

AFRICAN
STUDIES

ETHIOPIA'S 'DEVELOPMENTAL STATE'

Political Order and Distributive Crisis

TOM LAVERS



Ethiopia's 'Developmental State'

Ethiopia stands out as a leading example of state-led development in Africa. Tom Lavers offers in this book a comprehensive, multi-sector analysis of Ethiopia's development project, examining how regimes maintain power during the extended periods required to bring about economic transformation. Specifically, Lavers explores how the Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF, 1991–2019) sought to maintain political order through economic transformation, and why the party collapsed, leading to the outbreak of civil war in 2020. The book argues that the EPRDF sought to secure mass acquiescence through distribution of land and employment. However, rapid population growth and the limits of industrial policy in the contemporary global economy led to a distributive crisis that was a central factor in the regime's collapse. This Ethiopian experience raises important questions about the prospects for economic transformation elsewhere on the continent. This text is also available as Open Access on Cambridge Core at doi.org/9781009428316.

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Political Order and Distributive Crisis

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In the hope that Ethiopia can find its way beyond the tragic war that has destroyed so many lives in Tigray and elsewhere and move towards peace and development

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After leaving Ethiopia in 2006, I joined the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD). Like many others working at UNRISD at that time, the two years I spent there was a formative moment in my thinking that has greatly informed my subsequent research on the state, late development and distribution. Particularly influential was the then director, Thandika Mkandawire, as well as inspiring colleagues including Shea McClanahan, Eleanor Hutchinson, Yusuf Bangura, Katja Hujo and Peter Utting. I left UNRISD to study for my PhD at the University of Bath, intent on bringing the ideas I had

been exposed to at UNRISD to understand the political and economic changes underway in Ethiopia. This book is certainly not a standard conversion of a PhD thesis. It would perhaps be better described as a second – hopefully improved – attempt at answering a broadly similar set of questions to the original thesis. My PhD was funded by an ESRC studentship, with additional support from the Land Deal Politics Initiative (LDPI). I am very grateful to my supervisors at Bath, Joe Devine, Graham Brown, Peter Davis and Guy Standing, the research assistants who supported fieldwork, Tolossa Mamuye, Amdissa Darge and Meressa Tsehaye, the Political Science Department at Addis Ababa University for hosting me and Tigest Grieve for putting a roof over my head while in Addis. Jun Borrás and Ruth Hall from LDPI also provided very useful comments on early papers.

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Abbreviations

ACLED	Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project
ACSI	Amhara Credit and Savings Institution
ADLI	Agricultural Development-Led Industrialisation
AGOA	African Growth and Opportunity Act
AILAA	Agricultural Investment Land Administration Agency
AISD	Agricultural Investment Support Directorate
ANDM	Amhara National Democratic Movement
ATA	Agricultural Transformation Agency
CCI	Complementary Community Investments
CSA	Central Statistical Agency
CUD	Coalition for Unity and Democracy
DBE	Development Bank of Ethiopia
DECSI	Dedebit Credit and Savings Institution
EFFORT	Endowment Fund For the Rehabilitation of Tigray
EIZ	Eastern Industrial Zone
ELF	Eritrean Liberation Front
EPDM	Ethiopian Peoples' Democratic Movement
EPLF	Eritrean People's Liberation Front
EPRDF	Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front
EPRP	Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party
ESDA	Ethiopian Sugar Development Agency
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
FDRE	Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia
GERD	Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GTP	Growth and Transformation Plan
HABP	Household Asset Building Programme
HRW	Human Rights Watch
IFI	International Finance Institution
IHDP	Integrated Housing Development Programme
IMF	International Monetary Fund

MEISON	All Ethiopia Socialist Movement
MetEC	Metals and Engineering Corporation
MFI	Microfinance Institution
MIDROC	Mohammed International Development Research and Organization Companies
MoARD	Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development
MoFED	Ministry of Finance and Economic Development
MoLSA	Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs
MSE	Micro and Small Enterprise
NAEIP	National Agricultural Extension Intervention Program
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NRM	National Resistance Movement
OCSI	Oromiya Credit and Savings Institution. Also known by the Afaan Oromo acronym WALQO
OFC	Oromo Federalist Congress
OLF	Oromo Liberation Front
ONLF	Ogaden National Liberation Front
OPDO	Oromo People's Democratic Organisation
ORDA	Organisation for the Rehabilitation and Development of Amhara
PASDEP	Plan for Accelerated and Sustained Development to End Poverty
PBS	Protection of Basic Services
PSNP	Productive Safety Net Programme
PVH	Phillips-Van Heusen
REST	Relief Society of Tigray
RPF	Rwandan Patriotic Front
SEPDM	Southern Ethiopian Peoples' Democratic Movement
SNNPR	Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Region
TGE	Transitional Government of Ethiopia
TPLF	Tigrayan People's Liberation Front
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
UMNO	United Malays National Organisation
UPSNP	Urban Productive Safety Net Programme
US	United States
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
WFP	World Food Programme

1 Ethiopia and the Challenge of Late-Late Development

The challenge of structural transformation and the importance of the state to development have returned to centre stage. After several decades in which state intervention in the economy was widely dismissed in favour of market liberalisation, good governance and poverty reduction, the last decade or more has seen renewed interest in the state's role in development and the importance of industrial policy from both academics and policy actors.¹ This renewed attention has particularly focused on Africa, where to date, countries have made the least progress towards the structural transformation of their economies and many face growing problems of youth unemployment. A prominent theme in these debates concerns the challenges of 'late-late development' and how the contemporary global economy shapes opportunities for structural transformation. For many observers, the restructuring of the economy into global value chains and the liberalisation of trade and investment flows since the 1980s mean that the challenge of state-led development has become progressively harder (Kaplinsky 2013, Gereffi 2018).

An important thread of past and recent work on state-led development underscores that the challenge of structural transformation is as much a political as a technical one (Evans 1995, Kohli 2004, Doner et al. 2005, Doner 2009, Vu 2010, Whitfield et al. 2015, Whitfield 2018).² Effective industrial policy requires, amongst other things, a cohesive ruling elite focused on long-term economic transformation rather than short-run political pressures, state capacity to monitor and discipline firms

¹ For example, Mkandawire (2001), UNRISD (2010), UNCTAD (2011), Esteban et al. (2013), Lin Yifu (2013), Whitfield et al. (2015) and Haggard (2018).

² The term state-led development – rather than the common term 'developmental state' – is used here for two reasons. First, the concept of a developmental state is problematic in that it defines a particular state in terms of the outcomes it achieves rather than features of the state itself, despite the fact that exogenous events, such as the global economy, affect whether state efforts translate into developmental performance (Mkandawire 2001). Second, to avoid confusion, 'developmental state' is reserved for the particular strategy and ideology employed by the Ethiopian government from the mid-2000s onwards, as discussed in Chapter 4.

to promote productivity increases, and the power to suppress popular pressures for consumption in favour of investment. While, on average, authoritarian regimes do not achieve better economic performance than democratic ones (Przeworski et al. 2000), the most successful examples of state-led development since the Second World War have nonetheless taken place under particular forms of authoritarian rule in East Asia. More precisely, the most successful examples of rapid state-led development, from Singapore, South Korea and Taiwan to China, Malaysia and Vietnam, have taken place when authoritarian leaders perceive national development and the expansion of economic opportunity to be essential for their political survival (Haggard 1990, Campos and Root 2001, Doner et al. 2005). In such circumstances, ruling elites set aside divisions and instead focus on building high-capacity states that promote structural transformation and economic development.³

In contrast to the image of strong and capable states driving structural transformation across East Asia, the literature on African politics is almost unremittingly pessimistic about the prospects for effective state intervention.⁴ From this perspective, African states lack control of their own territory, let alone the capacity and expertise required for sophisticated industrial policy (Herbst 2000, van de Walle 2001). Regardless of formal state institutions, ruling elites in so-called ‘neo-patrimonial’ African states are motivated solely by enhancing their own power, leading them to plunder the state for self-enrichment and to finance their patronage networks rather than providing incentives to firms to invest in increased productivity (Bayart 1993, Evans 1995, Kohli 2004). As such, renewed interest in state-led development in Africa, on the one hand, and the ‘impossibility theses’ presented by the literature on African politics (Mkandawire 2001), on the other, raise vitally important questions. Is there any possibility that authoritarian regimes in Africa might pursue state-led development as a means of securing their own political survival along similar lines to those in East Asia? Or are African states uniquely beholden to ‘neo-patrimonialism’, thereby eliminating any possibility of effective state intervention? Moreover, how does the context of ‘late-late development’ alter prospects for state-led development and the political processes required to bring it about?

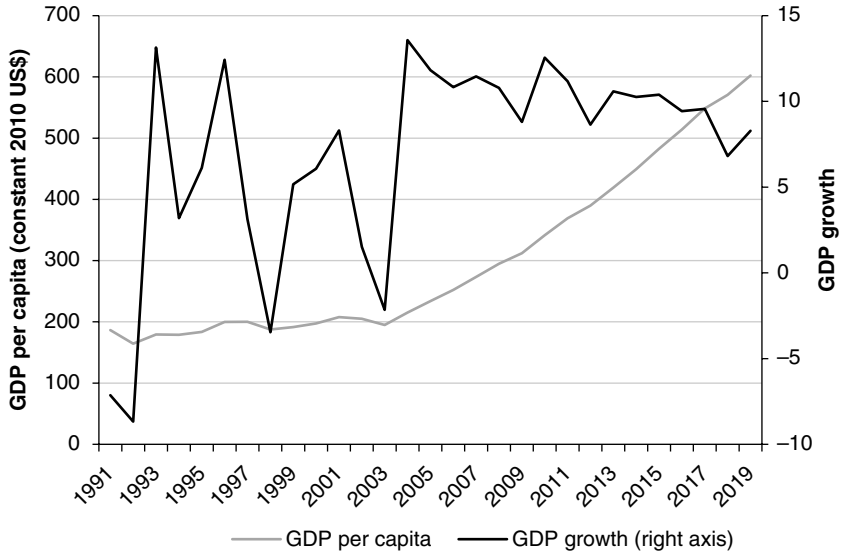
³ Industrial policy is harder to implement in democracies. Governments tend to have shorter time horizons that are difficult to align with long-term planning, while multiple veto points provide opportunities for interest groups to block state action (Schlogl and Kim 2021). These challenges are illustrated in Whitfield’s (2018) analysis of Ghanaian industrial policy.

⁴ Noteworthy exceptions include Mkandawire (2001), Whitfield et al. (2015) and Hickey et al. (2023).

Viewed in the light of these questions, the Ethiopian experience in the first two decades of the twenty-first century stands out as a vitally important case of state-led development in Africa and, moreover, a rather puzzling challenge to existing theories. Academics and media alike lauded Ethiopia for shedding its past image of famine to become one of the fastest growing economies in the world (Gill 2010, De Waal 2015, Moller 2017, Clapham 2018). The Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) ruled Ethiopia and dominated the political scene from 1991 until 2019. In the fifteen years from 2004, GDP growth averaged 10 per cent per annum, resulting in a tripling of GDP per capita (Figure 1.1). In addition, the completion of a series of mega-projects, including new railways, hydropower dams and industrial parks greatly expanded economic infrastructure and constitute visible symbols of Ethiopia's transformation, leading many to suggest that Ethiopia could become a new global centre for light manufacturing (Aglionby 2017, Leithead 2017, Whitfield et al. 2020). Moreover, economic growth translated into steady progress on social indicators, with Ethiopia among the few African countries to make significant progress towards the 2015 Millennium Development Goals, expanding educational enrolment and reducing poverty and maternal and child mortality, for example. Undoubtedly much remains to be done. However, socio-economic progress under the EPRDF was remarkable and would appear to vindicate what the government itself described as its 'developmental state' strategy.

Despite these successes, however, clearly all was not well. From 2014 onwards, mass protests spread across Ethiopia's central Oromiya region and from there countrywide. The protests were originally sparked by development plans for the capital city, Addis Ababa, and the displacement of farmers to make way for state-supported development projects. However, these 'Oromo Protests' broadened into mass protests against the authoritarian EPRDF and its 'developmental state' project. Brutal suppression by security forces only contributed to the protests' further spread in the following years. Protests gradually paralysed the country and ultimately forced Prime Minister Hailemariam Dessalegn to resign in early 2018. The EPRDF's choice of Abiy Ahmed, from the Oromo wing of the ruling coalition, as Hailemariam's successor initially led to optimism that developmental progress could be sustained amidst political reform. However, factional divisions deepened, leading to a power struggle, the dissolution of the EPRDF in 2019 and the outbreak of civil war in northern Ethiopia in late 2020 with catastrophic impacts both on human lives and the economy.

(A)



(B)

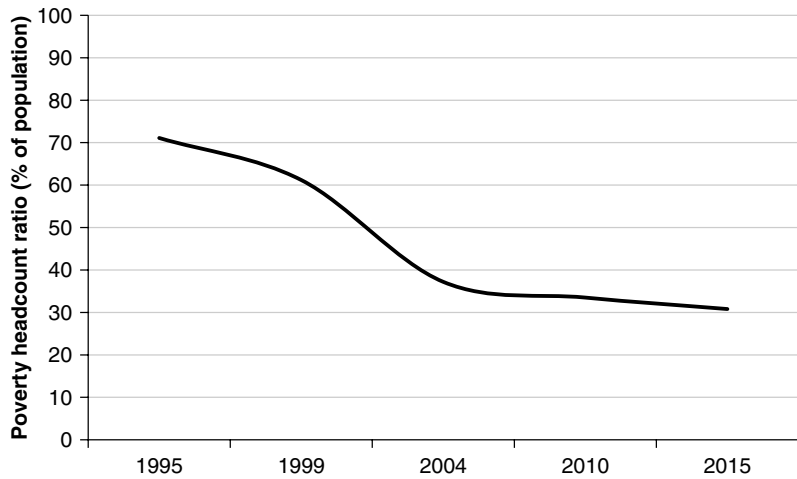
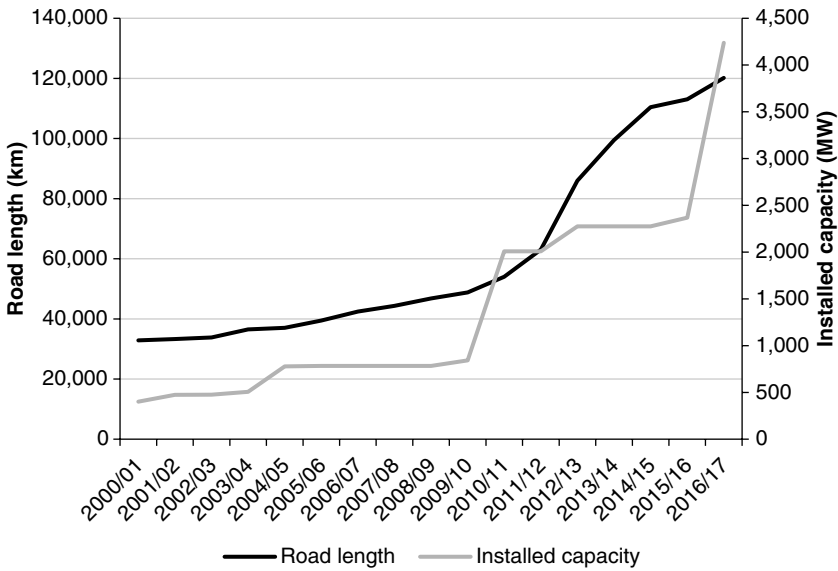


Figure 1.1 Select development indicators. A. GDP per capita and annual growth; B. Poverty headcount ratio (US\$1.90/day 2011 PPP); C. Infrastructure expansion; D. Under 5 mortality rate (per 1,000 live births)

Source: author, based on World Bank World Development Indicators, NBE (2017, p. 12), USAID (2019).

(C)



(D)

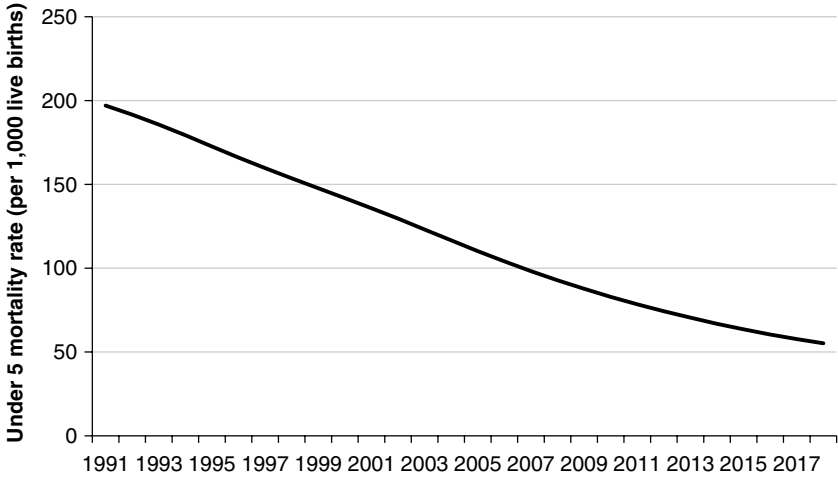


Figure 1.1 (cont.)

This book provides a detailed examination of the political dynamics shaping the rise and fall of the EPRDF's project of state-led development. To do so, the book is situated between two main literatures, namely those on the politics of state-led development and that on authoritarian

durability. Usually treated separately, integrating these theories is an important step towards understanding the potential and limitations of Ethiopia's 'developmental state', and the prospects for late-late development. Moreover, analysis of the Ethiopian experience enables the book to make important contributions to each of these bodies of work.

The book makes two main contributions to the literature on the politics of state-led development. First, and contrary to more pessimistic assessments, the Ethiopian case shows that it is possible for African states to obtain the capacities required to promote development and for leaders to pursue state-led development as part of their strategy for maintaining power. Indeed, the developmental progress achieved in Ethiopia is comprehensible in terms of theories developed to explain state-led development in East Asia. Building on the legacy of Imperial and then revolutionary state-building, the EPRDF sought – with considerable success – to consolidate political dominance through a project of state-led development that would expand economic opportunities – first in agriculture and then through labour-intensive industrialisation – as a means of securing mass compliance. Despite having an unusual history compared to the rest of the African continent, Ethiopia nonetheless highlights the considerable diversity in political configurations and state capacities that belie the common tendency to generalise from some of the more problematic experiences of African states when considering the prospects for state-led development.

