. The political culture of Ethiopia, before this, involved the sovereign issuing laws through awaj or "proclamation". Lata

(1999) contends that the Transitional Charter's four principles: rule of law, coalition government, democratic state restructuring, and just peace, served as an 'earthly principle' to control the government for the very first time in Ethiopia's political history. He also argues that the democratic discussion of the Transitional Charter made the Oromos and southern peoples feel like partners in constructing the "new Ethiopia." Consequently, a coalition government with diverse political views was formed and run, the first of its kind in Ethiopia.

The Transitional Charter reconstructed the Ethiopian state based on the victor powers' political platform. The Charter sought to end hostilities, heal wounds, realize just peace, and establish a democratic system as a "categorical imperative" for "new Ethiopia's" state-building. The Charter in its preamble explicitly stipulated that:

> The overthrow of the military dictatorship...presents a historical moment, providing the peoples of Ethiopia with the opportunity to rebuild the country and restructure the state democratically;... the demise of the military government marks the end of an era of subjugation and oppression thus starting a new chapter in Ethiopian history in which freedom, equal rights, and self-determination shall be the governing principles of political, economic and social life and thereby contributing to the welfare of the Ethiopian Peoples and rescuing them from centuries of subjugation and backwardness (Transitional Period Charter 1991).

The Charter is the first political and legal document that stipulated and affirmed the nationalities' question. The Charter explicitly in its Art. 2 says, "The right of nations, nationalities, and peoples to self-determination is affirmed" (Transitional Period Charter 1991). Furthermore, it stipulated that "each nation, nationality, and people is guaranteed the right to exercise its right to self-determination of independence when the concerned nation/nationality and people are convinced that the above rights are denied, abridged or abrogated" (Transitional Period Charter 1991). (Art.2 (c)). It also provided for the establishment of local and regional governments based on nationality (Art.13) (Transitional Period Charter 1991).

To facilitate Ethiopian nations' and nationalities' right to self-rule and reconfigure the state, a boundary commission delineated administrative borders between regions, which restructured Ethiopia into ethnically defined federal states (Vaughan 2003). The commission used maps and ethnic classifications from the Institute for the Study of Ethiopian Nationalities (ISEN), established in 1984 by the *Därgue* regime. Finally, Proclamation

7/1992 established the new "National Self-Governments" in January 1992 (Vaughan 2003).

Method of data collection and analysis

This article applied a qualitative exploratory methodology to critically review EPRDF's state-building in post-1991 Ethiopia. The rationale of this methodology was to examine what factors contributed to the creeping of authoritarianism and centralisation of power in a *de jure* federalized Ethiopia's second republic. Hence secondary sources or pieces of literature related to the topic were used for empirical data sources and analysis. The data collected for this study were analyzed using techniques of qualitative data analysis. Hence, the data from the secondary and primary sources were studied through thematic and content investigation. The authenticity and validity of the data were verified by cross-checking various sources and documents. This helped to identify the basic themes for analysis and reach a conclusion.

Results and discussions

This part of the article explores and analyzes the intricate factors that contributed to EPRDF's authoritarian state-building and the centralisation of political power at the expense of regional states.

The Oromo Liberation Front's (OLF) withdrawal from the transition

The transitional period was Ethiopia's first democratic opening, and different political forces participated in it (Lata 1999). However, the opposition had left the transitional process to undermine its legitimacy (Assefa 2012). The following section discusses the Oromo Liberation Front's (OLF) withdrawal and its repercussions on the democratization of the country in general and the centralization of power by the EPRDF in particular.

The pulling out of OLF, the second powerful entity, from the regional and local elections and the coalition government in 1992 discredited the Transition. Hence, OLF's withdrawal was one of the challenges of the Transition and it partly contributed to the authoritarian nature of EPRDF since OLF's social base in Oromia was put under EPRDF's OPDO (Oromo People's Democratic Organization).

OLF withdrew from the coalition government and boycotted the 1992 elections due to EPRDF's intimidation (Lata 1999; Shinn 2009). Despite democratic transition systems being established, political divisions among Ethiopian elites led to challenges in prioritizing short-term goals over long-term state development (Berhe 2020). The OLF's withdrawal from the transitional government, due to differing objectives and suspicion vis-à-vis EPRDF, hindered the democratization process of the country. OLF's basic objective has been to realize the Oromo people's right to self-determination[3]. The OLF claimed that the Oromos constitute half of Ethiopia's population[4]. So, it demanded political power that would be commensurate with the Oromo population (Shinn 2009; Clapham 2017). This was a strategic mistake of EPRDF since OLF was popular among the peoples of Oromo and it could be a real partner in the democratization of the country.