Second, the Ethiopian experience highlights that the political challenges to state-led development in the contemporary era have deepened considerably compared to earlier experiences of structural transformation. Much of the literature on the politics of state-led development has focused on the domestic political factors that explain variation in country experiences. While important, the prospects for state-led development have always been influenced by the global economy and the ways in which earlier industrialisers have reshaped the opportunities and challenges for latecomers (Gerschenkron 1962, Amsden 1992, Meiksins Wood 2002). In the latest iteration of this evolving process, late-late developing states such as Ethiopia face major challenges of which two stand out. On the one hand, the global economy places major constraints on the development of a high-wage, high-productivity manufacturing sector, and mutually reinforcing economic linkages between agriculture and industry. On the other, late-late developing countries experiencing delayed demographic transitions are facing larger and more rapid population growth and urbanisation than earlier industrialisers. The result in Ethiopia, and many other countries, is that ruling elites face acute mass distributive pressures in the form of a shortage

of land and employment opportunities at the same time as the potential for state-led development to alleviate these pressures through mass industrial employment creation, along similar lines to many East Asian countries, is severely constrained.

The distributive challenges associated with late-late development also have important implications for the literature on authoritarian durability. The tendency of the 'third wave' to deliver elections but not democratisation, and concerns about creeping authoritarianism in both established and new democracies has resulted in renewed interest in authoritarianism (Levitsky and Way 2010, Slater 2010, Geddes et al. 2018). Research frequently highlights two main factors that shape authoritarian durability, neither of which provides a convincing explanation for the EPRDF's collapse. First, one of the most consistent conclusions is that economic growth is favourable for authoritarian durability, while economic crisis that limits regimes' ability to reward cadres leads to defections, mass protests and authoritarian collapse (Bratton and van de Walle 1997, Haggard and Kaufman 1997, Geddes 1999, Przeworski et al. 2000, Levitsky and Way 2010). From this perspective, one might have expected Ethiopia's booming economy and progress in social indicators to have insulated the EPRDF from the mass opposition that ultimately precipitated its demise.

A second conclusion focuses on the importance of elite cohesion and political parties to regime durability. Where a cohesive elite builds a strong political party, this can provide the basis for elite collective action (Huntington 1968, Geddes 1999, Brownlee 2007, Slater 2010). Moreover, the strongest parties that provide the foundation for the most durable authoritarian regimes are those forged in the intensity of revolutionary struggle (Geddes 1999, Levitsky and Way 2010, Lachapelle et al. 2020). Yet the EPRDF came to power in Ethiopia through a protracted revolutionary struggle in the 1970s and 1980s and, since taking national power in 1991, spent several decades building what was widely considered to be a formidable and well-resourced party (Emmenegger et al. 2011, Vaughan 2011, Vaughan and Gebremichael 2011). Why then did one of the wealthiest and best-organised political parties on the continent implode so spectacularly in the midst of an economic boom?

This book argues that the answer lies in the distributive failings of the EPRDF's project of state-led development, which are at least partly explained by the challenging context of late-late development, including the barriers to mass employment creation and demographic growth. A focus on critical junctures, elite politics and economic growth in recent work on authoritarianism has been important. Nonetheless, this work downplays the importance of distribution, mass politics and the dynamic

challenge of mass incorporation in the context of urbanisation and the evolving class structures inherent to structural transformation. In Ethiopia, the EPRDF was initially able to consolidate power and secure mass acquiescence in a largely agrarian society through the expansion of state and party structures and control over the distribution of land and agricultural inputs. However, rapid population growth resulted in land shortages and made structural transformation and mass employment creation imperative to continue this process of mass incorporation. Despite rapid economic growth, the failure of attempts to create mass industrial employment resulted in a growing distributive crisis that was a major factor in the protests that began in 2014. These mass protests magnified emerging divisions within the ruling elite and directly precipitated the EPRDF's collapse. Theorisation of the challenge of authoritarian durability in the context of structural transformation therefore requires attention both to the long-run influence of evolving class and communal structures that underpin political authority (Moore, Jr. 1967, Skocpol 1979, Boone 2003) alongside the short-term impact of elite politics and party structure.

Structural Transformation and the Role of the State

Any analysis of state-led development must begin by unpacking the ambiguous concept of development. To do so, I draw particularly on excellent overviews in Waldner (1999) and Whitfield et al. (2015), as well as the agrarian change literature. While many studies focus on the crude indicator that is the economic growth rate, the approach taken in this book is that economic development depends not just on high rates of growth, but, vitally, the structural transformation of the economy, moving away from subsistence activities producing primary products with unskilled labour towards high-productivity activities producing knowledge-based assets with skilled labour. It is only in this way that a country's economy can move into more specialised activities with less competition, capturing rents that create value and provide jobs that ensure a decent standard of living. Since the demise of a communist alternative, structural transformation requires a shift to capitalist production.

Structural transformation is often associated with industrialisation. However, the approach taken here is that structural transformation comprises three distinct, albeit interlinked, processes: agrarian transformation, economic diversification and industrial upgrading. While industrial policy and the creation of a dynamic manufacturing sector are vitally important, as discussed below, a narrow focus on industrialisation risks neglecting the importance of agrarian transformation, both

in terms of its direct impact on agricultural livelihoods and agriculture's contribution to industrialisation. Repeated studies demonstrate that agricultural productivity growth – where land is broadly distributed rather than monopolised by large landholders – has a far greater impact on the reduction of extreme poverty than industry or services (Timmer 1997, Irz et al. 2001, Thirtle et al. 2003). By contrast, where industrialisation proceeds without agrarian transformation, industrial progress does not stimulate agricultural productivity growth, resulting in high rates of inequality and rural poverty (Kay 2002, Thirtle et al. 2003, Henley 2012). Moreover, agricultural productivity growth has historically provided an important stimulus to industry by: providing cheap food that limits real wages; producing agro-industrial inputs for processing; expanding the domestic market for locally produced industrial goods; generating foreign exchange to enable the import of capital goods; and 'freeing' surplus labour to provide an industrial workforce (Mellor 1995, 2017, Kay 2002, Bernstein 2004, 2009, Akram-Lodhi and Kay 2010). As such, when the majority of the population resides in rural areas, there are good reasons for focusing initially on agriculture.

The importance of agricultural productivity growth and surplus extraction places agrarian class relations at the centre of analysis. In early industrialising European countries, state intervention restructured property rights, separating agricultural producers from the land with the result that they were 'compelled to produce competitively' (Brenner 1982, p. 18, Polanyi 2001, Meiksins Wood 2002, Bernstein 2004). The state played a more direct role in subsequent examples. In the Soviet Union and China, revolutionary states expropriated the landed elite and captured the 'surplus' required to finance industrialisation, at the cost of the immiseration of the peasantry, through agricultural collectivisation (Akram-Lodhi and Kay 2010). Meanwhile, in late developing South Korea and Taiwan, the state expropriated the landed elite and redistributed land to smallholders in the aftermath of the Second World War. Here it was the state, rather than market forces, that raised agricultural productivity and ensured agriculture's contribution to industry, investing in rural infrastructure and agricultural extension services, forcing farmers to adopt new technologies and extracting the agrarian surplus through taxation and adverse terms of trade (Amsden 1979, Wade 1983, Moore 1984, Byres 1991, Kay 2002).

Agrarian transformation therefore plays a central role in poverty reduction and has the potential to contribute to industrialisation. However, agriculture is ultimately characterised by diminishing returns: beyond a certain point, increased inputs of labour and capital lead to progressively smaller productivity increases in the face of the limited supply

of land (Reinert 2007, Whitfield et al. 2015). Diminishing returns can arise through the expansion of cultivation onto less productive land or through intensification of existing production. While the application of new technology – such as irrigation, fertiliser and improved seed varieties – may deliver significant productivity increases, ultimately agriculture is constrained by the limits of natural resources. Industrialisation and the shift to high-productivity economic activities with scale economies and increasing returns is essential to break these Malthusian dynamics (Brenner 1982, Reinert 2007, Livi-Bacci 2017).

Many analysts distinguish two conceptually distinct processes within industrialisation, namely diversification and upgrading. The initial challenge of economic diversification is a process of imitation and learning whereby late industrialising countries acquire technology and copy production techniques from more advanced economies (Gerschenkron 1962, Amsden 1992, Waldner 1999, Khan 2000, Whitfield et al. 2015). Typically, the basic industries that provide the first steps include textiles and apparel, and leather and footwear. Achieving economic diversification requires resolution of what Waldner (1999) calls ‘Gerschenkronian collective action dilemmas’ that otherwise prevent capitalists from investing in production due to risks related to the learning process, future markets and competition, and the benefits of alternative investments such as real estate or trade. State intervention is required to provide necessary infrastructure and investment incentives, to protect firms while learning to use borrowed technology and to promote intersectoral linkages that capture more value domestically (Amsden 1992, Waldner 1999, Khan 2000, Whitfield et al. 2015). The technology employed in basic manufacturing, however, tends to be so widespread that there are few barriers to entry and the global market is highly competitive, offering few opportunities for innovation. Consequently, international competition is primarily based on low wages (Amsden 1992, Waldner 1999). While basic industries may provide an important source of employment and increased standard of living compared to agriculture, jobs nonetheless offer limited potential to raise living standards.

A second and more challenging step is to move from economic diversification to upgrading, enabling firms to compete in sectors of high-wage employment based on improvements in production processes and product innovation (Amsden 1992, Waldner 1999, Gereffi 2005, Doner 2009, Whitfield et al. 2015). Industries involving production of high-value-added goods requiring large amounts of capital, technology and skills have large barriers to entry, with the result that firms involved face more limited competition and are thereby able to charge higher prices and pay higher wages to their employees (Reinert 2007). Economic upgrading requires tackling

'Kaldorian collective action dilemmas' that prevent the improvement of firm performance (Waldner 1999). The state has an even more important and challenging role to play in overcoming these collective action problems, providing protection and incentives for firms taking risks in uncertain but potentially high-reward sectors, as well as pursuing process and product innovations (Amsden 1992, Waldner 1999, Khan 2000, Whitfield et al. 2015). At the same time, states must coordinate between upstream and downstream firms, and discipline firms to ensure that learning and productivity improvements do take place (Wade 1990, Amsden 1992).

Many middle-income countries across Asia and Latin America have succeeded to varying degrees in achieving *economic diversification*, contributing to important improvements in living standards. However, it is the *industrial upgrading* achieved by the likes of South Korea and Taiwan from the 1970s onwards that brought widespread wealth and attracted such attention, not just catching up with the advanced economies, but in many cases surpassing them. By contrast, where the state has been unable to drive upgrading, industrial production has become stuck, focused primarily on relatively low-value-added assembly roles, rather than the technology- and knowledge-intensive activities that add most value. Examples include Thailand's garment, electronics and automobile sectors, and Malaysia's electronics industry where firms focus primarily on the assembly of imported inputs (Lauridsen 2004, Doner 2009).

Structural transformation is therefore key to raising a population's living standards and comprises three interlinked processes: agrarian transformation; economic diversification; and industrial upgrading. The state can play a vital role in each of these processes and, indeed, the later a country tackles structural transformation, the greater the need for state intervention to 'catch up' (Gerschenkron 1962, Wade 1990, Amsden 1992, Waldner 1999, Whitfield et al. 2015). The key state function is the ability to allocate 'rents' to promote productive investment. Despite the common critique of 'rent seeking' as inimical to development, there are actually many types of rent with diverse implications for structural transformation (Boone 1992, Khan 2000, Mkandawire 2001). While some rents can be problematic, leading to inefficiency, others, such as rents for learning, innovation and process improvements, are essential. A key function of states in both late industrialising East Asian states and early industrialisers was the allocation of rents to stimulate productive investment (Chang 2002, Reinert 2007).⁵

⁵ As Whitfield et al. (2015) note, states made mistakes and some rents were put to unproductive uses. Nonetheless, successful states learned from failures (Cheng 1990, Moon and Prasad 1994).

Building on this definition of structural transformation, [Chapter 2](#) develops the main theoretical argument of the book regarding the political processes underpinning state-led development. The chapter proposes that state-led development depends, on the one hand, on the historical process of state formation that produces states with divergent capacities to contribute to development, and, on the other, elite threat perceptions that shape leaders' incentives to pursue structural transformation as a means of maintaining political power. Ruling elites in late-late developing countries are likely to mobilise state capacity to pursue structural transformation when they face mass distributive pressures that threaten their hold on power and exceed existing resource constraints.⁶ However, a focus on elite and mass politics within national boundaries is insufficient. In particular, analysis of domestic politics must be set in the context of the unique challenges of late-late development, namely the constraints that the contemporary global economy imposes on structural transformation and the distributive pressures resulting from delayed demographic transitions. Both these factors heighten the distributive challenges facing political leaders, presenting a major challenge to authoritarian leaders seeking to maintain power through developmental performance.

State-Led Development and Distributive Crisis in the EPRDF's Ethiopia

This book develops the theoretical arguments outlined above through the detailed analysis of the Ethiopian case. Ethiopia provides a particularly important test case for authoritarian state-led development, with vital theoretical and comparative implications for other late-late developing countries. This section outlines in more detail the specific argument advanced in the book regarding the rise and fall of the EPRDF and highlights the book's contribution to the existing literature on Ethiopian politics and development.

The EPRDF's project of state-led development was fundamentally shaped by the political pressures that the coalition faced while in power. However, it is also important to place the EPRDF in the context of long-term processes that shaped the Ethiopian state and society, and the impact that these had on subsequent state-led development. This legacy of past state formation was a dual one. On the one hand, the hierarchical Imperial state was transformed and bureaucratised through the modernisation project of Haile Selassie (1930–1974) and, following the 1974

⁶ Building on work by [Doner et al. \(2005\)](#).

revolution, under the Derg military regime (1974–1991). The result was not only a relatively strong state that exerted enormous control over the population – in the highland core at least – but also the eradication of the landed elite, and the weakness of domestic capital and popular classes. The legacy of the revolution was therefore one of considerable state autonomy and capacity, both of which would prove vital to subsequent state-led development. On the other hand, the territorial expansion and incomplete nation-building project of the Imperial state left a legacy of enormous ethno-linguistic heterogeneity. By the time the EPRDF came to power in 1991, ethnic diversity and inequality were increasingly politicised, not least due to the efforts of the TPLF and other ethnic-based movements to mobilise the population along ethno-nationalist lines. The EPRDF therefore inherited a state facing a fundamental challenge regarding the place for ethnicity in politics.

Having fought its way to national power by 1991 through a Maoist insurrection in the northern region of Tigray, the TPLF faced a difficult situation in which to consolidate national power. Though militarily dominant, the TPLF, which through the civil war had developed a high degree of elite cohesion, ideological commitment and control of the masses in Tigray, remained extremely politically vulnerable with limited elite or popular support outside that region. The TPLF's political strategy was twofold. First, the new government launched a state-building project based on a federal system comprising ethno-linguistically defined regions. This federalism aimed to address the 'national question' inherited from past regimes by allowing for a degree of ethnic self-determination, while the TPLF formed ethnic-based parties to administer regional administrations as part of the EPRDF coalition. Political control rested to a considerable degree on the symbolism of ethnic self-determination, and the TPLF's co-optation and subordination of newly formed EPRDF parties. Yet, by creating the federal system, the EPRDF also made ethnicity the central organising principle of politics, entrenching the politicisation of identity.

Second, the EPRDF considered widespread poverty and rapid population growth to present a major distributive threat. The government sought to consolidate its control over the masses through a broad-based development strategy, providing mass distribution in forms that tied people to the party-state. The first step was to maintain state land ownership and the distribution of usufruct rights to peasant farmers. However, the EPRDF also sought to expand economic opportunities as a means of maintaining mass compliance. Attention initially focused on raising smallholder agricultural productivity through state-controlled distribution of agricultural inputs. However, the focus on

agricultural productivity growth was always linked to a long-term ambition of using the agrarian surplus to stimulate labour-intensive industrialisation and mass employment creation that would reduce pressure on rural land, thereby enabling urbanisation and improved living standards. In doing so, the expectation was that the government would retain popular compliance during a process of structural transformation and urbanisation.

This political and economic strategy was, in many respects, successful. A party split in 2001 led to the centralisation of power around the Prime Minister, Meles Zenawi, and a concerted focus on implementing the national development strategy. The result was rapid agricultural productivity growth and strong economic growth fuelled by state infrastructure investment. However, the limitations of this strategy also sowed the seeds of the EPRDF's eventual demise. In terms of mass incorporation, the key failing was the slow pace of industrialisation and mass employment creation. Rapid population growth and rural land shortages meant that agriculture was no longer able to provide livelihoods for or political control over a rapidly expanding youth population. Moreover, despite some latter success in attracting foreign investment to new industrial parks, progress with industrial employment creation was minimal compared to the great needs of a rapidly growing and urbanising population. Despite being a key government priority over several decades, progress with industrialisation was slow, largely due to domestic capitalists' inability to bridge the technological frontier between their limited capacities and those required to secure a foothold in highly competitive global value chains, and the failure of state industrial policy to provide sufficient incentives to press them to do so (Brautigam et al. 2018, Grumiller 2021, Whitfield and Staritz 2021). In the absence of mass employment creation, growing population pressure and landlessness amongst young adults was further exacerbated by the government's development projects, displacing landholders with minimal compensation to make way for urban expansion, infrastructure projects and agricultural investments. Though population growth and stalled structural transformation were the main factors driving this distributive crisis, displacement for urban expansion and development projects provided a highly visible flashpoint for growing resentment at the shortage of opportunities generated by the development model. It was these instances of displacement that provided the initial spark for the Oromo protests in 2014 and 2015. The protests subsequently spread across the region and then the country fuelled by the broader distributive crisis and the politicisation of ethnicity, with distributive failings framed as inter-ethnic grievances.

A full understanding of the EPRDF's collapse requires analysis of the links between this mass distributive crisis and elite political dynamics, however. Elite cohesion within the EPRDF rested on the dominance of the TPLF and Prime Minister Meles Zenawi, and the acquiescence of the leadership of the other ethnic parties. This uneasy compromise within the EPRDF gradually began to unravel, particularly after Meles' death in 2012. The result was that when anti-government protests spread from 2014, leaders of subordinate ethnic parties within the EPRDF did not identify a common threat to the ruling elite that required a unified and coherent response, but rather saw potential for political advancement in riding the wave of ethnic-based anti-government protests. As such, mass protests magnified emerging divisions within the EPRDF, leading some factions to align with and encourage the protests, whilst others sought to suppress them. The 2018 leadership change, the EPRDF's dissolution in 2019 and the outbreak of civil war in 2020 are ultimately the complex results of these elite power struggles within the former EPRDF in the context of a mass distributive crisis. Ultimately, the distributive crisis and elite fragmentation translated into a broader crisis of the Ethiopian state, centring, once again, on the role of ethnicity in politics.