OLF too, made a political mistake, fell into EPRDF's political trap, and finally vacated the political arena to the latter. OLF resorted to an armed struggle that challenged the government's stabilization efforts (Berhe 2020), which gave EPRDF a chance to clear the road for dominance. Lyons (2013) argues that consolidating political power rather than power sharing and reconciliation dictates political transitions following rebel triumphs.

The withdrawal of OLF from the Ethiopian government was also rooted in disagreement with the EPRDF over peace, security, and democratization. Clapham (2017) notes that the EPRDF rejected the OLF as the legitimate Oromo representative, preferring the Oromo People's Democratic Organisation (OPDO) to administer Oromo. The OLF's weak organization, incoherent policy, and difficult demands tested the EPRDF's willingness to collaborate with autonomous groups. Moreover, EPRDF and OLF had mutual suspicion and couldn't get along, according to EPRDFs' self-appraisal (Gebru 2014; Clapham 2017; Berhe 2020). Berhe also notes that:

> In many ways, the EPRDF believed that the discipline of its army, its leadership's diligence in leading the nation towards peace and stability, and its progressive agenda for transforming the nation towards development had set a standard against which the other political actions could be measured. The EPRDF, for example, believed the OLF during the transition period could show the people of Oromia what it could do. In a short period, the OLF assembled over 30,000 armed personnel mainly from the defunct army of the [*Därgue*, which] the people knew for its brutality (Berhe 2020, 180).

3 OLF's political programme (2012) emphasises self-determination for the Oromo people and others in Ethiopia as the key criterion for collaboration with other political parties.

4 Based on the 2007 population census, Oromo constituted 36.7% of Ethiopia's population.

According to Lata (1999), despite the democratic credentials of the Peace and Democracy Conference and the formation of the TGE, the EPRDF ultimately restored one-party *Därgue* rule instead of the envisioned pluralistic order. The OLF's withdrawal was a setback for Ethiopia's democratization and the establishment of genuine power-sharing mechanisms. OLF's departure in 1992 led to the EPRDF's dominance and undermined the constitutional empowerment of Ethiopian nations and nationalities. Subsequently, the EPRDF-led government suffered legitimacy losses, which it tried to compensate for by bringing peace, stability, and development internally, and collaborating in the fight against terrorism externally.

In transitional societies and politics, the role of the opposition parties is enormous. The absence of a strong opposition implies the absence of governmental accountability and checks and balances within different benches of government. Generally, the Ethiopian opposition parties because of different factors failed to participate in the transitional process, which in this aspect contributed to the authoritarian re-centralisation of power.

Revolutionary democracy: The Ethiopian version of democracy

The EPRDF (1991-2018) adopted revolutionary democracy as Ethiopia's version of democratic revolution. Meles Zenawi, chairman of TPLF, EPRDF, and Ethiopia's PM (1991-2012), authored Ethiopia's revolutionary democracy, which was adopted as the foundation of EPRDF's state-building efforts in post-1991 Ethiopia. According to Meles, revolutionary democracy was the appropriate doctrine should Ethiopia embark on sustainable economic development (Berhe 2020). Lenin's opposition to capitalist ideology resulted in the concept of revolutionary democracy, which served as a link between pre-capitalist and socialist societies. Many countries adopted it during the Cold War but then abandoned it (Bach 2011). Bereket Simon, the second ideologue of revolutionary democracy after Meles, argues that revolutionary democracy in Ethiopia uprooted the ruling classes' oppression, paving the way for democracy and peoples' rights (Bereket 2018).

EPRDF's revolutionary democracy faced internal and external challenges. Externally, EPRDF faced the challenge of reconciling revolutionary democracy with the prevailing neoliberalism (Berhe 2020). EPRDF had pragmatically renounced its Marxist-Leninist ideology[5] and accepted liberal economic and political reforms and principles to lessen pressure from Wes-

5 Bereket Simon (2018) provides details on the EPRDF's pragmatic shift from socialism to a market system benefiting Ethiopians (Bereket Simon 2018, 33-42).

tern powers (Bach 201; Gebru 2014; Berhe 2020). The EPRDF utilized its hybrid democracy and structure, specifically designed for military conflict, to establish a government without fundamentally altering its revolutionary democratic beliefs (Gebru 2014). During the transitional period, liberal institutions were appropriated by EPRDF to support its revolutionary democracy, which was "neither revolutionary nor democratic" (Bach 2011, 643, 653). Accordingly, liberal democracy secured external support and legitimacy, while revolutionary democracy remained the core ideology of EPRDF (Abbink 2011).