By developing these arguments, this book makes a number of important contributions to the existing literature on Ethiopian politics and development. First, the book deepens understanding of the political drivers and ramifications of the EPRDF's 'developmental state'. There is a strong tendency in existing work to focus on former Prime Minister Meles Zenawi for his outsized influence in shaping the trajectory of Ethiopian development. This book certainly acknowledges the importance of Meles and his ideas, particularly after 2001 when he consolidated power within the ruling party. However, by situating the EPRDF within a long-run history of state formation and revolution, and emphasising how the structural vulnerabilities facing the EPRDF shaped its political strategy, the result is a more balanced assessment of Meles' role. To paraphrase Marx, Meles made his own history, 'but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past'.⁷

Second, the book provides a more comprehensive analysis of the EPRDF's project of state-led development. Existing research tends to examine only the sector-specific manifestations of the macro political economy shaping Ethiopian development through analysis of agriculture (Berhanu and Poulton 2014, Bachewe et al. 2018) or industrial policy (Oqubay 2015, Cheru et al. 2019, Whitfield et al. 2020). These excellent studies provide firm foundations for the analysis in subsequent chapters.

⁷ In *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (Marx 2008).

However, the EPRDF did not merely aim to bring about progress in a particular sector, but sought an ambitious project of economic and societal transformation that cut across sectoral boundaries. The analysis in this book therefore tackles this macro political economy head on through a multi-sectoral, multi-scalar and historical approach that examines the political drivers of the government's evolving development strategies and their distributive outcomes.

Third, the book deepens understanding of the EPRDF's collapse and what, at the time of writing, is an ongoing civil war in northern Ethiopia. Ever since the EPRDF adopted ethnic federalism, modelled on Stalin's approach to the national question in the Soviet Union, there has been a view that politicising ethnicity would inevitably lead to inter-communal conflict and the Balkanisation of Ethiopia (Abbink 2006, Mehretu 2012, Bayu 2022). From this perspective, the EPRDF's political project was doomed from the beginning and the civil war might be interpreted as the inevitable result of the ethnic divisions resulting from the federal system. For others, meanwhile, the protests that forced the EPRDF from power were due to the 'developmental state's' unjust expropriation of smallholder farmers that stood in the way of EPRDF-defined progress (Rahmato 2019). As argued above, expropriation was an important spark for mass protests, while federalism undoubtedly shaped the form that the protests assumed and the salience of ethnicity in elite and mass politics. However, this book shows that the EPRDF's collapse and subsequent conflict are also rooted in a deeper distributive crisis of the EPRDF's state-led development model. While political conflict has manifest along ethnic lines, elite divisions and mass discontent are not inherently 'ethnic' in nature, but rather the result of elite power struggles and mass distributive pressures being refracted through the institutions of ethnic federalism. Indeed, conflict is not caused by ethnic divisions alone, but becomes more likely when ethnic cleavages intersect with political inequality and material deprivation (Stewart 2010, Wimmer 2018). In Ethiopia, the growing politicisation of ethnicity proved so explosive precisely because identity politics combined with a distributive crisis and elite fragmentation, fuelling inter-ethnic grievances and resulting in a crisis of the state. Analysis of these processes is essential to developing a deeper understanding of the Ethiopian case and the implications for state-led development in Ethiopia and elsewhere.

Finally, by analysing Ethiopia through the theoretical lenses of the politics of state-led development and authoritarian durability, the book places Ethiopia in comparative context. Given Ethiopia's unusual history, the country is usually explicitly dismissed as an exception or implicitly

brushed over in comparative studies of African politics. Consequently, most of the best analysis of Ethiopian politics is placed in single country works, with little attempt to compare and contrast with other countries. An important contribution of this book, therefore, is to place the Ethiopian experience in direct conversation with other countries tackling the challenge of late-late development in Africa and Asia. Indeed, Ethiopia's unusual history makes Ethiopia a leading candidate for authoritarian state-led development and, consequently, the challenges experienced in recent years raise important questions about the potential for such processes to play out elsewhere.

Methodology and Data Sources

The methodological approach taken in this book builds on the principles of process tracing, which seeks to reconstruct a causal sequence of events by analysing a case study in context, evaluating and, where possible, ruling out rival theories through comparison with available evidence (George and Bennett 2004, Collier 2011, Bennett and Checkel 2014). To do so, the analysis triangulates between multiple data sources with convergent lines of inquiry. The main data source is detailed primary research conducted over more than a decade (2009–2020). This fieldwork comprises more than 500 interviews and focus group discussions with: senior politicians, bureaucrats and policymakers in federal and regional governments; donor representatives; local government officials and party footsoldiers; and residents of rural and peri-urban sites across Ethiopia. Indeed, this breadth and depth of empirical research – from the highest levels of political office to village-level case studies – constitutes a major contribution of the book. The analysis complements primary research with documentary evidence based on archival research in state departments in Ethiopia, as well as official reports, statistics and existing survey data.

As discussed in Chapter 2, existing theories highlight centralised political authority, state capacity and autonomy from social forces as pre-requisites of state-led development. Viewed from this perspective, Ethiopia under the EPRDF can be considered a critical or most likely case for state-led development in Africa. Ethiopia is unusual in having a long history of a hierarchical state legitimated by state religion and based on a sophisticated agrarian system and plough agriculture (Goody 1971, Tareke 1991, Donham 2002). Indeed, Ethiopia was the one country in Africa that centralised political authority sufficiently in the late nineteenth century to respond to the threat of European colonialism and maintain its independence. Subsequently, and again unusually,

Ethiopia experienced a social revolution in the 1970s that transformed the Imperial state, massively expanding the control and reach of a bureaucratic state. The result was that by 1991, when the EPRDF seized power, Ethiopia possessed what in many respects was a relatively strong state that exerted an outsized influence on society (Clapham 1988). Moreover, the EPRDF made a concerted effort to learn from the earlier experiences of South Korea and Taiwan (Ohno et al. 2011, Clapham 2018), and jealously guarded its policy autonomy from donor influence as it launched a development project sharply at odds with the dominant market liberalism (Furtado and Smith 2009, Feyissa 2011a). As such, if authoritarian state-led development along East Asian lines is possible anywhere in Africa, Ethiopia would surely be a leading contender.

The focus on the rise and fall of the EPRDF necessarily raises questions regarding the timespan of the analysis. Given the importance of long-run state formation on the structure of state and society, it is necessary to situate the EPRDF's time in office in the context of the historical processes that shaped the Ethiopian state. To do so, the analysis begins with a brief discussion of the long-run history of the Ethiopian state and, in particular, the period since the late nineteenth century, when Ethiopia acquired its contemporary borders and Imperial rulers set about constructing modern state structures. This historical analysis pays particular attention to revolution of the 1970s both regarding its effect on the state and the commencement of the TPLF's revolutionary struggle that brought it to national power in 1991.

The end point of analysis is also worth discussion at this point. The EPRDF coalition was formally dissolved in late 2019 when three constituent parties and several affiliates merged to form the Prosperity Party while one – the TPLF that founded the coalition – refused to join. This split paved the way for the civil war between these two factions from 2020. However, the prior resignation of Hailemariam Dessalegn and the selection of Abiy Ahmed as his successor in March 2018 represented a fundamental turning point for several reasons. First, Abiy Ahmed was selected against the wishes of the TPLF that had dominated the EPRDF since its creation, with the result that the leadership change represented a fundamental shift in the balance of power within the ruling coalition. Second, the selection of Abiy Ahmed was the beginning of the end of the EPRDF's 'developmental state' project, as the new regime adopted a more market-based development strategy with strong support from western donors. The result is that the political changes in early 2018 constituted the beginning of a fundamental shift in the power relations and ideological foundations of the EPRDF's state-led development project, the analytical focus of this book. As such, the main focus of analysis is the period up to early 2018,

while [Chapter 11](#) reflects on the implications of the subsequent crisis for Ethiopian politics and development moving forward.

Within the ‘case’ of Ethiopia the research focuses on different levels of analysis from the federal government and the increasingly important regional states, to the *wereda* (district) and *kebele* (sub-district) that directly interact with the population. The analysis of the federal and regional levels focuses on the political economy of decision-making regarding national and sectoral strategies, and key changes in policy direction. This analysis draws on official and unpublished policy documents, administrative records and official statistics, as well as key informant interviews with key political figures, senior bureaucrats and donor officials involved in negotiations with government. In instances where it was not possible to interview key individuals due to limited access or the earlier death of those involved, the analysis also draws on published interviews and public statements.

The analysis of local-level politics, policy implementation and state–society relations is based on sub-national case studies of particular *wereda* and *kebele*, alongside analysis of existing quantitative datasets to place case studies in context. Sub-national case studies trace implementation of government strategies and state–society relations through regional governments down to frontline offices in particular towns and villages. To that end, sub-national cases are used in [Chapter 7](#) to explore urban expansion and in [Chapters 8–10](#) to examine how local party-state structures distribute resources and maintain political control. These sub-national case studies comprise key informant interviews with important figures within communities, including local party and state officials, elders and religious leaders, as well as semi-structured interviews and focus groups with community residents. For the latter, respondents were selected with a view to ensuring a diversity of views and experiences with careful attention to ensure that selection captured diversity in age, gender, ethnicity and religion.

The local-level cases themselves were also selected with a view to exploring variation in experiences of the state and relations with the EPRDF. Inevitably, in a country as diverse as Ethiopia, a handful of case studies cannot possibly be representative of the complex reality of the country. Instead, the approach taken to sub-national case selection was to choose cases from two extremes in their relations with the party-state. To that end, sub-national case studies contrast Tigray – the historic centre of the Ethiopian state and the home of the TPLF that founded the EPRDF coalition – and Oromiya – incorporated into Ethiopia through conquest at the end of the nineteenth century and where the regional branch of the EPRDF long suffered from a lack of legitimacy amongst the local population.

Qualitative case studies are compared and contrasted where possible with quantitative evidence from existing datasets. In particular, analysis of agricultural development and land access draws on the Socioeconomic Survey (2015–2016) carried out jointly by the World Bank and Ethiopia's Central Statistical Agency (CSA), as well as the CSA's annual Agricultural Sample Survey, and the Large and Medium Scale Commercial Farms Survey. Analysis of industrial development and employment draws on the CSA's Large and Medium Scale Manufacturing Survey, National Labour Force Survey and the Urban Employment and Unemployment Survey. Analysis of the protests that spread across Ethiopia from 2014 utilises data from the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED).

Finally, given the political sensitivities involved in the research, all interview respondents have been anonymised to protect their identities, with the exception of a few interviews by senior political figures speaking in their official capacity who did not request anonymity.

Structure of the Book

The remainder of the book is structured as follows. **Chapter 2** outlines the study's theoretical arguments. The discussion draws on the comparative literatures on state-led development, globalisation, demography and authoritarian durability to identify the political drivers of authoritarian state-led development and the increasingly acute challenges facing states pursuing late-late development. The book then turns to the Ethiopian case, beginning in **Chapter 3** with the processes leading to the formation of the Ethiopian state and the revolution of the 1970s. The result was a dual legacy for the EPRDF when it seized power in 1991: a state with relatively high levels of autonomy and capacity that would prove vital for the EPRDF's developmental project, yet increasingly politicised ethnic divisions that presented a major challenge to subsequent state-building. **Chapter 4** focuses on the political dynamics that shaped the EPRDF's development strategy once in office, highlighting, first, the vulnerability of the new government and its need to consolidate a political base amongst the non-Tigrayan peasantry, and, second, a series of political crises in the early 2000s that forged a cohesive political elite focused on rapid development and mass distribution as a means of securing its political survival.

The following five chapters analyse the economic and distributive implications of the government's evolving development model. **Chapter 5** examines the EPRDF's changing approach to agricultural development and the agrarian question from an initial emphasis on peasant agriculture

to a spatially differentiated strategy that prioritised smallholder commercialisation and capital-intensive agricultural investments. While this strategy ultimately delivered rising agricultural productivity, a combination of population growth, displacement for investments and growing market forces in land gradually eroded what had been the main means of mass distribution and political control – access to land. **Chapter 6** examines the EPRDF's attempt to generate mass manufacturing employment as a distributive strategy to replace the past focus on land. Despite the high political priority placed on industrial development, progress was consistently slower than the rapid, broad-based industrialisation demanded by the ruling elite and that required to provide employment for a rapidly growing population with limited agricultural opportunities.

Chapter 7 turns to the issue of urban development and expansion, which came to be a central feature of the 'developmental state' with the growing emphasis on industrialisation, infrastructure and construction. The analysis shows that state expropriation of peasant farmers to make way for urban development exacerbated demographic processes that were already undermining land access for large sections of the population. As such, urbanisation constituted a highly visible expression of the inequality of the 'developmental state', which, when overlaid on historically embedded ethnic divisions in Addis Ababa, proved to be an explosive combination. **Chapter 8** examines the government's ambiguous social protection response to these growing challenges. The government introduced and expanded social protection programmes in response to the expanding distributive crisis. Yet the distributive role of these programmes was in tension with the 'productivist' framing of the government's 'developmental state' model, which led the government to limit coverage in order to maintain its narrative of developmental progress. While the government's social protection policy papered over immediate problems, it failed to address the underlying distributive failings of the 'developmental state'.

Chapter 9 then takes a closer look at how the party-state maintained control at the local level through a series of village-level case studies. The chapter shows that the party-state established control over the distribution of almost every necessary livelihood resource – including land, agricultural inputs, credit and social protection – effectively routing the survival strategies of the population through party-state structures. However, the distributive failings outlined in previous chapters – notably the shortage of land and employment opportunities and restricted access to social protection – also exposed the limits of political control. The party-state had progressively little to offer in terms of livelihoods for young adults, with the result that younger generations tended to have much weaker ties to the regime.

The final two chapters examine the EPRDF's collapse and reflect on the implications of the ongoing political crisis in Ethiopia. [Chapter 10](#) traces the EPRDF's downfall to three main factors: the distributive failings of the government's development strategy manifest in high rates of landlessness and unemployment, particularly amongst young adults; growing elite divisions that were exacerbated by the mass protests that spread from 2014; and the ways in which these mass and elite crises were refracted through the prism of ethnic federalism, resulting in ethnic-based protests and elite divisions. Finally, [Chapter 11](#) reflects on the implications of the study for the literature, including the prospects for state-led development in Africa and the challenge of authoritarian durability. The successes and failings of the EPRDF's developmental project raise important questions about the feasibility of authoritarian state-led development elsewhere on the continent.

2 Structural Transformation, Late-Late Development and Political Order

This chapter sets out the theoretical approach that guides the book, focusing on the links between state-led development and political order in the context of late-late development. The chapter builds on the discussion of structural transformation in [Chapter 1](#), reviewing the literature on state-led development in order to theorise the political processes that underpin the state's ability and willingness to promote structural transformation. The first half of the chapter argues that state-led development requires, first, the long-term process of state formation to produce states with the capacity and autonomy that are pre-requisites for effective state intervention. Second, however, it is only where state-led development aligns with elite threat perceptions that leaders will make politically difficult choices to utilise and enhance state capacity to promote structural transformation. For many late-developing authoritarian regimes, it is when ruling elites face mass distributive pressures alongside severe resource constraints that they pursue development as a means of expanding the resources available for distribution to secure mass acquiescence ([Doner et al. 2005](#)).

However, a focus on domestic politics is insufficient. The second half of the chapter examines how late-late development has altered the challenge of structural transformation, and what this means for authoritarian regimes pursuing state-led development in the interests of political stability. Two major challenges stand out. First is the changing nature of the contemporary global economy, which is fragmented into global value chains with manufacturing driven by foreign investment, rather than new domestic capitalists. Second is the delayed demographic transition that gives rise to rapid, large-scale population growth and urbanisation, enhancing mass distributive pressures. The result is that authoritarian state-led development in the contemporary era faces the dual challenge of increasingly severe distributive pressures due to demographic growth at the same time as the state's ability to meet these distributive pressures is increasingly constrained by the global economy. The final section of the chapter conceptualises the three main

distributive resources that form the analytical focus throughout the book, namely access to land, employment and social protection.

Political Drivers of State-Led Development

Chapter 1 underscored the importance of the state to every aspect of structural transformation: agrarian transformation, economic diversification and industrial upgrading. The extensive literature on state-led development highlights three main factors that enable states to allocate rents productively, namely state autonomy, state capacity and cohesion within the ruling elite. First, states must be able to act autonomously of powerful societal interests. Agrarian transformation *and* industrialisation require a decisive split between the ruling and landed elite. Such a split enables the state either to press the landed elite to turn to capitalist production or to destroy it through land reform (Albertus 2015). Likewise, destruction of the landed elite removes a common obstacle to economic diversification, with landholders often opposing the trade and exchange rate policies required for infant industry protection, as well as the extraction of an agrarian surplus to support industrialisation (Haggard 1990, Byres 1991, Amsden 1992, Kay 2002). The state must also achieve a delicate balance of relations with capitalists, sufficiently autonomous to be able to monitor performance and discipline firms when this proves inadequate, yet also sufficiently embedded so as to be able to understand the challenges firms face and respond with policy solutions (Amsden 1992, Evans 1995).¹ Finally, for a state to extract an agrarian surplus and maintain low wages in pursuit of internationally competitive manufacturing, the state must also maintain some degree of autonomy from popular classes and, frequently, to suppress popular mobilisation (Byres 1991, Amsden 1992, Waldner 1999).

Second, state-led development requires state capacity, enabling states to implement their development plans. Many analyses of East Asian industrialisation have focused on the 'Weberian' state bureaucracies that prioritised meritocracy, technical competence and a sense of purpose, enabling the state to formulate and implement sophisticated industrial policies.² While most research focuses on lead agencies for industrial

¹ State intervention to create a capitalist class cannot be truly autonomous of the class interests of capital (Chang 2009). Rather, the key factor is the state's power over individual firms.

² Despite considerable corruption, key state agencies possessed high levels of technical expertise and sectoral knowledge (Moon and Prasad 1994, Evans 1995, Khan 2000). As such, pockets of effectiveness within the state are key, even if capacity is not uniformly high (Whitfield et al. 2015, Hickey 2023).

policy, the forms of state capacity required actually vary markedly between sectors (Centeno et al. 2017). For example, rather than particularly high levels of technical expertise, land reform and raising smallholder productivity place demands on the state's 'infrastructural power', namely its ability to reach out across national territory and implement policies on the ground (Mann 1984, 1986). As such, agrarian transformation in East Asia required an extensive network of state-employed agricultural extension workers that carried out land redistribution, advised farmers on production and distributed improved inputs (Amsden 1979, Moore 1984, Byres 1991, Mellor 2017).

Third, cohesion amongst the ruling elite is essential for state-led development (Doner et al. 2005, Vu 2010, Whitfield et al. 2015, Khan 2018). Elite cohesion enables ideological consistency and a clear vision for national development (Leftwich 2000, Mkandawire 2001, Vu 2010). Moreover, a cohesive ruling elite can direct resources towards long-term productive investments, such as building state capacity, infrastructure and industrial policy (Waldner 1999, Whitfield et al. 2015, Khan 2018). In contrast, where the elite is fragmented – for example, based on competing interests, ideological differences or ethnic divisions – resources are often diverted to buying the allegiance of potential opponents to secure short-term stability, while divisions undermine a coherent ideology and vision for development.