Internally, given the EPRDF's strong adherence to Marxism-Leninism and the pressure exerted by its armed fighters, it demonstrated a commitment to socialism. The EPRDF implemented revolutionary democracy due to these circumstances. This helped to convey to the West that the EPRDF abandoned socialism and practices Western-style democracy, despite revolutionary terminology (Henze 1990; Gebru 2014). Accordingly, when the EPRDF took power, revolutionary democracy became the guiding paradigm of state-building, but liberal democratic values were integrated into the Transitional Charter, though contrasted with each other.

EPRDF adopted revolutionary democracy despite Ethiopians' desire for Western-style liberal democracy. Some argue that the EPRDF adopted revolutionary democracy due to its Marxist influence, while others assert it was borrowed from Albanian democracy, favoured by Meles, and wanted to replicate its authentic socialist philosophy, as opposed to Soviet imperialism and Chinese "national bourgeoisie" (Henze 1990; Berhe 2009). However, Meles Zanawi's discussion with Samuel Huntington, who was in Ethiopia in 1993 to assist the Ethiopian Constitutional Commission, may have influenced and theoretically advised the EPRDF's insistence on revolutionary democracy, which it believes best suits Ethiopia's socioeconomic realities. In a discussion with Huntington (1993), Meles asked:

> Professor Huntington, I have read your book The Third Wave. According to your analysis, countries become democratic after they have become wealthy. Ethiopia is an extremely poor country, very far from having a high level of economic development. Does that mean that democracy is impossible in [Ethiopia]? (Huntington 1993, 2).

Huntington's response was the overall balance of economic, social, and other conditions in Ethiopia was not favourable to democratization. 'Does this mean that democracy of any sort is impossible?' Not necessarily. So, he advised Meles:

> Conceivably, [...] other types of democratic systems could be created in Ethiopia. Whether it is or not depends overwhelmingly on the extent to which political leaders want to create an Ethiopian democracy. Political regimes are created not by preconditions but by political leaders (Huntington 1993, 3).

Huntington's suggestion made EPRDF firmly embrace revolutionary democracy, deeming it more suitable for Ethiopian conditions than liberal democracy. Tronvol (2009) supports this and argues that "liberal democracy is a misfit" given Ethiopia's social, economic, and political circumstances.

Patriarchal traditions in Ethiopia may influence the adoption of revolutionary democracy. The ruling party, which was all-knowing, must guide its social base, rural society, in what is best for it. Former PM Hailemariam Desalegn once said that "due to poor education and illiteracy, the Ethiopian public is too underdeveloped to make a well-reasoned, informed decision, and so revolutionary democracy is the political bridge through which the 'enlightened leaders' can lead the people to democracy (Global Security 2018).

Difference between revolutionary democracy and liberal democracy

In *Sovereignty and Democracy in Ethiopia*, Gebru Asrat (2014) contrasts revolutionary and liberal democracy. Revolutionary democracy is class-based, segregates citizens into allies and adversaries, denies oppressors' rights, and advocates vanguard party control. In contrast, liberal democracy prioritizes individual interests, equality for all citizens, and the leadership of competent and qualified citizens in political, economic, and social activities (Gebru 2014).

There are two key differences between liberal and revolutionary democracy: liberal democracy prioritizes individual rights, while revolutionary democracy focuses on the advancement and protection of collective rights. Revolutionary democracy rejects representative and parliamentary systems of administration in favour of real people-power (Bach 2011). Berhe, citing Meles, argues that liberal democracy is based on zero-sum politics and electoral short-termism, transforming political parties into patronage machines while failing to address society's core concerns (Zenawi 2006 *apud* Berhe 2020). Revolutionary democracy, on the other hand, prioritizes the disenfranchised majority's political rights over the wealthy elite's interests (EPRDF 2001 *apud* Berhe 2020).

In the words of Vaughan (2011), revolutionary democracy calls for a direct "coalition with the public"[6] as opposed to the covert "coalitions" between politicians that multi-party pluralism is characterized by. This is the reason why EPRDF negates parliamentary democracy since it does not represent and empower the people. So, EPRDF created a coalition of forces among the state, the party, and the grassroots people as a "developmental army" (Berhe 2020, 231). Finally, EPRDF's policy divided citizens into friends and enemies, as capitalists, bureaucrats, chauvinists, narrow thinkers, anti--people, anti-development, anti-peace, and other appellations and labelling were used to deny citizens' basic rights, such as political power through contested elections in urban areas and land or other services in rural areas (Gebru 2014).

Dominant/vanguard party

Another distinguishing feature of EPRDF's state-building, perhaps resulting from revolutionary democracy, is its rejection of political pluralism and multi-party systems in favour of the vanguard party model. Bach (2011) asserts that revolutionary democracy was utilized as a "discursive instrument" to exclude and marginalize political opponents. According to Abbink (2011), the Vanguard party is a direct result of revolutionary Marxist-Leninist doctrine and opposes the concept of transferring power through elections, even if elections have been held. Elections in post-conflict states like Ethiopia serve as part of legitimizing the process (Bach 2011) and bolstering authoritarian governments rather than state-building through liberalization (Lyons 2013). Without the threat of electoral defeat, dominant parties may feel they "own" the political system and strive to constrain other centres of power. Political criticism is often viewed as "irresponsible and divisive" (Handley, Murray and Simeon 2008).

Ethiopia has held elections since 1992, although they have not followed Western norms. According to Zakaria, Ethiopian democracy is one of the "illiberal democracies" (1997, 23), since the "popularly elected" government committed a series of constitutional breaches and violations of fundamental rights and liberties. As a result, critics claim that EPRDF's revolutionary democracy is undemocratic and dismissive of alternative viewpoints. Clapham (2017) notes that Ethiopians must accept the regime's hegemony to participate in government. This state-building strategy angered urban

6 Sara Vaughun interviewed Meles in 1994 and he said that "in agricultural areas, we do not make coalitions with elites: the only coalition we want to make is with the people" (Vaughun 2011, 622).

intellectuals, political parties, and groups that embraced democratic ideals and expected the EPRDF to be more democratic than previous regimes.

The EPRDF's refusal to commit to parliamentary democracy or Western-style liberal democracy is understandable, as Hopkinson (2017) argues that "multi-party elections do not guarantee democracy afterward". He argues that "society requires a continuous voice to ensure government accountability" (Hopkinson 2017, 45). Thus, taking genuine societal interests as a measure of democracy, rather than frequent administration changes through multiparty or parliamentary democracy, makes it logical why EPRDF insisted on being Ethiopia's vanguard party.

Ethnic federalism

The federal formula in post-1991 Ethiopia's state-building approach was necessary to prevent the disintegration of the highly centralized Ethiopian empire (Assefa 2012). The introduction of ethnic federalism has effectively resolved the country's identity-based armed conflicts, which were threatening its territorial integrity (Berhe and Gebresilassie 2021). The federal state-building dispensation has granted previously marginalized groups and minorities unprecedented political and institutional recognition (Andreas 2010). Pan-Ethiopianism forces however argued that ethnic-based federalism could encourage ethno-nationalists to separate from the Ethiopian state.

EPRDF claimed to restructure Ethiopia to address structural and historical causes of conflict and meet ethno-nationalities' quest for self-rule and self-determination. However pan-Ethiopianist forces and unionist organisations have been questioning the true motive of the federal initiative. Temesgen (2015) asserts that the EPRDF utilized ethnic federalism as part of its "divide and rule" policy to maintain power and institutionalize minority dominance. However, Kefale (2003) contends that the EPRDF leadership cannot use Ethiopia's federal experience to maintain power. However, with the twin goals of establishing a democratic political system and a fully decentralized federal administration, expecting these in a country lacking such experience is problematic.

Opponents of ethnic federalism have been arguing that the government's suppression of unity over diversity increases the risk of interethnic violence and national disintegration (Mennasemay 2003; Selassie 2003; Temesgen 2015). However, given the alignment of ethno-nationalist forces, ethnic-based politics was inevitable during the transitional period. Fesesha (2010) contends that any constitution that deviates from the trajectories of

past mistakes should recognize ethnicity. Ethiopian ethnic federalism has the potential to solve Ethiopia's political crisis (Nahum 1997). Hence, ethnic federalism was the only way to ensure Ethiopia's stability and continuity (Fiseha 2012).