Most of the literature on state-led development focuses on the policies required for structural transformation and the features of successful states that enabled their success. Importantly, however, this raises questions regarding the political origins of successful state intervention. Why do some leaders aggressively pursue structural transformation, mobilising strong capacity to implement their plans, whilst in other countries, states are weak and their leaders beholden to narrow interest groups? The following sections identify two main factors. First, political centralisation and nation-building over the long-run process of state formation gives rise to state structures with the potential to play developmental roles. Second, the ruling coalition's willingness to mobilise and expand state capacity in the pursuit of development requires that elite threat perceptions align with structural transformation. These two processes are considered separately in the following discussion since these are conceptually distinct dynamics that may or may not overlap in practice. In some historical cases, political crises have led to rapid expansion of state capacity that rulers immediately put towards developmental purposes. However, in others, political centralisation produces the required state capacities, yet these latent capacities are unutilised for an extended period, awaiting a ruling coalition whose political survival strategies align with state-led development (Vu 2010).

State Formation, Nation-Building and State–Society Relations

The process leading to a capable and autonomous state is a long one, and the product of relations between state and society, on the one hand, and the state and the international system, on the other. State formation is fundamentally shaped by critical junctures such as war, social revolution and colonialism (Skocpol 1979, Mann 1986, 2012, Tilly 1992, Ertman 2005, Rueschemeyer 2005). In particular, capacity and autonomy arise when state formation results in political centralisation, which enables ruling elites to invest resources in increased state capacity.

A key turning point concerns how pre-existing political authorities responded to the rise of capitalism and the nation-state in Europe in the nineteenth century (Skocpol 1979, Migdal 1988, Waldner 1999, Wimmer 2018). The expansion of economic, and consequently political and military, power that accompanied capitalist development presented a fundamental challenge to authorities across the globe. Threatened with the loss of independence, ruling elites sought to centralise power, bureaucratising mediated states, redistributing property rights to initiate capitalist development and mobilising the masses through nationalist appeals (Skocpol 1979, Anderson 1991, Wimmer 2018).³ In doing so, leaders necessarily clashed with landed elites, on whose shoulders previous mediated states rested. In Prussia and Japan, leaders centralised sufficient power to drive through reforms, enhancing state capacity and initiating industrialisation. In contrast, where the nobility was able to resist modernisation, revolutionary movements in France, Russia and China upended the political system and expanded state powers by building mass inclusion states (Skocpol 1979, Goodwin 2001). In many cases, however, the weakness of existing rulers resulted in colonial conquest,

Quite simply, industrialization was late in coming to ‘backward’ countries because they were too weak to mobilize forces to inaugurate economic development and to fend off a wave of foreign aggression begun in the second half of the nineteenth century. Their weakness, moreover, arose from internal social conflict—ethnic, racial, regional, or class. (Amsden 1992, p. 12)

The end of the nineteenth century was also a critical juncture for nation-building. A key distinction can be made between countries in which political leaders had centralised power prior to the arrival of

³ In a ‘mediated’ state, state power is exerted through local notables who serve as state intermediaries, whereas in a bureaucratic state institutionalised networks link ‘the state to social classes and groups’ and the state takes responsibility for public goods provision (Waldner 1999, pp. 23–24).

mass politics at the end of the nineteenth century and those that had not (Waldner 1999, Wimmer 2018). Where centralised political systems existed, states developed the infrastructural power required for public goods provision and promoted linguistic integration (Wimmer 2018, p. 12). In the long run, state capacity and linguistic homogeneity supported nation-building and minimised the salience of ethnic divisions. In contrast, where centralised political authorities were absent, subsequent states lacked capacity to deliver public goods and were linguistically diverse, contributing to the politicisation of ethnicity and a challenge to national cohesion (Wimmer 2018). Whereas nation-building supported the development of an autonomous and capable state, ethnic politicisation often undermined state capacity and autonomy, as the state and the resources it controlled became the focus of inter-ethnic competition (Horowitz 1985, Jesudason 1989, Wimmer 2018).

The majority of Africa and Asia fell under European or Japanese colonial rule in the late nineteenth century, leaving contrasting legacies for post-independence states. The Japanese sought to integrate Korea and Taiwan into the metropole, investing in state administration, and agricultural and industrial production, and leaving a legacy of centralised authority and competent bureaucracy that proved vital to subsequent state-led development (Cumings 1984, Waldner 1999, Kohli 2004). In contrast, European colonialists in much of Africa and European-colonised Asia sought to govern and extract resources on the cheap, co-opting or creating 'traditional authorities' through indirect rule (Mamdani 1996). European colonialism also directly contributed to the creation of ethnically heterogeneous and divided states, organising mass migration to meet labour requirements, dividing populations among 'customary' authorities and selectively promoting certain groups over others (Horowitz 1985, Mamdani 1996, Gomez and Jomo 1999, Slater 2010, Boone 2014).

The wave of independence following the Second World War constituted another pivotal moment, providing some post-independence leaders with new opportunities to re-shape politics. Across East Asia, the Japanese withdrawal left a political vacuum, unleashing revolutionary movements that contributed to political centralisation and state-building through social revolutions or by forcing existing rulers to strengthen the state to ward off the communist threat. Slater (2010) shows that where unmanageable class and ethnic conflict combined, ruling elites were able to centralise political power and build particularly strong states in Malaysia and Singapore. Importantly, this shows that while ethnic diversity has often impeded political centralisation and state-building, where multi-ethnic elites face a severe threat to their collective security,

this can provide the motivation to centralise power. Consequently, ethnic heterogeneity is *not necessarily* an obstacle to political stability or developmental progress (Slater 2010, Stewart 2010, Wimmer 2018). In other instances, the impulse for state-building instead came from within state structures. For example, in the likes of Egypt and Peru, modernising military-bureaucratic elites seized power and conducted land reforms aimed at destroying dominant social classes in ‘revolutions from above’ (Trimberger 1978).

These multiple, overlapping processes resulted in highly divergent states in terms of their autonomy, capacity and cohesion, and consequently contrasting potential to lead the structural transformation of their economies. South Korea and Taiwan provide examples in which colonial legacies and post-independence politics greatly strengthened the state, providing an essential foundation for economic development. Building on the bureaucratic legacy of Japanese colonialism, elite ideological polarisation and mass repression led to the further centralisation of political power, resulting in capable and autonomous states in South Korea and Taiwan (Vu 2010). Rulers in South Korea and Taiwan decisively split from landed elites, opening the way for far reaching land redistribution that wiped out powerful potential opponents.⁴ States in Korea and Taiwan were heavily involved in primitive accumulation that supported the development of industrial capitalists through state land reform and control of the financial sector, with the result that at early stages, ‘capitalists were dependent on state largesse’ (Amsden 1992, p. 52, Woo 1991). Finally, the state utilised its coercive powers to suppress the peasantry and labour, limiting collective action, extracting an agrarian surplus and limiting wage costs (Amsden 1992, Waldner 1999, Chang 2009).

The contrast with Latin American countries such as Argentina, Brazil and Peru is instructive since contrasting histories of state formation resulted in very different states with less beneficial implications for structural transformation.⁵ Prior to the 1930s, the landed elite continued to control politics in many Latin American countries.⁶ Disruption to global trade during the Great Depression prompted many Latin American

⁴ In Korea, land reform was supported by the US military and implemented as the landed elite was marginalised during the Korean War (Byres 1991, Waldner 1999, Kohli 2004). Meanwhile, the Kuomintang’s retreat to Taiwan in 1949 resulted in an ‘ethnic conflict’ between the ruling and landed elite (Cheng 1990, Wade 1990, p. 232, Kay 2002, Albertus et al. 2018, p. 54).

⁵ Only a brief account is possible here. Kohli (2004) provides a useful account for Brazil, while Gereffi and Wyman (1990) and Thorp (1998) analyse patterns across Latin America.

⁶ The main exception being post-revolutionary Mexico.

countries to pursue state centralisation and industrial diversification through import substitution of basic manufacturing (Kaufman 1990, Ross Schneider 1999). However, while industrial capital and foreign investors gained political influence at this time, the landed elite blocked far-reaching land reform (Thorp 1998, Kay 2002, Albertus 2015). The concentration of landholdings meant the continuation of rural poverty and inequality, limiting the size of the domestic market, as well as impeding the transfer of an agrarian surplus to industry. By the 1950s, as the market for basic goods was saturated, governments promoted foreign investment as part of a push for secondary import substitution for capital and foreign exchange-intensive production for high-end consumers (Stallings 1990). However, this resulted in modest employment creation, condemning many to the informal economy (Weyland 1996, Thorp 1998, Kay 2002). While several countries, of which Brazil is perhaps the leading example, made progress with economic diversification, the political influence of industrial capital – particularly multinational firms – and labour movements prevented governments from disciplining firms and demanding the productivity improvements required for upgrading (Evans 1995). Instead, governments pursued a cycle of debt-fuelled import substitution, contributing to the 1980s debt crisis (Weyland 2004).

The literatures on state-led development and African politics are, for the most part, more pessimistic still about the prospects of African states making any positive contribution to agrarian transformation or economic diversification, much less industrial upgrading. According to this body of work, pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial state formation has undermined state autonomy, capacity and cohesion (Callaghy 1987, Herbst 2000, van de Walle 2001). Post-independence leaders inherited ethnically diverse countries in which state power depended heavily on neo-customary authorities (Mamdani 1996). Many post-independence leaders opted to maintain the status quo, rather than threatening the political order with the reforms required to build state capacity and instigate capitalist development (Boone 1992). As such, for many, rather than rational-legal bureaucracies of Weber's ideal type, African states are 'neo-patrimonial', combining the façade of the formal institutions of a modern state with the reality of highly personalised authority and informal politics (van de Walle 2001, Kohli 2004). Unsurprisingly, based on this diagnosis, the prospects for state-led development are not good.

While many African states undoubtedly face major challenges, these analyses tend to downplay the diversity that exists within Africa, as well as the significant progress that has been made in building states capable of playing important developmental roles in certain cases (Allen 1995,

Mkandawire 2001, Boone 2003, Whitfield et al. 2015). For some critics of this literature, the prevalence of clientelism and informal institutions is as much a reflection of the absence of structural transformation and capitalist development as an indication of anything distinct about African political systems (Khan 2010, Whitfield et al. 2015). Moreover, though there are certainly examples of state collapse, and economic and political crisis, this is far from uniform across a diverse continent and an extended period since independence. Notably, past research has identified examples of ‘centralised-bureaucratic politics’ in which strong authoritarian presidents centralised control over rent allocation and built relatively strong bureaucracies in response to political crises, providing the basis for political stability and rapid growth in post-independence Côte d’Ivoire, Kenya, Malawi and Tanzania (Allen 1995, Mkandawire 2001, Kelsall 2013).⁷

Since the turn of the Millennium, renewed interest in the role of the state in development has resulted in growing attention to countries where relatively high-capacity states have overseen periods of rapid economic development. Of particular prominence in these discussions is Ethiopia, which in many respects constitutes a leading candidate for state-led development in Africa. With a long history of a hierarchical state, Ethiopia was the only African authority that was able to centralise power and mobilise sufficient military and diplomatic resources to ward off European colonialism in the nineteenth century, defeating the Italian invasion of 1896 and, indeed, significantly extending its territory alongside the European ‘Scramble for Africa’.⁸ Moreover, Ethiopia in the 1970s experienced one of the few social revolutions on the continent, resulting in the eradication of the landed elite and the bureaucratisation of the state. The result was a state with greatly expanded capacity and territorial reach, and autonomy from social forces. Ethiopia shared with many of its African neighbours a legacy of ethno-linguistic diversity that presented a major challenge to nation-building. However, from the perspective of existing theory, the Ethiopian state was comparatively well placed to play a role in state-led development.

Authoritarianism and Developmental Orientation

The history of state formation shapes a state’s potential to promote structural transformation. Nonetheless, these processes on their own

⁷ The ultimate failure of these experiments with state-led development was as much the result of external economic shocks and structural adjustment as the limitations of African states (Mkandawire 2001).

⁸ Mussolini’s Italy did subsequently occupy Ethiopia for six years in 1935–1941.

offer little insight into why a ruling elite might tackle the politically challenging collective action problems involved in structural transformation, rather than, for example, merely using state capacity to enrich itself. Indeed, Ethiopia's poor economic performance in the twentieth century, despite what is, in certain respects, a positive legacy of state formation, clearly underscores that other factors are at play.

The approach taken in this book builds on the common simplifying assumption that, above all, leaders want to stay in power, and that their strategy for doing so derives from their perceptions of threat to their rule (Migdal 1988, Geddes 1994). Where ruling elites face a severe *collective* threat, they are likely to put aside personal interests and focus on their collective political survival. Under certain circumstances, the ruling elite's response to collective threats will align with the mobilisation of existing state capacity and investment in further state strengthening to promote structural transformation. For many early industrialisers, foreign threats provided the impulse for such elite collective action focused on strengthening the economy and retaining sovereignty (Skocpol 1979). Meanwhile in late developing East Asia, a combination of external military and internal revolutionary threats led elites to focus on structural transformation (Doner et al. 2005). The consolidation of the nation-state system following the Second World War has, by and large, reduced foreign threats. As such, severe domestic political threats – notably class and ethnic divisions rooted in histories of state formation – have been increasingly important as a motivation for elite collective action (Huntington 1968, Slater 2010). In particular, when authoritarian rulers face mass distributive pressures in the context of extreme resource shortages, this can provide the incentive to pursue state-led development in order to expand the resources required to secure mass compliance (Doner et al. 2005, Doner 2009).

This argument can be elaborated as follows. Rulers typically seek to consolidate power in the most straightforward way by forming alliances with and distributing resources to local elites who can be relied on to maintain order, for example the landed class in an agrarian economy, or ethnic and communal elites in multi-ethnic societies (Horowitz 1985, Waldner 1999, Boone 2003, Albertus 2015). It is only where such straightforward options are unavailable that leaders seek to secure direct control over the masses. Frequently, such a strategy is the result of splits between the ruling coalition and socio-economic elites due to divergent economic interests or social background, with states seeking to usurp socio-economic elites by establishing direct control over the popular classes (Trimberger 1978, Boone 2003, Albertus 2015, Albertus et al. 2018). In certain situations, however, *ruling and socio-economic*

élites may face sufficiently severe collective threats that they coordinate in the pursuit of mass control and the maintenance of political order (Slater 2010).

In either case, this raises the question as to how states can secure mass compliance. Following Etzioni (1975) and Slater (2010), rulers draw on symbolic, coercive and distributive state powers.⁹ For incumbents, the most desirable situation is one in which leaders can rely on normative appeals and symbols that underpin legitimate authority, reducing the need to employ coercive or distributive powers. Historically, leaders would invoke the divine right of kings and religion to enhance legitimacy, while subsequent regimes have turned to the symbolic powers of nationalism, Marxist-Leninism or anti-communism to legitimate authoritarian rule. Coercion, meanwhile, is central to state power and, from a Weberian perspective, a defining feature of a state. The ability to deploy physical threats and sanctions can be vital means by which regimes suppress opponents. Coercion may take high visibility forms – arresting political organisers or dispersing protests – or low-visibility and low-intensity forms including surveillance, harassment or denial of services that prevent the emergence of mass opposition in the first place (Levitsky and Way 2010). While symbolic and coercive powers are both important, however, many authoritarian regimes persist for years without widespread legitimacy, while rulers cannot rely on coercion exclusively and indefinitely (Skocpol 1979, Geddes 1999, Migdal 2001, Albertus et al. 2018). Instead, the state's distributive powers are essential to secure the mass acquiescence on which authoritarian regimes depend. Indeed, where rulers believe that their political survival depends on broad-based distribution, yet available resources are insufficient to meet these requirements, the ruling elite must act collectively in the pursuit of state-led development to enable mass distribution (Doner et al. 2005, Doner 2009).

This basic dynamic of developmental impulse as a response to distributive pressures can be deepened by incorporating the concept of 'coercive distribution' (Albertus et al. 2018). From this perspective, certain authoritarian regimes seek mass incorporation through 'far-reaching distributive policies that deliver basic necessities to the vast majority of the populace', frequently, though not always, displacing rival socio-economic elites in the process (Albertus et al. 2018, p. 4). In such circumstances,

⁹ Etzioni (1975) refers to remunerative rather than distributive power, as here. Etzioni's study focuses on the means by which leaders secure compliance within organisations, making a narrower focus on remuneration justifiable. For the purpose of analysing compliance with state power, however, this focus is broadened to distribution, where remuneration is only one potential means of distribution.

distribution is a top-down, pre-emptive initiative by rulers seeking to entrench their power, rather than a response to interest group demands. Rulers utilise coercive distribution to ‘enmesh’ the masses in relations of dependence, requiring the expansion of state infrastructural power and the re-routing of people’s survival strategies through these state structures.¹⁰ Distribution is intentionally broad-based, perhaps even universal, with a view to enmeshing as broad a section of the population as possible.¹¹ The result is that with the masses dependent on the authoritarian state for ‘their basic material necessities, their ability to individually defy or collectively mobilize against their rulers is severely compromised’ (Albertus et al. 2018, p. 2).

In an agrarian economy, in which land is the principal productive resource, land redistribution is the clearest example of coercive distribution, with many authoritarian regimes expropriating the landed elite and enmeshing the peasantry through the allocation of usufruct rights on state-owned land (Albertus et al. 2018, Albertus 2021). However, land reform cannot ensure mass compliance indefinitely. For smallholder farmers to use the land productively and translate this into improved livelihoods, they also require agricultural extension services and market access. Furthermore, population growth, diminishing returns in agriculture and urbanisation progressively undermine the redistributive potential of land reform (Platteau 2005, Reinert 2007, Boone 2014). Coercive distribution therefore requires a process of ‘upkeep’, resulting in continuous pressure for the expansion of distribution – in addition to or instead of land access – routed through state structures in order to maintain mass acquiescence (Albertus et al. 2018).

Where the ruling elite views mass distribution as essential to its own political survival, and the absence of easy revenues – such as those provided by natural resources – limits the regime’s ability to finance large-scale spending, there are strong incentives for leaders to pursue economic development to grow the pie, enabling the distribution that can maintain popular compliance (Doner et al. 2005, Doner 2009). Following land reform, this distribution is initially likely to take the form of agricultural extension services and improved agricultural inputs to raise productivity. However, the limits to agricultural production will inevitably necessitate a shift, first, to economic diversification and, subsequently, industrial upgrading as means of providing mass employment opportunities and improved living standards, alongside services such as

¹⁰ Vu (2010) describes a similar process of ‘controlled mobilization’.

¹¹ Coercive distribution therefore differs from clientelism, for which contingency and exclusion are integral (Stokes 2007, Hicken 2011).