Andreas boldly claimed back in 2010 that Ethiopian federalism has addressed two fundamental goals, without which it is difficult to pursue other public goods[7]. These are "Ethiopia's survival and the establishment of legitimate political authority" (Andreas 2010, 43). He further claimed that because of federalism, nations, nationalities, and peoples are convinced that instead of rejecting Ethiopia, they should collaborate to create an authentic system of government for harmonious relations and unity.

Ethiopia's ethnic federalism, despite fear from unionist and pan-Ethiopianist forces, ensured the continuation of the Ethiopian state. The EPRDF's centrist nature allowed this, though component units' *de jure* rights to self-determination up to secession are guaranteed (See Art. 39). However, the regime exercised *de facto* and unconstitutional power by controlling both the federal government and regional states, compromising regional states' constitutional prerogatives. Consequently, the centralist and authoritarian rule of the EPRDF allowed for the unity and territorial integrity of the Ethiopian state despite the condition of secession. The promising economic growth registered through EPRDF's leadership could also be seen as a factor in making unity attractive along with ethnic federalism, despite opposition.

Asafa Jalata, an Oromo nationalist who subscribes to the colonial thesis, opposes the benefits of federalism in the survival of the country and argues that Ethiopian federalism is a continuation of Abyssinian (northerners) colonial efforts against southern Ethiopians under the guise of "promoting democracy, federalism, and national self-determination" (Jalata 2009, 207). He believes that federal discourse is irrelevant to the emancipation of Ethiopian nations and nationalities from northerners' colonialism and state terrorism and that the benefits of federalism in the survival of the country are not significant.

The developmental State model

Ethiopia attempted the "developmental state" from 2001-2018. A developmental state has been needed to address poverty in Ethiopia since 2001 (Gebresenbet 2014). In EPRDF-led Ethiopia, development was secu-

7 These include: democratic values and practices, culture of peace, the rule of law, secularism, a free press, competitive political parties, and free associations (Andreas 2010, 43).

ritized and failure to develop Ethiopia would be an existential threat to the Ethiopian state and the equal rights of Ethiopia's nations and nationalities (Fana 2015). EPRDF, unlike its predecessors, identified poverty as the sole enemy of Ethiopia, and tackling it should be one area of national consensus to be reached, and rapid economic development centred on the benefits of the people should be the pillar of Ethiopia's national security policy and strategy (FDRE 2002; Zenawi 2011). Meles believed that lasting peace or the likelihood of a sustainable political community is unlikely unless rapid development and breakdown with starvation and enduring poverty is made (Andreas 2013).

The EPRDF regime recognized the pitfalls of the neoliberal development model, highlighting market failures and poverty traps in developing countries, prompting concerted political action (Zenawi 2011) than transforming Ethiopia into development through the minimalist and "night watchman" role of the state. Meles argued that the active role of government should be focused on enhancing the economy's capacity for value creation and assisting the private sector in becoming more competitive (Berhe 2020).

The remarkable development achievement in East Asia-principally in Japan, Korea, and Taiwan — and the major role of the state in these countries have facilitated the emergence of the developmental state (Zenawi 2011). The features of the East Asian developmental state i.e. rapid economic growth, the high degree of state intervention in the economy, and the state's focus on industrialization somehow characterize the Ethiopian developmental state (Hauge and Chang 2019).

The developmental state is a political economy that encompasses anti-neoliberal economic models. A developmental State is characterized by a highly interventionist approach, distinct from neoliberalism or *laissez-faire* political economic principles. Simply in the developmental state, it is the state that manages the market and plays a developmental role (Zenawi 2011). The state's primary objective is economic growth through industrialization (Hauge and Chang 2019). The developmental state has four basic attributes. These are (1) capable, autonomous (but embedded) bureaucracy; (2) development-oriented political leadership; (3) symbiotic relationship between some state agencies and key industrial capitalists; and (4) successful policy intervention that promotes growth (Routley 2012).

Legitimacy, a crucial concept in developmental states, is primarily secured through economic growth and development, rather than through popular elections. According to Mkandawire (2001, 289), a "developmental state has two components: one ideological and the other structural." The ideological dimension refers to the mission of the state which brings sustai-

nable development, which helps win legitimacy. The structural one refers to the national capacity to execute national economic policies effectively, which is conditioned by institutional, technical, administrative, and political factors. The concept of legitimacy through development has not prevented the developmental state from escalating into authoritarianism (Hauge and Chang 2019).

However, Johnson (1999) argues that the legitimacy of developmental states should not be explicated by the state-society relation of the Western countries. EPRDF argued that Ethiopia's diverse society is not conducive to authoritarian rule, as it has adopted all features of the developmental state but its authoritarian nature. It argued that Ethiopia cannot afford to become undemocratic and authoritarian like Asian societies that are more or less homogeneous (Bereket 2018). EPRDF claims Ethiopia cannot afford authoritarian rule but has imposed it, violating federalism and self-rule. The developmental state promotes a pro-dominant party system, requiring a single party to hold power for extended periods of time in order to achieve economic development and sectoral transformation. In this regard, Zenawi (2006) argued that in a democratic system, there is always some degree of uncertainty about policy continuity. More harmful to development, politicians will be unable to think beyond the next election. As a result, it is argued that the developmental state must be undemocratic to retain power long enough to achieve successful development (Zenawi 2006). The EPRDF's ambition for economic development and transformation drove it to maintain power through repeated elections, resulting in the erosion of democracy and the consolidation of authoritarian rule.

Politicized bureaucracy

The developmental state requires strong state institutions and a competent bureaucracy headed by autonomous civil servants to guide the private sector toward economic growth (Hauge and Chang 2019). Peter Evans calls this "embedded autonomy" that implies that the bureaucracy to be called "developmental had to be effectively 'embedded' in society through a concrete set of connections that link the state intimately and aggressively to particular social groups with whom the state shares a joint project of transformation" (Evans 1995).

EPRDF's revolutionary democracy-based state-building model is challenging to classify as developmental due to its use of party members and cadres for State bureaucracy rather than merit-based appointment. Oqubay (2015) argues that the bureaucracy inherited from *Därgu's* authoritarian rule

was politically hostile to the new EPRDF-led government, necessitating its rebuilding with political indoctrination and professional competencies. He also argues that the EPRDF's power, organizational structure, and leadership had to be used to address bureaucratic shortcomings. However, it has been observed that EPRDF's revolutionary democracy was discriminatory and alienated highly educated people from the bureaucracy, while the educated elites were also ethnically aligned and politically antagonistic to the regime, cementing the authoritarian tendency of the regime.

The alienation of educated elites was in direct opposition to the principle of participatory governance, the developmental state, one of whose distinguishing features is the need for broad support for its development agenda, and the EPRDF's insistence on fighting poverty through development, which, according to Zenawi (2011), requires widespread support and national consensus. Furthermore, the mechanism of "criticism and self-criticism," wherein the lower, middle, and upper leadership, including civil servants, had to pass through a series of evaluation procedures based on party lines and platforms (Vaughan 2003), was a contributing factor in alienating the bureaucracy.

The 1-5 household arrangement

EPRDF's authoritarian nature was reflected in the 1-5 household or neighbourhood arrangement, which the regime dubbed "a development army". This politico-social arrangement facilitated communal economic activities. But, in addition to its economic and development aspects, the political one is significant because the regime used its lower administrative tiers to spy on and control the EPRDF's rural social base. The arrangement was used for political indoctrination, strengthening grassroots structures, and implementing development policies. Kefale (2003) notes that the lowest tiers of Ethiopia's administrative structures, *Wäräda* and *Käbäle*, were pivotal in executing policies and raising the political consciousness and control of the people.

Ethiopia's political culture

EPRDF is the result of the Ethiopian Students' Movement (ESM) and the radical revolutionary elites who still believe in zero-sum politics, which resulted in many casualties and losses for the state just because of tactical differences, not ideological ones. Particularly, the long-held political culture of northerners is accustomed to authoritarian and hierarchical rule (Lata 1999), which the EPRDF cannot eschew. The EPRDF leadership was hierarchical,

rigid, and procedural, limiting democratic freedom for its members. Even its leadership had to follow democratic centralism and wait for directions for political, social, and economic decisions. It can be argued that democratic deliberation only worked for the top EPRDF's politburo members, who used to take long days to deliberate on national issues and come to decisions either through consensus or majority decision.