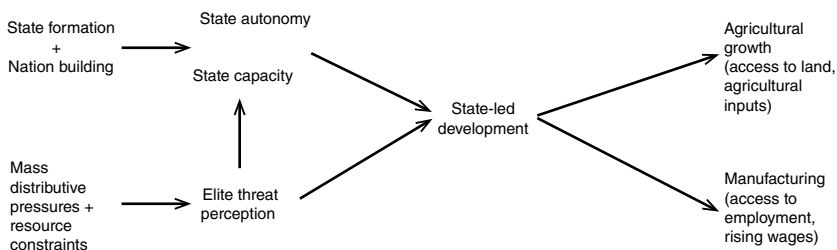


Figure 2.1 The political drivers of state-led development

urban housing, education and healthcare. To effectively support regime maintenance, each of these resources must be distributed through state and party structures, cultivating mass dependence on the regime. From this perspective, then, the commitment of authoritarian rulers to state-led development is inseparable from their efforts to ensure their own political survival by averting mass unrest. This basic causal sequence is outlined in [Figure 2.1](#).

This causal process can be illustrated with reference to some of the most successful instances of late development in East Asia. South Korea and Taiwan faced both a severe military threat from neighbours in North Korea and mainland China, respectively, *and* the major internal threat of communist revolution. Enabled by a split from the landed elite and spurred by the threat posed by the peasantry, ruling elites in South Korea and Taiwan conducted sweeping land reform in the post-war years which enabled them to consolidate control over the peasantry ([Wade 1990](#), [Amsden 1992](#), [You 2015](#)). To that end, leaders built state and party structures that established direct relations with smallholders, and used these to extend additional forms of distribution such as improved inputs and extension services required to raise agricultural productivity but also cultivate peasant dependence ([Amsden 1979](#), [Wade 1983, 1990](#), [Byres 1991](#)).¹² Similar dynamics underpinned industrialisation, with ruling elites motivated by ‘fear ... of a resurgence of political unrest and labor militance’, resulting in the promotion of labour-intensive industry to create employment and state pressure on firms to bargain wage increases for productivity improvements, driving industrial upgrading ([Amsden 1992](#), p. 208, [Doner et al. 2005](#)).

¹² These included *bao-jia* in Taiwan and patriotic or citizen’s *ban* in South Korea, originally introduced by the Japanese, but adapted by Korea leaders ([Read 2012](#)). Both organised small groups of households and were used for mass distribution and maintenance of political order ([Albertus et al. 2018](#)).

Moreover, the state invested in 'productivist' social policies, providing mass distribution, but also prioritising education and health for their contribution to a well-trained and healthy labour force, and employment-linked pensions used to provide additional resources for state investment (Holliday 2000, Gough 2004, Kwon 2004). The result is that 'while popular sectors have been politically subordinated and even brutally repressed ... they have rarely been economically ignored' (Doner et al. 2005, p. 331).

Mass distributive pressures also shaped the Malaysian government's focus on agriculture and economic diversification. Growing frustration amongst the Malay population at inter-ethnic inequality and a communist insurgency fundamentally shaped the early independence period from 1957. Upheaval was perceived as a collective threat to ruling and socio-economic elites resulting in 'a race to enmesh the masses' but in this case 'not to eradicate feudal elite rivals' (Albertus et al. 2018, p. 66). The United Malays National Organisation (UNMO) that dominated the ruling coalition sought to expand control of the Malay rural population by investing in infrastructure, irrigation and agricultural inputs (Scott 1985, Gomez and Jomo 1999). UNMO avoided land redistribution, which would have brought them into conflict with an important source of support amongst large landholders. However, the open land frontier enabled large-scale land allocations to smallholders (Albertus et al. 2018, p. 67). Rising agricultural productivity benefitted both large capitalist farmers and smallholders, consolidating support among capitalist farmers, control over smallholders and achieving rice self-sufficiency to support industrialisation (Scott 1985, Wong 1987, Henley 2012). Similar political pressures underpinned the state's push for economic diversification from the early 1970s. Labour-intensive manufacturing was prioritised to meet the growing demands of the majority Malay population and smooth inter-ethnic tensions (Jesudason 1989, Gomez and Jomo 1999, Welsh 2002). The result was one of 'the world's most impressive cases of export-led growth through low-cost manufacturing' (Doner et al. 2005, p. 354).

Once again, the contrast between these East Asian leaders' commitment to national development and the standard portrayal of African leaders is stark. Rather than the pursuit of state-led development in response to an existential threat, African rulers are presented as lacking in 'political discipline' (van de Walle 2001, p. 14), 'predatory' (Evans 1995) and motivated by the 'politics of the belly' (Bayart 1993). From this perspective, politics has become a winner takes all struggle amongst political elites to control state resources and particularly the foreign aid receipts and external trade that can be used for self-enrichment and

'systematic clientelism' (Bratton and van de Walle 1997, p. 65, De Waal 2015). While much of the African politics literature attributes these failings to the venal tendencies of rulers themselves, a number of studies focus on the structural constraints that shape rulers' behaviour. From this latter perspective, the challenge facing many African countries is not necessarily poor political leadership, but an acute form of the 'politician's dilemma' whereby strategies to address short-term political imperatives undermine developmental impulse (Geddes 1994, Migdal 2001). Post-independence leaders often faced broadly similar challenges to their colonial predecessors in trying to project state authority over national territory. Frequently they arrived at similar political strategies, relying on neo-customary authorities to maintain order, rather than displacing these intermediaries (Mamdani 1996, Boone 2003). Moreover, in their efforts to consolidate control over the state and its resources, leaders have often marginalised weak capitalists and undermined their incentives to invest and upgrade production (Boone 1992, Whitfield et al. 2015). For the most part, the revolutionary movements and foreign threats that prompted many East Asian leaders to undertake sweeping reforms have been lacking in Africa. Instead, rebel movements in Africa have been launched primarily in response to urban crises and have struggled to build support amongst the peasantry (Mamdani 1996, Mkandawire 2002).

Ethiopia under the EPRDF was therefore relatively unusual in facing a somewhat comparable set of incentives to many East Asian regimes. The TPLF originated in the student movement of the 1970s and spent nearly two decades mobilising the Tigrayan peasantry as part of a Maoist insurrection, forming the EPRDF coalition in the late 1980s and fighting its way to national power in 1991. While the EPRDF forces were militarily dominant by the time it took power, the EPRDF lacked a solid support base outside Tigray. The landed elite had been destroyed by the land-to-the-tiller reforms of the 1970s, while most non-Tigrayan ethnic leaders were either sceptical of or outright resistant to the new Tigrayan-dominated government, with the result that regime consolidation through the co-optation of existing elites was infeasible. As such, the EPRDF sought to build a 'coalition with the people' (Vaughan 2011, p. 619), pursuing a pre-emptive strategy to consolidate a political base amongst the ethnically diverse peasantry, by far the most numerous social group in the country. To do so, the EPRDF built on past land reforms and expanded mass provision of agricultural extension and social services. All these resources were distributed through an extensive network of party-state structures and thereby used to tie the people to the party-state.

From very early on, moreover, the EPRDF recognised the limitations of land and agriculture as a distributive strategy, with rapid population growth inevitably eroding this system of enmeshment. Consequently, the government prioritised industrial development, with a view to expanding employment opportunities, absorbing rural surplus labour and enabling an urban transition without disruption to political order. This project of state-led development was wrapped in a nationalist narrative of an Ethiopian Renaissance as a counter-balance to growing ethno-nationalism. The result was a relatively rare instance in which an African authoritarian ruling party viewed structural transformation as imperative to its political survival. The first part of this book elaborates this argument in detail. [Chapter 3](#) examines Ethiopian state formation and how this contributed to the creation of a relatively autonomous state with some capacity for state-led development, and the revolutionary struggle that brought the TPLF/EPRDF to office. [Chapter 4](#), meanwhile, turns to the political dynamics that shaped the EPRDF while in power and how the intersection of class and ethnicity contributed to elite vulnerability, and thereby the necessity of broad-based development.

Contrasting Explanations of State-Led Development

This theoretical argument builds on existing theories of state-led development, as should be clear from the works cited above, but expands on and diverges from them in certain respects. First, the approach differs from those who place a central emphasis on developmental ideology or political leadership in explaining the orientation of political leaders ([Leftwich 2000](#), [Soifer 2015](#)). A focus on the structural constraints facing rulers is essential to avoid an overly voluntaristic approach that may overstate the benign influence of, for example, Park Chung-hee in Korea and Lee Kuan Yew in Singapore, or, indeed, Ethiopia's Meles Zenawi or Rwanda's Paul Kagame. Ultimately, however visionary a leader may be, if the political context in which they operate is not conducive to their vision of development, they will be unable to realise their goals. This analytical focus on structural factors does not preclude acknowledgement of an important role for individual leaders and their political ideas. While elite threat perceptions can provide the incentives for leaders to pursue state-led development, this does not necessarily mean that they will do so. In the context of these structural constraints, leaders can play vitally important roles, setting out a vision for national development and the role of the state in it, or indeed undermining developmental prospects by pursuing strategies that undermine productive incentives. The approach pursued in this book, therefore, seeks to ground analysis

of individual leaders within the structural factors that shape their incentives to pursue state-led development.

A focus on mass distributive pressures also contrasts with much of the literature that argues that a key factor enabling state-led development in East Asia was the suppression of the popular classes, enabling governments to focus on long-term investments rather than short-term consumption (Deyo 1990, Waldner 1999, Haggard 2018). The implication of some of this work is that all redistribution is necessarily detrimental to structural transformation. But as Doner et al. (2005) argue, while redistribution *can* add to labour costs and undermine industrial competitiveness, certain forms of redistribution are perfectly compatible with economic development. For example, land reform can enhance productivity while placing the means of production in the hands of the peasantry (Albertus 2021); investment in education, health and pension schemes were part of a distinctive 'productivist' social policy across much of East Asia (Holliday 2000, Gough 2004, Kwon 2004); housing in Singapore contributed to mass compliance while subsidising labour costs and industrial competitiveness (Trocki 2006); and bargaining wage increases for productivity improvements can contribute to upgrading and rising living standards (Amsden 1992). While it is certainly true that the peasantry and working class were suppressed in many East Asian countries, such coercion is supplemental, rather than contradictory, to the pre-emptive distributive efforts of an authoritarian regime seeking mass compliance.

Another contrasting claim in the literature is that authoritarian regimes in East Asia sought to build performance legitimacy through rapid development in place of the process legitimacy of competitive elections (Castells 1992, Leftwich 2000, Campos and Root 2001, p. 3, Mkandawire 2001). While this focus on growth and distribution certainly resonates with the theory outlined above, it also raises several questions. Legitimacy is a notoriously difficult concept to pin down or to measure, and it is far from clear that many East Asian regimes or Ethiopia's EPRDF were necessarily considered legitimate by the majority of their populations. Indeed, many authoritarian regimes persist for extended periods without popular legitimacy (Skocpol 1979, Geddes 1999). Rather, what authoritarian regimes require is the active support of an influential minority and mass acquiescence. A focus on resource distribution and the way in which this binds the masses to the regime offers a much more tangible explanation for mass acquiescence than a general appeal to legitimacy.

As is no doubt evident from the preceding discussion, Doner, Ritchie and Slater's concept of 'systemic vulnerability' has been particularly

influential on the theoretical approach pursued in this book (Doner et al. 2005, Doner 2009). Doner et al. (2005, p. 328) hypothesise that states succeed in industrial upgrading when ruling elites face mass distributive pressures amidst extreme resource constraints, requiring leaders to take action to grow the pie in order to avoid ‘unmanageable mass unrest’. Moderate distributive pressures may cause leaders to invest in agricultural development and economic diversification, as in Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand. However, it is only when ruling elites in Singapore, South Korea and Taiwan were faced with ‘systemic vulnerability’ – mass distributive pressures, severe resource constraints *and* an external threat that necessitated military spending – that they successfully tackled economic upgrading. Despite important insights regarding elite threat perceptions and mass distributive pressures, this theory – as outlined in a rather short paper – remains ambiguous in certain respects and is in need of elaboration for present purposes. While placing causal emphasis on ‘popular pressures’, Doner et al. are rather ambiguous about the origins of these pressures, their nature and what forms of distribution are required to address them. First, the existence of mass pressures is taken for granted, rather than situating the need for mass incorporation in the context of elite splits or collective threats. Second, reference to ‘restive popular sectors’ (Doner et al. 2005, p. 327) suggests the importance of popular mobilisation and redistributive demands. However, as others have argued, heavily suppressed popular sectors in South Korea and Taiwan were not particularly vocal in making redistributive demands (Deyo 1990, Haggard 1990, Amsden 1992, Albertus et al. 2018). Rather state distribution was primarily ‘a supply-driven campaign for regime consolidation and social control, not a demand-driven attempt to curry popular favour’ (Albertus et al. 2018, p. 55). Third, systemic vulnerability is also somewhat ambiguous regarding the outcome it seeks to explain. The paper is presented as a means of explaining why some countries succeeded in industrial upgrading, while others did not. Yet, case studies on South Korea and Taiwan also present systemic vulnerability as an explanation for land reforms conducted in the early post-war period, long before any attempt at upgrading (Doner et al. 2005, pp. 341–342). Doing so raises the question as to whether this is a theory of industrial upgrading or development as a whole. Consequently, this ambiguity leads to uncertainty as to what resources are required to meet distributive pressures and at what points in the process of structural transformation. To address this gap, the final section of this chapter conceptualises the three main resources that are the focus of analysis in this book, namely the key resources required for the survival strategies of the majority of the population at different stages of structural transformation: access to land, employment and social protection.

Finally, the theoretical approach outlined above shares important commonalities with the growing body of work on ‘political settlements’, particularly in research on African political economy. Building on Mush-taq Khan (2010), authors have adapted Political Settlements theory to explain patterns of industrial policy, structural transformation and a range of developmental outcomes (Whitfield et al. 2015, Gray 2018, Khan 2018, Kelsall et al. 2022, Hickey and Sen 2023). This body of work directs attention to the underlying settlement or order that provides political stability and shapes elite incentives for contrasting development strategies. This political settlement, in turn, is based on the balance of power between contending groups within society and, in particular, the degree of cohesion and vulnerability within the ruling elite. Though sharing many points in common, the approach taken in this book diverges in certain respects from much work on political settlements. First, for Khan, and many others, elite vulnerability is considered detrimental to development since vulnerability prompts rulers to distribute rents to secure short-term survival rather than promoting long-run development (Khan 2010).¹³ This, of course, contrasts with the focus above on mass distributive threats as an important driver of elite collective action. Second, this body of work pays little attention to mass politics, with the main consideration being the extent to which masses can be mobilised by contending elites in their struggle for power. The control of popular classes and the threat they pose to ruling elites is, in contrast, a central concern of the theoretical approach taken here.¹⁴ Finally, political settlements theory focuses analytical attention primarily on the patterns of recent and contemporary elite bargaining. While undoubtedly important, the analysis tends to pay much less attention to the long run history of state and nation-building, which are key factors in the analysis in this book.

The Challenge of Late-Late Development

While this framework enables analysis of the factors shaping the structure of the state and the orientation of the ruling elite, it is, nonetheless, incomplete. A country’s development prospects are not only determined by domestic politics. Ultimately, however ‘developmental’ a regime may

¹³ Whitfield et al. (2015) are slightly ambiguous in this respect, highlighting Doner et al.’s arguments about elite threat perceptions (p. 99), but ultimately positing that the absence of elite vulnerability and contestation are key to economic transformation (p. 104).

¹⁴ In this sense, the book is more closely aligned with Kelsall et al. (2022) who foreground the ‘social foundation’ of the political settlement and the threat that this poses.

be, there remains the possibility that factors beyond its control might undermine progress (Mkandawire 2001). For states that aim to raise the living standards of their populations, the objective is clear – to shift production from low productivity, subsistence activities to high productivity skills-based activities that provide employment and decent wages. While understanding past paths of structural transformation is important to grasp the changes involved, it is also essential to acknowledge that such transformations take place in particular world-historical contexts. Late industrialisers have the benefit of being able to learn from the successes and failures of more advanced economies, but also face the challenge of catching up with a continuously advancing technological frontier (Gerschenkron 1962). Moreover, countries currently tackling the challenge of structural transformation face a fundamentally different context to that faced by the late industrialising countries such as South Korea and Taiwan, or even later examples such as Indonesia and Malaysia. The discussion now turns to the particular challenges facing countries tackling late-late development – namely the contemporary global economy and delayed demographic transitions – and how these enhance the challenge for authoritarian regimes seeking to maintain political power through rapid development and mass distribution.

Globalisation and Late-Late Development

The literature on state-led development suffers from a degree of ‘methodological nationalism’, with most studies emphasising characteristics of the state, industrial policy and the predominately domestic political dynamics that shape these. Yet state-led development has always been shaped by global economic processes, and the global economy has changed in important ways in recent decades that fundamentally reshape opportunities for structural transformation of the sort undertaken in East Asia.

An important feature of the contemporary global economy is the fragmentation of industrial production into global value chains that make up an integrated global system of production and division of labour (Gereffi 2005, Kaplinsky 2013). The offshoring and outsourcing of low technology, low-wage activities by multinational firms began in the 1960s, but accelerated since the 1990s as a result of the massive expansion of the global workforce due to: population growth and the integration of former socialist countries into the capitalist economy from the early 1990s; technological changes, particularly in communications, that enable the development of an integrated global system of production; and increased capital mobility resulting from economic liberalisation since the 1970s.

Trade agreements are an important factor shaping the structure of value chains and the pattern of industrial production. South Korea and Taiwan's initial steps in the manufacture of textiles and apparel were aided by preferential access to US markets, while protectionist quotas and tariff restrictions on imports to Europe and North America subsequently provided incentives for Korean and Taiwanese firms to out-source production to countries with lower labour costs and available quotas, such as Bangladesh, China and Vietnam (Gereffi 2018). In the last two decades, the United States' African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) and the European Union's Everything But Arms agreement have provided preferential quota and tariff-free access to a range of producers based in African and least developed countries, respectively. The result is that many countries have new opportunities to engage in export-oriented light manufacturing.

However, global value chains have important implications for countries taking initial steps in industrialisation. The tendency has been for lead firms in global value chains, based primarily in the advanced economies, to retain control of design, branding and marketing, where most value is concentrated, outsourcing the least profitable, labour-intensive manufacturing activities (Gereffi 1994, Kaplinsky 2013). Outsourced activities utilise widely available technology, with little potential for innovation, resulting in low-profit margins and high competition based on low-wage jobs that offer little potential to raise living standards. This is particularly the case for low-technology sectors, including apparel, which tend to be the first step into manufacturing for industrialising countries (Gereffi 2005, Kaplinsky 2013). Moreover, the fragmentation of production into value chains has meant that initial participation in low-technology assembly activities does not necessarily provide a firm foothold to expand into the rest of the value chain or to establish domestic production linkages, as has often been the case in the past (Reinert 2007, Kaplinsky 2013, Whitfield et al. 2015).