The fight against terrorism

After 9/11, the EPRDF regime presented itself as a trusted and viable partner in the fight against global terrorism and combating jihadist forces in the Horn of Africa. This convinced the US government not to pressurize the Meles-led EPRDF regime to undertake political reforms and widen the democratic environment. Therefore, a blend of internal and external factors contributed to the creeping of authoritarian rule in 27 years of EPRDF rule.

Critique of EPRDF's State-building

EPRDF's State-building can be criticized from political, social, and economic aspects. Politically, contrary to what Andreas (2010) claimed, Ethiopia's federal experience under the EPRDF's State-building did not cultivate political pluralism as it succeeded in cultural aspects. It has caused massive political inequality and instability. Ethiopia's federalism neither succeeded in the creation of one political community, as stipulated in the preamble of the FDRE Constitution, nor achieved national cohesion, solidarity, freedom, and equality with the constituent units, let alone amongst Ethiopians, except for the upper echelon of the ruling elites who were tied up to the party through the party's democratic centralism and consensus-making on political issues.

EPRDF's federalism-based state-building has been criticized for its lack of democratization and empowerment of the periphery, as it has established a strong authoritarian bureaucracy and state structure under the guise of federalism. Moreover, EPRDF's federal state-building, based on ethnic federalism, is criticized for deviating from its founding principles.

EPRDF's state-building through ethnic federalism and the principle of self-determination has had far-reaching consequences. Ethnic federalism and self-determination have led to a rise in "we" and "they" politics among ethnic groups and the general population. Abebe (2014) notes elites' social, economic, and political interactions become more ethnically aware, resulting

in stronger prejudice and bias. Inter-ethnic hostility and distrust are visible even at grassroots levels, as decades of social capital and inter-communal peace have collapsed. Ethnic entrepreneurs can exploit this by exploiting ethnicity's instrumentalist values for perceived economic and political purposes.

The perceived economic and political disparities in the country due to the ethnocratic nature of the country's federal experience continue the vicious circle of conflict in Ethiopia that creates social inequality, regional disparity, and a step backward in the transformation of Ethiopia, complementing the existing socio-economic crisis and complicating efforts of reconciliation and peace-building. As a result, the prevalence of social and economic inequality downsizes public participation in social, economic, and political realms and creates a conducive environment for authoritarian rule. According to Pelke (2020), authoritarian governments do not worry about economic inequality as a reason for anti-regime mobilization.

Socially, the very federalism intended to promote unity and diversity has instead fuelled ethnic tensions, rivalries and intensified social cleavages, fostering animosity and disunity among Ethiopians. In the economic arena, the economic progress was promising and registered some double digits. However, genuine development and transformation have become secondary since the system created ethnocratic elites, who benefited from patronage systems and were primary beneficiaries, though quite a few of them were labelled as "rent collectors," and even some of them penetrated deep into the state, achieved state capture, and contributed to the 2018 political reforms. EPRDF's federal experience deviated from theory and praxis and created a strong authoritarian centralized polity, which in the end swallowed the very party that created the system.

Finally, in EPRDF's state-building, what was practised was the reversal of the principles EPRDF claimed to stand for and that of the Transitional Charter and the FDRE constitution's preamble, Art. 8 (sovereignty of the people); Art. 9 (supremacy of the constitution); Art. 10 (human and democratic rights); Art. 25 (right to equality); Art. 39 (rights of nations, nationalities, and peoples); Art. 52 (powers and functions of states); all these had been explicitly and implicitly violated, slanting power to the centre, otherwise made weak by the constitution. It can be argued that EPRDF's practices set a precedent for successors to evade constitutional federalism, perpetuating repression and further centralisation at the expense of regional States.

Conclusion

Since 1991, Ethiopia has undergone significant political restructuring under EPRDF, leading to ethnic federalization. This was aimed at addressing the "nationalities' question" mitigating centre-periphery conflict and enfranchising Ethiopian nations and nationalities' quest for recognition and self-rule. Unlike the previous unitarist regimes, EPRDF also introduced the Ethiopian nations' right to self-determination including secession, arguing that Ethiopia should be built voluntarily rather than through coercion. Proponents of the new state-building dispensation argue that without the 1991 Transitional Charter and multinational federalism, the story of post-1991 Ethiopia would have been different.

The Transitional Conference in Ethiopia was the first democratic opening in the country's political history, though it was dominated by the victors of the armed struggle, the EPRDF and OLF. It also produced the Transitional Charter, empowering Ethiopian nations and nationalities' rights to autonomy and self-rule. It was argued that despite this provision and political empowerment, the EPRDF, which claimed to be champion of the nationalities' cause and federalism, turned to authoritarian centralisation, undermining the principle and praxis of federalism. Many factors contributed to the EPRDF's authoritarian centralisation of power. The OLF's withdrawal, which represented the second largest constituency, not only harmed the transitional government and the democratization process of post-conflict Ethiopia but also contributed to EPRDF's authoritarian rule. Ethiopia could have experienced true power-sharing and consociational democracy had the OLF not withdrawn.

EPRDF-led Ethiopia's state-building has implemented policy frameworks such as self-determination, ethnic federalism, revolutionary democracy, and the developmental state since 2001. Despite internal and external challenges and criticisms, the EPRDF aimed to create a strong and united Ethiopia where the aspirations of Ethiopian nations and nationalities would be realized, building a democratic and federated Ethiopia. To this end, EPRDF assumed itself to be the vanguard party of the country by winning elections repeatedly. It argued that to bring rural transformation, industrialization, and a middle-class urban society, it would be imperative for the EPRDF to win elections so that it can execute development policies uninterrupted. Furthermore, it argued that its revolutionary democracy and developmental line lay the future social base for social or liberal democracy. However, the EPRDF has been criticized for its ambitious plan to achieve economic transformation

through a dominant party, which has made Ethiopia a *de facto* one-party state, limiting the participation of other parties in the country's politics.

EPRDF's discourse on revolutionary democracy and developmental state prioritized peace and development, but the regime had subordinated democracy and built an authoritarian order. This has led to dissenting voices and forced citizens to seek alternative means of change. For example, the Oromo youths, *Qerro*, have challenged the regime unconstitutionally since 2016, forcing political reforms in 2018. The Oro-Mara coalition (a tactical alliance between Oromo and Amhara elites within the EPRDF's coalition) halted TPLF/EPRDF's 27-year dominance, shifting political power and state-building discourse to the south.

Finally, the Ethiopian people's demand for radical change caused the 1974 Ethiopian Revolution. The Därgue, which hijacked the revolution, adopted the "Land to the Tiller," Ethiopian Students' slogan, and issued a land proclamation, allowing Ethiopia's tenants to own land, except their produce. In 1991, the EPRDF's armed struggle successfully overthrew the dictatorial *Därgue* regime, providing another opportunity for people's political empowerment. EPRDF committed itself to addressing the remaining issues facing Ethiopian peoples, including democracy, self-rule, and political empowerment. However, EPRDF again hijacked the people's struggle and reincarnated authoritarian centralisation by introducing pseudo-democracy and federalism. The question is where does the state go amidst ongoing political turmoil? Is it democracy or anocracy of another round and in different forms?

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ABSTRACT

This article deals with post-1991 Ethiopia's state-building crafted by the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), a guerrilla movement turned state-builder. EPRDF captured state power in 1991, introduced federalism, and restructured the state along ethnic lines to answer the nationalities' questions. Ethiopia designed federalism to share constitutional power with regional states, albeit theoretically. A critical review of Ethiopia's federal exercise showed that EPRDF did not share power with component units per federalism's praxis. Rather, it reincarnated authoritarian power centralisation under the guise of federalism. A regime that claimed to be a champion of addressing oppressed nations' quest for recognition, self-rule, and autonomy ended up being authoritarian and characterized as one of the most highly centralized governments the country has ever seen. A qualitative exploratory approach was employed to examine what factors contributed to the creeping of authoritarianism and power re-centralisation in a de jure federalized Ethiopia's second republic. The findings indicated that EPRDF implemented a combination of ideologically-oriented cum pragmatic policies to build Ethiopia. Accordingly, revolutionary democracy, dominant party, ethnic federalism, developmental state model,

politicized bureaucracy, 1-5 household arrangement, Ethiopia's political culture, the opposition's withdrawal, the fight against terrorism, and EPRDF's determination to repeat wartime strategies and disciplines to state-building contributed to authoritarian reincarnation and power re-centralisation.

KEYWORDS

Authoritarian re-centralisation. Consociational democracy. Democratic centralism. Developmental State. Ethiopia. Revolutionary democracy.

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