While most of the value chain literature focuses on manufacturing, similar processes shape some agro-industry, in particular horticulture and floriculture. European, US and, increasingly, also developing country supermarkets and buyers operate as lead firms in buyer-driven value chains, shaping what is to be produced and how (Dolan and Humphrey 2000, Barrientos et al. 2003, 2016). Integration into these value chains for producers, ranging from foreign and domestic investors hiring wage labour to smallholders working as contract farmers, can provide market access and new economic opportunities. However, relationships within the value chain are characterised by inequality, favouring lead firms, which demand high quality and low cost. The result is a tendency to

favour better off farmers able to invest in meeting exacting production standards and to impose downward pressure on wages and working conditions (Barrientos 2008).

Linked, in part, to the changing nature of global production systems is the changing role for foreign and domestic firms in structural transformation. For early industrialisers in Europe and North America, and late industrialisers in East Asia, manufacturing was dominated by domestic capitalists, with states actively promoting learning to acquire cutting edge technology, and providing incentives for firms to upgrade production to reach global competitiveness (Chang 2004). Prior to the Second World War, domestic firms in late developing economies in East Asia and elsewhere had already acquired some manufacturing expertise on which post-war state-led efforts could build, whether through colonial influence in Korea and Taiwan or émigré firms elsewhere (Eckert 1991, Amsden 2001). In contrast, and almost by definition, late-late developing countries currently attempting to promote industrialisation face the significant challenge that they lack domestic capitalists with manufacturing expertise (Amsden 2001). Nowhere is this more the case than in Africa where colonial regimes prevented the emergence of an indigenous capitalist class and where post-war industrialisation efforts tended to produce heavily protected and inefficient state enterprises (Berman and Lays 1994, Whitfield et al. 2015). In a context of late-late development, the productivity frontier for global competition has advanced so far – even in low-value, low-productivity roles that tend to be outsourced – that it is extremely difficult for emerging domestic firms to acquire the technological capabilities required to compete (Whitfield et al. 2015, Whitfield and Staritz 2021). Moreover, lead firms in global value chains tend to rely on existing suppliers that can be trusted to meet demanding requirements for quality and flexibility, making it very hard for new firms to break in and secure market access. The result is that rather than nurturing domestic firms to participate in global production, as with the likes of South Korea and Taiwan, later examples of industrialisation have all involved states targeting foreign investors and providing these foreign firms with incentives to relocate part of their production (Mortimore and Vergara 2004).

Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) can play a vitally important role in industrialisation, as an initial source of capital, as well as providing access to cutting edge technology, training, managerial expertise and market access. Indeed, FDI – attracted by low taxes and export processing zones – is credited with playing key roles in economic diversification, employment creation and export promotion across East Asia (Welsh 2002, Doner 2009). Yet, industrialisation through FDI promotion also

risks attracting footloose investors that operate as enclaves to take advantage of low labour costs, importing inputs for low-productivity assembly and thereby failing to establish linkages to the rest of the economy. Moreover, attracting globally competitive, capital-intensive production may have muted effects on employment creation and therefore do little to absorb surplus labour (Doner 2009, p. 13). Instead, it is by establishing linkages between FDI and domestic firms that FDI has the potential to make contributions to economic upgrading, mass employment creation and rising living standards. The comparative experiences of northeast and southeast Asia are instructive. South Korea and Taiwan strictly controlled capital inflows to promote domestic industry. Where FDI was allowed, it was directed to new priority industrial sectors through joint ventures with domestic firms, while local content requirements promoted transfer of technology and managerial expertise (Wade 1990, Chang 2004, Hauge 2019). In contrast, Malaysia's semiconductor industry focused for decades on downstream assembly work for multinational firms, with few linkages to domestic capital (Jesudason 1989, Gomez and Jomo 1999, Welsh 2002, Doner 2009).

The state therefore has a key role, not just in encouraging FDI inflows, but also supporting the development of domestic capitalists; actively promoting linkages between foreign firms and domestic suppliers; focusing on market access, technology transfers and training; and promoting clusters of industries that facilitate linkages (Lall and Narula 2004, Doner 2009). As Doner et al. (2005) argue, the state is more likely to be successful when regimes perceive that success in industrial upgrading, and the mass distributive resources it offers, is essential to regime survival. Yet, it would also be an exaggeration to conclude that the sole difference between Korea, which has succeeded in industrial upgrading, and Malaysia, which has not, is the intensity of the threats faced by those regimes. The changing global economy has also played a role, with the challenge involved in nurturing domestic firms to acquire technological capabilities and integrating with global value chains only increasing over time. The result has been that all 'the later entrants into globalised systems, from Malaysia to Mexico and Costa Rica, have gone the FDI route' of targeting lead transnational firms and encouraging them to relocate parts of their production to the host country rather than nurturing domestic capital (Lall and Narula 2004, p. 458).

These changes in the structure of the global economy therefore have important implications for ruling elites pursuing structural transformation as a means of meeting mass distributive pressures. Put simply, it is increasingly hard for states to deliver mass employment and rising living standards through reinforcing processes of agrarian transformation,

economic diversification and upgrading. Whereas the generation and extraction of an agrarian surplus was a key factor driving primitive accumulation in the past, global capital mobility now means that agrarian transformation is not essential for industrialisation (Bernstein 2004, 2009). The potential linkages between agriculture and industry are therefore likely to weaken, with manufacturing dependent on FDI rather than agrarian transformation, while manufacturing is largely export oriented rather than providing agricultural inputs. For Bernstein, the *agrarian question of capital* – the contribution of agriculture to primitive accumulation – has been resolved through access to global capital. What is left is the *agrarian question of labour*, namely whether capitalism is capable of ‘generating sufficient, and sufficiently secure, employment to provide a living wage to the great majority’ (Bernstein 2009, p. 251). The changing nature of the global economy presents serious concerns in this regard. Industrialisation through global value chains and FDI promotion frequently results in modest employment creation. Moreover, intense competition in low-productivity sections of value chains results in pressure from lead firms on price and flexibility that translates into low pay, long working hours, precarious working conditions and repression of worker organisations (Anner 2020). Consequently, diversification into manufacturing does not necessarily translate into improved social outcomes (Barrientos et al. 2011, Anner 2020).

The EPRDF’s attempts to promote industrialisation as a means of creating mass employment and maintaining mass compliance illustrate some of these challenges, as discussed in Chapter 6. Early on the EPRDF identified a pressing need for structural transformation in response to rapid population growth and the inability of agriculture to absorb surplus labour indefinitely. Concerted efforts to promote industrialisation from the early 2000s focused on domestic firms – both private and those owned by party and state – to produce initially for the domestic market and subsequently to move into exports. However, these firms and the state agencies responsible for designing industrial policy incentives struggled to build the technological capabilities required for global competition and to secure market access in global value chains (Whitfield and Staritz 2021). Latterly, in an attempt to accelerate industrial development and generate desperately needed employment, the government changed track to an approach more in line with the structure of the contemporary global economy, building industrial parks in an attempt to attract foreign investors. Despite major achievements in attracting some leading global firms, progress in employment creation was far too limited and too late to address what was by the mid-2010s a growing distributive crisis.

Demographic Transitions and Late-Late Development

The changing nature of the global economy presents challenges for incumbents seeking to use employment-intensive growth to expand the resources available for distribution and thereby maintain political control of the masses. However, late-late industrialising countries concurrently face the challenge of rapid demographic growth that results in particularly intense distributive pressures.

Early industrialisers undertook structural transformation alongside a demographic transition from high fertility and high mortality to low fertility and low mortality. In the first countries to undergo this transition, changes were gradual, with progressive improvements in public health and sanitation leading to gradual reduction of mortality, which subsequently prompted a gradual reduction in fertility. The faster decline in mortality than fertility led to population growth (Dyson 2013, Livi-Bacci 2017). The demographic transition in many countries in the global south has taken a distinct form. Following the Second World War, there has been a marked and more rapid decline in mortality due to technology transfer and improved public health. Fertility rates, in contrast, have declined more slowly, resulting in a far more rapid and large-scale population increase (Dyson 2011, 2013, Livi-Bacci 2017, Benanav 2019). Indeed, developing countries have had peak annual population growth rates more than double those of the advanced economies that underwent the demographic transition earlier (Livi-Bacci 2017, pp. 167–169). The result is that there are currently around three billion people aged under 25 in the world, of whom 89 per cent live in the Global South. This is more than entire world's population in 1950 (Benanav 2014, p. 105).

While declining mortality is, of course, a great success, the economic and political ramifications of rapid population growth are mixed. A large population offers the potential benefit of a large domestic market that can be an important factor supporting industrialisation through economies of scale. Moreover, declining fertility rates following earlier decline in mortality leads to a temporary increase in the working age population. Many East Asian countries benefitted from this 'demographic gift' of low dependency ratios at a key stage of industrialisation (Bloom and Williamson 1998). However, the demographic dividend resulting from a large working age population is far from automatic. Even in the first countries to undergo the demographic transition – where more modest population growth coincided with industrialisation – international migration to the 'new world' provided an important means of relieving population pressure (Amsden 1992, Livi-Bacci 2017).

In contemporary developing countries, population growth is larger and opportunities for international migration considerably more limited than in the past. While some have expressed optimism that African economies may soon benefit from a demographic dividend along East Asian lines (Garcia and Fares 2008), this would require creation of sufficient jobs to absorb the youth bulge. Thus far, the dominant picture in much of Africa is instead one of ‘catastrophic youth unemployment’, informality and vulnerability, with the result that this young population may be ‘more of a threat than an opportunity’ (Meagher 2016, pp. 483–484, Benanav 2019).

These demographic changes also have important implications for urbanisation. Based on the earlier European experience in which industrialisation took place in parallel with urbanisation, the common assumption has long been that urbanisation was a product of this economic transformation.¹⁵ Yet the experiences of Latin America and Africa, where urbanisation has rapidly outpaced industrialisation, have led to the contrasting conclusion that urbanisation is primarily a product of the demographic transition and that economic growth only moderately influences the pace of urbanisation (Dyson 2001, 2013, Fox 2012, Gollin et al. 2016, Benanav 2019). The main historical barriers to urban expansion were poor public health that resulted in mortality exceeding fertility rates, and limited supplies of food and fuel. Improvements in public health, agriculture and energy around the industrial revolution enabled large-scale urbanisation first through rural-urban migration and then urban population growth. For early industrialisers, industrialisation at around the same time went some way to creating employment for this growing urban population. The experience of urbanisation in late developing countries has, again, diverged from that of the ‘early urbanisers’ with more rapid and large-scale population growth resulting in far more rapid and large-scale urban expansion that has outpaced industrialisation (Dyson 2013, Benanav 2019, Fox and Goodfellow 2021).

The combination of the growing difficulty of employment creation through industrialisation in the contemporary global economy, and an increasingly populous and urbanised society therefore presents particular challenges for regimes seeking to maintain power through mass distribution, as outlined in Figure 2.2. For late-late developing countries, even where domestic political drivers align with the promotion of state-led

¹⁵ While there are important examples of rural industrialisation, including Taiwan and China’s Township and Village Enterprises, industrialisation has tended to be an urban phenomenon.

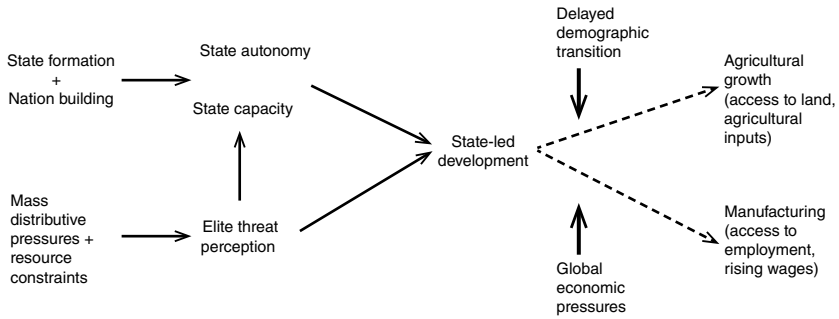


Figure 2.2 The distributive challenge of late-late development

development, population growth places intense pressure on available land resources and employment opportunities, while the global economy constrains the ability of states to deliver mass employment through industrialisation. Structural transformation may not therefore automatically follow from elite efforts to pursue state-led development.

The question then arises as to what happens when a regime that has sought to consolidate its power through coercive distribution fails to generate the resources needed to meet these distributive pressures? Under what circumstances will failure to meet mass distributive pressures lead to regime collapse, and when can regimes turn to other measures, such as repression, to maintain power? The literature on authoritarian durability suggests that while distribution is of vital importance, it is not necessarily the case that unmet distributive demands lead to regime change. Where there is a high degree of elite cohesion and authoritarian regimes draw on the full powers of the state, incumbents are likely to be able to resist even powerful opposition movements pressing for their removal for a period. Instead, splits within the ruling elite that erode the elite's ability to mobilise these powers almost always precede regime collapse (Skocpol 1979, O'Donnell et al. 1986, Haggard and Kaufman 1997, Levitsky and Way 2010, Slater 2010).

A common finding in this literature is that strong political parties are key to authoritarian strength, while powerful parties in control of strong states tend to be the most durable authoritarian regimes (Geddes 1999, Brownlee 2007, Levitsky and Way 2010, Slater 2010, Lachapelle et al. 2020). Political parties play a particularly important role in elite collective action since they regulate access to power between ambitious individuals, mediate intra-elite conflict and provide elites with the possibility of future advancement and collective security (Brownlee 2007, p. 39, see also Geddes 1999, Magaloni and Kricheli 2010). This is

particularly the case at the often problematic moment of leadership succession and generational change in leadership, when the potential for elite divisions and factional disputes is at its peak (Huntington 1968). Clear rules for succession and established mechanisms for compensating those not selected can be vital to retaining elite cohesion (Brownlee 2007). In contrast, where parties are unable to play this role, offering little hope for advancement or collective security, the inevitable result is factionalism and elite conflict. Where this occurs, some elite factions see political advantage in allying with the opposition (Brownlee 2007). Social movement theorists highlight such elite fractures as a key factor shaping opportunities for mass mobilisation, with elite divisions raising the possibility that some part of the elite might align with protestors and reducing the likelihood that protests could be forcibly suppressed (Tarrow 1996, 1998). In the absence of such divisions, where parties are able to maintain elite collective action, opposition will have few opportunities to challenge the regime through either elections or mass protests (Brownlee 2007).

In Ethiopia, the challenge of rapid population growth leading to rural land shortages and youth landlessness was already apparent by the early 1990s. Agricultural intensification through productivity growth and extensification through the expansion of cultivated area served to ease these pressures for a period, as discussed in Chapter 5, but could not stall this demographic process indefinitely. For the EPRDF government, industrialisation and mass employment creation was viewed as the only solution to this growing distributive crisis. As such, limited progress in industrial development constituted a major problem, manifest in mass landlessness and underemployment for rural youth, and mass un- and underemployment in urban areas. While Ethiopia is, from a demographic perspective, in its demographic 'window of opportunity' (Hailemariam 2019, p. 380), politically, this translated into a distributive crisis rather than a demographic gift. Mass protests began in 2014 and 2015, sparked by state expropriation of peasant landholdings to make way for urban expansion, investments and infrastructure projects. However, these protests soon spread, first across Oromo and subsequently across much of the rest of the country, against an authoritarian regime that had failed to deliver. To understand the impact of these protests, however, it is necessary to turn to elite politics. The EPRDF's ascent to power and maintenance of political order while in office was rooted in a high degree of elite cohesion based on a collective response to political threats. The 2012 death of Prime Minister Meles Zenawi, who had centralised his hold on political power since 2001, left a political vacuum and emerging divisions within the ruling elite. The result

was that the mass distributive crisis that came to the fore from 2014 provoked a crisis amongst the ruling elite, with contending factions taking a very different view of the degree to which the protests represented a threat to their political survival or an opportunity for political advancement. This ambiguous response enabled the spread of the protests, and the combination of mass protests and elite conflict ultimately led to the EPRDF's collapse.

Distribution and Control

Before proceeding to the analysis of the Ethiopian case, the final task is to specify the distributive resources that a ruling coalition might use to secure the acquiescence of popular classes, how the nature of resource distribution changes with structural transformation and the pressures that late-late development places on such forms of distribution. The analysis that follows in the book focuses on the three main forms of state distribution that have the potential to play central roles in most people's survival strategies at different points in the process of structural transformation. First, in an agrarian economy, access to land and the agricultural inputs required to make that land productive, are the key resource and a central focus of many regimes' distributive strategies. Second, as structural transformation and urbanisation proceed, and land and labour become increasingly commodified, access to jobs and improved working conditions gradually replaces access to land as the main survival strategy. Third, as the majority of the population becomes dependent on markets for their survival, de-commodification through access to social protection becomes increasingly important, supplementing agricultural incomes, and providing protection from labour market risks and support at vulnerable stages of the lifecycle (Esping-Andersen 1990, Polanyi 2001).

Access to Land as a Distributive Resource

Control over the distribution of land has long been a key means of establishing and maintaining political authority in agrarian societies (Moore, Jr. 1967, Huntington 1968, Skocpol 1979, Mann 1986). In mediated states, land grants were invariably the means of securing the compliance of intermediaries who maintained local order in exchange for control over the agrarian surplus. Equally, land reform has been a key means of consolidating state power and forming a centralised bureaucratic state (Migdal 1988, Albertus 2015, Albertus et al. 2018). Land reform was pursued by both revolutionary movements, such as in China and

Vietnam, and counter-revolutionary regimes in South Korea, Taiwan and parts of Latin America to eliminate the threat of powerful elites and to consolidate control over the peasantry.

In Africa, land tenure has also been a key means by which the colonial and post-colonial state sought to project authority into rural areas. Land constitutes 'a politicized resource or political asset, rather than a politically neutral market commodity' (Boone 2014, p. 310). Radical land redistribution has been comparatively rare, limited to the likes of Ethiopia and Tanzania. Nonetheless, access to land and other agricultural inputs has been an important distributive resource across the continent since colonial times, forming what Seekings calls an *agrarian welfare regime* (Seekings 2008, 2012). State intervention often takes the form of the adaptation and reinvention of 'neo-customary' tenure in which the relation between the state and its citizens remains mediated through neo-customary authorities (Platteau 2005, Seekings 2012, Boone 2014). Moreover, by providing agricultural extension, and controlling product markets through parastatals, colonial and post-colonial governments sought to develop agriculture while also limiting state responsibility for social spending by placing the burden for supporting relatives on family and communities. Through such an agrarian regime, states seek to integrate farmers into market-oriented production, while inhibiting the commodification of land and labour (Seekings 2008, p. 26).

While political influence over land allocation is a potentially powerful tool, land is only one factor of production alongside labour and capital. Assessing the impacts of land distribution must take into account the broader relations of production within the agrarian economy. Moreover, state land distribution is frequently accompanied by provision of agricultural inputs and extension services required to raise productivity on the land, as well as facilitation of market access for produce. That is to say, the land question is inevitably bound up with the agrarian question. Equally, it should be noted that land access and the agricultural division of labour is highly gendered (Razavi 2003, Whitehead and Tsikata 2003), with the result that the state control is also likely to be highly differentiated by gender.

A distributive strategy based on access to land is also vulnerable to population growth, whether the result of fertility exceeding mortality or through migration into an area. A locality may be able to absorb a growing population initially without a significant reduction in living standards either as a result of high initial land availability or through efforts to raise agricultural productivity. Ultimately, however, agriculture faces diminishing returns, with the result that relevant state or customary authorities

will be forced to restrict access to land – by wealth, age, gender or ethnicity – thereby limiting its distributive reach, or face declining landholdings and living standards (Platteau 2005, Boone 2014). This has important political implications since, as Boone notes,

Africa is changing from a continent with open land frontiers into one of widespread and intensifying land pressure and scarcity. As this happens, rural land tenure regimes come under strain. Because the territorial and institutional underpinnings of state authority are partly grounded in these land regimes, land tensions and land-related conflict destabilize established forms of political order. Ties that bind farming populations to the state weaken. (Boone 2014, p. 330)

Access to land for agricultural livelihoods is also coming under increasing pressure from urban expansion. Rapid population growth translates into urban population growth and intense demand for access to urban land for housing, business and infrastructure (Fox and Goodfellow 2021). Meanwhile, the reallocation of land rights from rural to urban users – whether through market processes or state intervention – is often politically charged. As structural transformation and urbanisation proceed, therefore, the value of land as a distributive tool necessarily declines: urban land becomes more valuable than rural land, while access to jobs supplant access to land as the main survival strategy for the majority of the population. The result is that a ruling coalition seeking to secure the compliance of the masses must find alternate distributive mechanisms to maintain popular acquiescence.

Access to Jobs as a Distributive Resource

As argued above, industrial policy is the key tool available to regimes seeking to promote economic diversification that creates jobs and industrial upgrading that enables expansion into higher productivity, higher wage sectors that contribute to rising living standards. While the state's attempts to mediate access to jobs in an industrialising economy are likely to entail weakening state control over the popular sectors compared to state control of land in an agrarian economy, the ability to shape the creation and allocation of job opportunities is nonetheless a powerful political tool.

The potential and limitations of industrial policy in the context of globalisation is therefore an important *distributive and political question*. Though states are undoubtedly constrained by global trade rules, economic competition and the power of lead firms, states do retain the ability to influence the development, operation and distribution of

benefits within global value chains and thereby the dynamics shaping employment creation and working conditions (Barrientos et al. 2011, Anner 2020). State intervention can take a wide range of forms. States may take a direct role in production through state-owned enterprises or help to establish domestic private firms by mobilising large-scale capital, as with the Korean conglomerates (*chaebol*), or by providing credit and training to Small and Medium Enterprises, as in Taiwan (Cheng 1990, Campos and Root 2001). Increasingly, however, the trend has been for the state to promote FDI and to find ways of linking foreign investors to domestic suppliers. The literature highlights three main functions of state governance in value chains (Gereffi 2005, Alford and Phillips 2018). Facilitation involves assisting firms to navigate value chains, including through the provision of infrastructure, export processing zones and negotiating trade agreements. Regulation is used to place limits and restrictions on firms with a view to preventing negative externalities. Finally the state plays a role in distribution, shaping the distribution of rents within the value chains through a range of policies such as social policies, taxation and labour regulation (Alford and Phillips 2018, pp. 102–103).

In spite of these tools, the constraints imposed by value chains in both basic manufacturing and agro-industry are considerable. Global population growth has led to a massive increase in the global workforce relative to the needs of capital, resulting in widespread unemployment, underemployment and the erosion of workers' bargaining power (Benanav 2014). As such, commercial pressures and the power of lead firms tend to result in downward pressure on producers to raise quality while reducing costs, very often resulting in insecure and flexible labour requirements, and poor working conditions (Barrientos 2008). The resulting jobs may not be such a prized distributive resource to secure mass compliance after all. Moreover, like land access, job prospects in value chains are highly differentiated by gender and age. In particular, a recurrent tendency is for firms in horticulture and light manufacturing to seek a labour force of young women, who are favoured for their 'nimble fingers' and the perception that they are more passive in labour relations (Barrientos et al. 2003). In contrast, the less numerous managerial and supervisory posts are more likely to be dominated by men.

Access to Social Protection as a Distributive Resource

The expansion of state social protection has long been associated with capitalist development and the need to respond to market risks by de-commodifying the means of subsistence (Esping-Andersen 1990,

Polanyi 2001). As such, unemployment insurance, child benefits and pension schemes, amongst others, have been used to provide protection against risk and vulnerability across the lifecycle. Equally, however, states have long been motivated to expand social protection to maintain political order and limit unrest, from the Poor Laws of nineteenth century England to social transfers in contemporary South Africa, Brazil and China (Seekings and Nattrass 2005, Ngok 2013, Ravallion 2015, Saad-Filho 2015).

The dominant form of social protection in Europe, Asia and Latin America has been contributory social insurance linked to labour market participation. States extended segmented social insurance provisions to secure the acquiescence of workers across Latin America, the generosity of which was heavily stratified based on their relative bargaining power (Mesa-Lago 1978, Weyland 1996). In several East Asian countries, meanwhile, 'productivist' social policy was used as an investment in economic development, as well as a distributive resource (White and Goodman 1998, Gough 2004, Kwon 2004). However, the expansion of contributory social insurance is linked to the expansion of the formal labour market. In many developing countries, high levels of informality translate into low social insurance coverage.

The emergence of social transfers as a global policy priority is important here (Von Gliszczynski 2015, Hickey and Seekings 2019). Policy innovations in countries such as Brazil, India, Mexico and South Africa in the 1990s led to the creation of major social transfer programmes delinked from prior financial contributions. Such schemes range from poverty-targeted cash transfers to lifecycle benefits such as pensions and child grants to cash-for-work schemes. The distributive role played by these social transfer programmes has often been to fill the gap left by a lack of access to land or jobs for sections of the population. In South Africa and much of Latin America, lack of access to land as a result of unequal landholdings, and highly segmented labour markets have meant that broadly distributed social transfers to mothers of young children and the elderly have been used to maintain social peace and avoid more difficult redistributive choices (Seekings and Nattrass 2005, Seekings 2012, Saad-Filho 2015). Given the common recourse to agrarian welfare regimes in many African countries, Seekings (2012) argues that it is only when access to land becomes unsustainable through population pressure that African governments turn to other forms of distribution such as social protection. However, perhaps the key factor shaping such distributive pressures is the inability of urban labour markets to absorb rural surplus labour. State intervention is particularly likely where these pressures culminate in distributive crises

that highlight to incumbents the failings of existing forms of distribution and the potential for such a crisis to threaten the regime (Lavers and Hickey 2021).

The remainder of the book applies this theoretical approach to the analysis and understanding of the EPRDF's attempts to maintain power and its ultimate disintegration. This begins in Chapter 3 by examining the historical process of the formation of the Ethiopian state and the revolution of the 1970s.

3 Ethiopian State Formation and the Revolutionary Origins of EPRDF Dominance

Chapter 3 examines how Ethiopian state formation resulted in a particular state structure, which afforded both opportunities and challenges to the EPRDF when it seized power in 1991. The analysis briefly examines the history of the state over the past 2,000 years, particularly focusing on the period since 1855, which is widely regarded as the beginning of the modernisation of the Ethiopian state, and the revolution of the 1970s. This history has already been the subject of extensive debate in the literature. As such, the chapter provides a brief synthesis of key issues relevant to the book's analytical focus, rather than attempting complete coverage of this long and complex history.¹

This analysis makes two main contributions to understanding the EPRDF and its project of state-led development, both of which tend to be downplayed or neglected in the existing literature. The first is to show that long-run state formation and the revolutionary changes of the 1970s forged many features of the Ethiopian state – such as a high degree of state autonomy and a relatively high state capacity – that subsequently enabled the EPRDF's state-led development project, even if these state structures were not initially utilised for developmental purposes under the Derg. More problematically however, Imperial state-building and the revolutionary period also resulted in an extremely linguistically and culturally diverse population, which was increasingly politicised along ethno-nationalist lines. Second, the chapter emphasises the EPRDF's origins in the revolutionary events of the 1970s and examines how this history shaped the party. The Emperor's overthrow in 1974 resulted in competition for political dominance between multiple revolutionary movements, including one that was overtaken by the military in urban areas and a range of ethno-nationalist insurgencies

¹ For the Imperial era see [Zewde \(1991\)](#) and [Crummey \(2000\)](#); for the Derg, see [Clapham \(1988\)](#) and [Tareke \(2009\)](#), for the Ethiopian student movement, see [Zewde \(2014\)](#) and [Zelege \(2019\)](#); for the origins of the TPLF, see [Young \(1997\)](#), [Berhe \(2008\)](#) and [Berhe \(2020\)](#).

that started in rural areas and sought to fight their way to the centre. These revolutionary origins shaped the EPRDF's political strategy for gaining and maintaining power, and the structure of the party itself, as it transitioned from an ethno-nationalist movement to a national government.

The chapter begins by providing an overview of the origins of the Ethiopian state before focusing on the period of state-building and territorial expansion in the second half of the nineteenth century under the threat of European colonialism. The analysis then turns to Emperor Haile Selassie's attempt to centralise power and transform the Ethiopian state in the twentieth century, followed by the revolutionary processes unleashed by the failings of this attempted modernisation. The remainder of the chapter considers the competing revolutionary projects carried out by the Derg and the ultimately victorious Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF), highlighting the legacies of the revolution in terms of the structure of the state, nation-building and state-society relations.

The Origins of the Ethiopian State

The roots of the Ethiopian state can be traced at least as far back as the Aksumite civilisation in contemporary Tigray and Eritrea in the first century AD. Though a detailed discussion of this long history lies outside the scope of the book, a brief summary provides essential context for subsequent analysis, particularly regarding the centrality of land to political power, the limits of state infrastructural power and the complex origins of Ethiopia's ethno-linguistic diversity.

For many observers, a key factor distinguishing Ethiopia from most of Africa was the early adoption of the ox-drawn plough that underpinned an agrarian social hierarchy (Goody 1971, Tareke 1991, McCann 1995, Crumme 2000). Moreover, following King Ezana's conversion to Christianity in the fourth century, the link to the Coptic Church in Alexandria was key to legitimising state power (Erlich 2002). Aksum was succeeded by kingdoms to the south, first the Zagwe kingdom and, from 1270, the restoration of kings claiming descent from the mythical tenth century BC King Menelik I, son of King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba. A consistent challenge to the exercise of authority was contestation between the Emperor's attempts to centralise power and centrifugal pressures of the nobility (Ellis 1976, Donham 2002). The Imperial state's infrastructural power was constrained by limited technology, and the mountainous territory that is divided in many places by deep ravines and rivers that were all but impassable in the rainy season.

Consequently, the Emperor relied on the nobility and church to maintain local order. Vital to this relationship was the Emperor's power to allocate *gult*, or fiefs to members of the nobility and the church (Crummey 2000). *Gult*-holders had the right to demand tax, tribute and labour from tribute-paying peasants (*gebbar*) in a particular territory in exchange for keeping the peace, dispensing justice and providing military support to the emperor. *Gult* rights were overlaid on diverse land tenure regimes of which the most common was *rist*. Under *rist*, peasant farmers held rights to a share of community land through descent from a common ancestor along male and female lines.² The allocation of *gult* rights was therefore the central means of sustaining the power of a mediated state comprising the Emperor, the landed nobility and the church.

The empire gradually expanded its territory up to the early sixteenth century into the western highlands and as far south as parts of Bale (see Figure 3.1), while trade networks extended into areas beyond Imperial control (Tareke 1991, Crummey 2000). In doing so, this expansion brought the Christian kingdom into contact with other societies, including the Muslim Adal Sultanate based in Harar, and Oromo populations to the south (Hassen 2015). The result was contestation over territory over an extended period and, from the early sixteenth century, the reversal of the Christian kingdom's expansion. The first major challenge was presented by Ahmad ibn Ibrahim, commonly known as Ahmad Gagn, of the Adal Sultanate who conquered most of the Christian Empire from 1529. While Ahmad was eventually defeated with Portuguese support in 1543, the Christian empire was severely weakened, contributing to a major expansion of the Oromo from Bale and Sidamo from the early sixteenth century (Zewde 1991). Through a combination of migration and assimilation of non-Oromo groups, Oromo populations established themselves as far north as Wello and Tigray, and as far west as Wellega (Crummey 2000, Hassen 2015). The result was that Ethiopian emperors in the seventeenth century ruled over a much-reduced territory centred on a new capital at Gondar, while the Oromo were divided into different kingdoms and societies, including integration into parts of the Christian Empire. Weakened by conflict and religious divisions, Ethiopian emperors were reduced to mere pawns in the hands of powerful regional leaders during the 'Era of the Princes' from 1769 to 1855 (Clapham 1969, Crummey 2000).

² On *rist* see Hoben (1973). Under other tenure systems such as *chiguraf gwoses* and *diessa* farmers claimed a share of community land based on residence rather than descent. See Bauer (1973), Bruce (1976) and Joireman (2000).

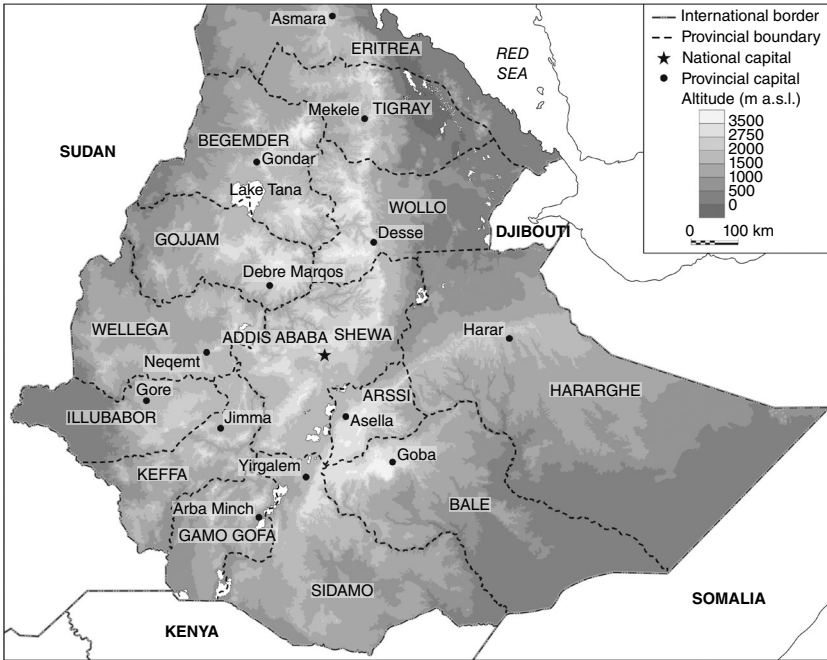


Figure 3.1 Ethiopian provinces as of 1963
Source: author/Manchester Cartographic Unit.

State Centralisation, Expansion and External Military Threats

Most historians date the formation of the modern Ethiopian state to the reigns of Emperor Tewodros II (1855–1868), Yohannes IV (1872–1889) and Menelik II (1889–1913) (Zewde 1991). The expansionist claims of Egypt (1875–1876), and then Italy and Sudan highlighted the technological deficiency of the Ethiopian armies, and the need to centralise political power internally and to secure foreign manufactured weapons through trade. The result was the southward expansion of the empire to secure lucrative resources for commodity exports and a fundamental re-orientation of the Ethiopian state. This expansion, in turn, left a lasting legacy in terms of the territorial contours of the state and the challenge of nation-building.

A common critique of the Imperial land tenure system is that tenure insecurity undermined agricultural production incentives for both *gult*-holders and *rist*-holders, leading to agrarian stagnation. *Gult*-holders had

no direct role in production and only had rights to extract tribute for as long as they retained the Emperor's favour, providing strong incentives to extract rather invest in productivity. Likewise, *rist*-holders had rights to a share of community land, but not particular parcels. Periodic land redistributions and endless litigation provided a constant threat of loss of access to existing landholdings (Hoben 1973, Rahmato 1984, Donham 2002). Consequently, the main means by which the state could increase economic production was to expand control over greater tracts of low productivity agriculture, rather than intensification of existing production. This expansionist dynamic was reinforced by the need for imported weapons to maintain independence from foreign aggression and to establish dominance against domestic rivals. Territorial conquest south of the Blue Nile and Awash rivers provided access to slaves, ivory and, particularly, coffee, key export commodities that increased state revenues and financed imports.

The provinces of Gojjam and Shewa, the southernmost points of Ethiopian territory, were best placed for this southern conquest. Shewa expanded its territory from Amharic-speaking areas in the north of the province into Afaan Oromo speaking areas to the south from the second half of the eighteenth century (Zewde 1991). In 1882, Shewa defeated Gojjam at the Battle of Embabo to secure Shewan dominance over the south. During the 1880s, Menelik II, as king of Shewa, built on this victory to establish Shewan control of Oromo-speaking societies in Nekemte, Jimma, Illubabor and Arssi and the lucrative trade opportunities that these afforded. Following Emperor Yohannes' death in battle with the Sudanese, Menelik became Emperor and signalled the southward shift in political and economic power by moving his capital from Ankober in north Shewa to the newly established city of Addis Ababa in 1891.

Meanwhile, the external threat in the north continued to grow. The Italians seized the port of Massawa when the Egyptians were defeated by Yohannes IV in 1875–1876. Italy subsequently established a colony in Eritrea in 1890 and invaded Ethiopia in 1896. The remarkable victory of the Ethiopians at the Battle of Adwa was a testament to the centralisation of power under Menelik, a brief moment of unity within the Ethiopian nobility, as well as strategic errors by what was one of Europe's weakest powers (Zewde 1991). Controversially, Menelik decided not to build on this victory by removing the Italians from Eritrea, instead signing a treaty that ceded the territory in exchange for Italian recognition of Ethiopian sovereignty. The treaty left Ethiopia landlocked and divided the Tigrigna-speaking population between colonial Eritrea and Ethiopia's Tigray province. Nonetheless, victory secured independence

for a further four decades and ensured that Ethiopia's subsequent brush with European colonialism was brief.

Following Adwa, Menelik raced with neighbouring European colonialists to expand Ethiopian territory to the west, south and east (Zewde 1991). Ethiopia's borders were settled in treaties with France, Italy and the United Kingdom in 1897 and 1900. In doing so, Menelik incorporated into Ethiopia some areas which had been under Ethiopian control in the near or distant past, some which had long been in contact with Ethiopia through trade links and raids, and some which were well beyond any previous Ethiopian claims. Thanks to the vast and rapid territorial expansion, Addis Ababa – at the southern tip of the Ethiopian empire when established – found itself at the geographical centre of the country by the early twentieth century.

Menelik pursued distinct strategies for incorporating new territories, ruling through tribute-paying local leaders where they submitted peacefully and establishing direct control where they faced resistance (Markakis 1974, Tareke 1991, Donham 2002). In contrast, in remote areas of the west, south and east the state established very little state presence despite its territorial claims. Where previous leaders had resisted Menelik, their removal necessitated new forms of control in order to extract resources. Supported by a string of military garrisons that would provide the seed of many towns in the south, the Emperor expropriated vast amounts of land and allocated *gult* rights to churches and military leaders (*neftegna*) (Crummey 2000). While the farmers were, like in the north, known as *gebbar*, unlike in northern Ethiopia, *gebbar* did not have *rist* rights, but were tribute-paying tenants and subject to labour service. Responsibility for keeping the local population in line and extracting tribute often fell to local leaders who were given economic privileges in return (Markakis 1974). The result was the imposition of highly exploitative class relations overlaid on ethno-linguistic divisions between the *neftegna* – generally Amharic or Tigrigna-speakers from northern Ethiopia or co-opted local leaders – and the southern *gebbar*.

A major legacy of the Menelik era was therefore to lay the foundations of an ethnically, religiously and linguistically diverse state. However, it is important not to impose contemporary ethnic identities retrospectively onto the past. Today's ethnic identities are the product of political projects of nationalist and ethno-nationalist mobilisation over the following century. Ethiopian state-building in the early twentieth century was an elite project, which sought legitimacy in terms of the divine right to rule of the descendants of Solomon and Sheba, rather any claims to rule on behalf of a national population. Moreover, in overwhelmingly rural societies where claims to land and livelihood depended on local relationships

within the descent group and with little in the way of literacy or media, transport or communication links, identities were overwhelmingly local rather than pan-ethnic (Tareke 2009). This applies just as much to the Amharic and Tigrigna-speaking north, which was divided into provinces and *awraja* (counties), as it did in the south, where speakers of Afaan Oromo and other languages were divided into distinct polities and communities (Hassen 1990, Keller 1995, Michael 2008, Tareke 2009). The late nineteenth century state expansion, meanwhile, meant that Amharic and Tigrigna speakers – who shared linguistic and religious ties and previously formed the majority – came to be a minority as the country incorporated many groups with few if any shared linguistic, religious or cultural ties. Ethnic identities were by no means pre-determined at this point. However, with the subsequent global spread of nationalism as a form of political organisation and as leaders embraced the idea of ruling on behalf of ‘the people’, this diversity would inevitably present a challenge to the construction of a cohesive nation-state.

Menelik’s reign was, therefore, a defining moment for the Ethiopian state, centralising political power and securing sovereignty at the Battle of Adwa, as well as expanding territorial claims to contemporary borders. Menelik also undertook a number of state reforms, establishing a National Bank, cabinet government and formal education. However, the Emperor suffered a stroke in 1906 that incapacitated him until his death in 1913. The fragmentation of political power during the succession struggle slowed reforms under Lijj Iyasu (1913–1916) and Empress Zewditu (1916–1930), who governed with her regent, Ras Tafari. Over time, Tafari gradually consolidated power and became Ethiopia’s de facto ruler. He was eventually crowned Emperor Haile Selassie following Zewditu’s death in 1930.

Modernisation and Stagnation

Haile Selassie’s reign, like those of his predecessors, was shaped by the dual challenge of maintaining Ethiopia’s independence from European colonialists, and centralising power domestically. Initial efforts at state-building were curtailed by the Italian occupation of Ethiopia in 1936–1941. However, the Italians’ revenge for the loss at Adwa was short lived, with Ethiopian resistance fighters and the British military removing the Italians during the Second World War. While the Emperor made significant progress in strengthening the state on his return to power, his reforms were ultimately constrained by resistance from the nobility, while nation-building efforts contributed to growing ethno-political mobilisation.

Under Haile Selassie, Ethiopia began the transition from a mediated state – in which the Emperor ruled through the nobility – to an absolutist monarchy with a centralised state bureaucracy (Zewde 1984). Ethiopia's first constitution in 1931 and a revision in 1955 enhanced Imperial powers over the nobility, and created a national standing army, rather than relying on the private armies of provincial leaders. Following the Italian occupation, the Emperor introduced the position of Prime Minister, re-established ministries, and re-organised the country into 14 provinces, 100 *awraja* and some 600 *wereda* (districts) (Clapham 1988, p. 102). A centrally appointed and salaried official was placed at each level of this administration, in contrast to the past practice of using *gult* as a reward for service (Markakis 1974, Crummey 2000, Donham 2002). A necessary corollary of this growing state bureaucracy was increased taxation, with standardisation of the tax structure and the move to payment in cash rather than in kind. Likewise, the government expanded education to staff the growing bureaucracy, including the establishment of Haile Selassie I University in 1961 and scholarships for students to study in Europe and North America.

Despite major changes, the result was far from a Weberian ideal-type bureaucracy. State positions were often allocated not on merit but as patronage, enabling the Emperor to balance contending factions amongst the nobility (Clapham 1969, Markakis 1974, Donham 2002). Moreover, there remained limits to state infrastructural power, even in the central highlands, where, below the *wereda*, there was not even 'the fiction of modern administration' (Ottaway 1977, p. 85). Instead, the *chika shum*, the hereditary village headman, recruited from the landholders remained the key figure linking the *wereda* to the local population (Tareke 1991).

Bureaucratic reforms also aimed to promote agricultural commercialisation, expand commodity exports and increase state revenues, which primarily derived from recently incorporated areas in southern Ethiopia (Donham 2002). While the *neftegna-gebbar* system and allocation of *gult* rights had proven an effective means of establishing political control over the south, it did not serve economic requirements. Characterised by absentee landlords and insecure tenancy arrangements, there was little incentive to invest in production (Brietzke 1976, Rahmato 1984). Meanwhile, the state's reliance on intermediaries meant much of the surplus never reached the central state. State bureaucratisation went some way to replacing the role of the nobility, but taking advantage of the economic opportunities afforded by international trade – particular for coffee – required exerting direct control over producers (Crummey 2000).

Reforms in the 1940s and then the 1960s sought to end labour and tribute requirements, eliminate *gult* and covert land to freehold, and establish direct taxation. In northern Ethiopia, however, reforms were fiercely resisted by both the landed elite, who resisted the attempt to remove their powers and privileges, and the peasantry, who feared loss of *rist* rights (Tareke 1991). The first revolt, known as the *Weyane*, took place in southern and eastern Tigray in 1943, sparked by diverse grievances related to recent reforms and which was ultimately crushed with the support of the British army and air force. Similarly, the passing of an agricultural income tax in 1967 was abandoned after a year of rebellion in Gojjam. In southern Ethiopia, meanwhile, reforms failed to improve conditions for the *gebbar* and in some cases made them worse as a result of the conversion of *gult* rights to private property, fraudulent land expropriations and the failure to end labour obligations (Tareke 1991, Zewde 1991). These factors, along with Somalia's push for creation of a Greater Somalia including southeast Ethiopia, contributed to a major rebellion in Bale from 1963 to 1970 that was eventually suppressed by the military (Tareke 1991, Østebø 2020a).

From the 1960s, the student movement and several donor agencies highlighted the failings of the agrarian economy and the need for land reform (Cohen 1985, Oosthuizen 2020). Yet, it was only in 1966 that the Emperor paid any attention to smallholder agriculture with the creation of the Ministry of Land Reform in 1966 and a focus on raising smallholder productivity in the third five-year plan (1968–1973). However, attempts to regulate tenancy arrangements – let alone far-reaching land reforms – were blocked by the nobility that dominated parliament. For ministry officials, the Emperor merely established a ‘fake’ ministry to placate donors and students, rather making a meaningful attempt to reform the agrarian system (Oosthuizen 2020, also Brietzke 1976). Ultimately, the Emperor was unable or unwilling to push through agrarian reform in the face of a powerful landed nobility, which had much to lose. The result was that by the end of the Imperial era, the prevalence of tenancy still mapped closely on to the pattern of nineteenth century state expansion. As shown in Figure 3.2, tenancy was very low in northern provinces of Begemdir, Gojjam, Tigray and Wello where *rist* was common. In contrast, in the recently incorporated south, tenancy was as high as 73 per cent in some provinces.³ Shewa, in turn, represented the dividing line, with *rist* common in the historic northern core of the province and tenancy prevalent in the more recently incorporated south.

³ The lower frequency of tenancy in Sidama is likely due to *enset* cultivation by owner-cultivators (Rahmato 1984).

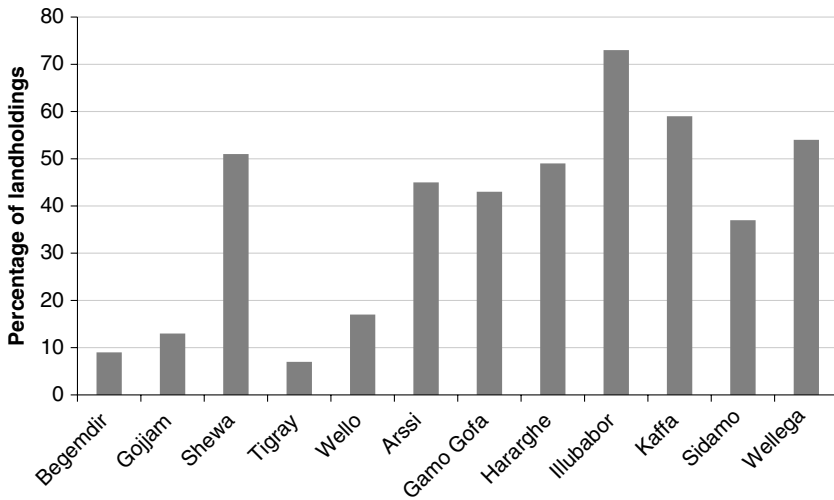


Figure 3.2 Rented landholdings by province (1966–1968)
 Source: author, based on [Markakis \(1974, p. 128\)](#).

Instead, the main economic priority for the Imperial government was to use foreign investment to promote import substitution and some exports. This included foreign investments in large-scale, ‘modern’ agriculture producing sugar and cotton in the Awash Basin, and sesame in Humera, north-western Ethiopia ([Ashami 1985](#), [Zewde 2008a](#), [Puddu 2016](#)). These investments avoided disruption to the political order in the highlands but necessitated displacement of pastoralists from grazing lands and water access. These plantations were also linked to new foreign-owned factories for agro-processing for domestic markets, including sugar factories at Wenji-Shoa and Metehara, and textile factories at Bahir Dar and Akaki ([Clapham 1988](#), [Zewde 1991](#)). By 1974, however, the industrial economy remained miniscule, and any incipient processes of capitalist transformation that had begun were ‘stopped in their tracks’ by the revolution of 1974 ([Clapham 1988](#), p. 164).

Haile Selassie inherited from Menelik a legacy of an extremely linguistically and culturally diverse population. Attempts to modernise the state apparatus, to expand educational opportunities, and improvements in transport and communications all served to highlight this diversity and the great inequality between ethno-linguistic groups. Moreover, as Haile Selassie sought to modernise his administration and supplement his divine rights with popular legitimacy, this raised

the question as to what sort of 'nation' Ethiopia was.⁴ The nation-building challenge was further enhanced by the federation of Eritrea with Ethiopia in 1952, and the Emperor's subsequent move to integrate the region as an Ethiopian province in 1962. The Emperor sought to build an Ethiopian nation in continuity with longstanding principles of Imperial state-building that rested on the expansion of the Amharic language and Orthodox Church. Access to state employment, services and the legal system required fluency in Amharic, while the development of other written languages was forbidden in an attempt to promote a single national language and identity (Cohen 2006, Hussein 2008). While this undoubtedly contributed to ethnic inequality, it did not necessarily mean that all non-Amhara were barred from state positions. Rather non-Amhara had to learn Amharic, and often adopt Orthodox Christianity and Amhara names in order to advance within the system (Clapham 1988, Michael 2008).

Haile Selassie's legacy is therefore a mixed one. As regent and in his initial decades as Emperor he took major strides in transforming and strengthening the state, as well as restoring Ethiopia's independence following the Italian occupation. However, in the last decades of his rule, the aging Emperor lost the will for reform and failed to drive through the changes that might have resulted in greater economic dynamism or equality.

Imperial Collapse and the Competition to Control the Revolution

To many observers, it was clear by the 1960s that the 'future of the existing traditional monarchies [including Ethiopia's] is bleak' (Huntington 1968, p. 191). Indeed, growing dissatisfaction amongst the military, the civil service, the student population, urban workers and the peasantry, and the failure of the Imperial regime to take the far-reaching measures required to address these grievances culminated in the revolution that began in 1974.

The process leading to 1974 was long and complex.⁵ A failed coup by the Imperial bodyguard in 1960 punctured the Emperor's image of invincibility and sparked the subsequent student movement (Clapham 1988, Tareke 2009). Likewise, peasant rebellions in Tigray, Bale,

⁴ The 1955 Constitution outlined the 'Rights and Duties of the People', at the same time as underscoring the absolute and divine rights of the Emperor.

⁵ For contending explanations of the revolution, see Halliday and Molyneux (1983), Markakis and Nega Ayele (1986), Clapham (1988), Kebede (2011), Tareke (2009) and Zeleke (2019).

Gojjam, Wello and Gedeo highlighted inequality and economic stagnation, while providing one of the movement's main slogans: 'land to the tiller' (Tareke 1991, Zewde 1991). The 1973 famine in Tigray and Wello that is estimated to have killed 200,000 also served to delegitimise a regime that failed to respond. Furthermore, the union with Eritrea forced the national question to the fore and led to the establishment of the secessionist Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF) in 1961 whose rebellion grew into a major conflict, stretching the military and fostering divisions.

Throughout the 1960s and early 1970s the student movement within Ethiopia and at universities in Europe and North America was a central focus of resistance to the Imperial regime and a source of ideas on how to reshape state and society (Tareke 2009, Zeleke 2019). While Haile Selassie had taken a personal interest in expanding educational opportunities, for many students, exposure to the outside world highlighted how Ethiopia had fallen behind not just the advanced economies, but also many African former colonies. Moreover, many students found that education did not necessarily lead to the employment opportunities that they had expected (Markakis 1974). Inspired by African independence and the US civil rights movements, students engaged in annual mass demonstrations from 1965, as well as vigorous debate in newspapers and journals that increasingly drew on Marxist and anti-Imperialist theories (Zeleke 2019). The growing threat posed by the movement inevitably led to state repression, forcing many leaders into exile.

The student movement came to focus on two fundamental questions that shaped the revolution and, indeed, Ethiopian politics through to the present day. The first was the land question and the need to address the inequality and stagnation of the agrarian economy. The second was the national question concerning the interpretation of Ethiopian history and how to structure politics in an ethnically and linguistically diverse country. Particularly influential was a famous speech by a student, Walleligne Makonnen (1969), in which he argued that for members of the diverse ethnic groups 'to be an Ethiopian, you will have to wear an Amhara mask'. The ensuing debates were dominated by Stalin's essay on the National Question and his definition of nations, nationalities and peoples (Zeleke 2019). Though the majority of those involved agreed on the necessity of self-determination for ethnic groups, the main dividing lines concerned whether the national question was merely a manifestation of class oppression or whether addressing the national question was essential to overcoming class oppression.

The revolution itself began as a series of relatively minor events in early 1974 that snowballed, culminating in the removal of the Emperor

in September. The first was a mutiny by an army division in Negelle Borana in January over food rations and salaries that sparked unrest in other military units (Clapham 1988, Zewde 1991). This was followed in February by strikes by teachers and taxi drivers, and a general strike in March, all supported by the students. As urban areas were paralysed by unrest, the lower ranks of the army selected a committee of divisional representatives named the *Derg* to coordinate the military's demands. From June onwards, the *Derg* conducted a 'creeping coup' involving 'the slow but systematic erosion of imperial power culminating in the disposition of the emperor' (Zewde 1991, p. 234). When Haile Selassie was finally detained, the *Derg* took power. As is common following regime overthrow, the Emperor's removal provoked a contest for power. Indeed, the *Derg* was internally divided, and faced considerable opposition from the urban groups – the students, teachers and unions – that had launched the revolution, and the nobility who were threatened by it. Key *Derg* leaders moved quickly to eliminate opposition and consolidate the regime's control over society. Despite much bloodshed, it never quite succeeded.

Mengistu Hailemariam rose from a junior member of the *Derg* to the sole leader by 1977, eliminating his rivals one by one. The new regime also quickly moved from its initial position, which espoused Ethiopian nationalism and support of the Emperor, to a radical socialist outlook and a full frontal attack on the ancien régime (Clapham 1988). The first move in this direction was in November 1974 when the *Derg* executed some sixty members of the aristocracy and senior military officials. This was followed in early 1975 by the nationalisation of the financial sector, private enterprises, and, as discussed in the following section, rural and urban land reform. Land reform eliminated the economic base of the nobility, and initial attempts by former governors of Tigray and Gondar to resist the new regime by organising the Ethiopian Democratic Union were subdued by 1977.

The *Derg*'s turn to socialism was heavily influenced by the student movement, including returning students from Europe and North America (Clapham 1988, Zewde 1991). The student movement crystallised into two sharply divided parties, which competed to form the Marxist-Leninist revolutionary vanguard. These were MEISON (All Ethiopia Socialist Movement) that critically engaged with the *Derg* from 1975 and the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party (EPRP), which resisted the military takeover. From 1976, the EPRP began a campaign of urban terrorism, assassinating MEISON and regime officials, while the *Derg* moved to eliminate the EPRP in a period known as the Red Terror. The *Derg*'s bloody campaign forced EPRP remnants to withdraw from

urban areas, and the Derg proceeded to eliminate MEISON, which it had come to view as a threat (Zewde 1991).

As is often the case, the weakness of the Ethiopian state following the revolution was seen as an opportunity by neighbouring states (Skocpol 1979, Clapham 1988). The Somali army invaded in 1977 claiming south-eastern Ethiopia, which was incorporated under Menelik and contained a large Somali-speaking population. Despite rapid Somali advances, the tide turned as a result of Ethiopian mobilisation and the Soviet Union's decision to end its support to Somalia and switch allegiances to the Derg (Patman 2009). With Soviet and Cuban support, the Ethiopian army removed Somali forces from Ethiopia by early 1978.

By 1978, Mengistu Hailemariam had gone a considerable way to consolidating his position, eliminating the nobility, urban opposition and the Somali threat. With the Derg's attention elsewhere, however, by this time a range of rural insurgencies were well established across the country. The result, as Tareke (2009) argues, was competition between multiple revolutionary movements that were divided by the national question. The Derg took a nationalist stance, rejecting self-determination for Eritrea and other ethnic groups, and viewed the national question as a diversion from class struggle.⁶ Having consolidated control of urban and many rural areas, the regime sought to extend its control and eliminate its rivals. In contrast, a range of rural insurgencies, some of which began before 1974, sought to fight their way to power. For the most part, these groups were ethno-nationalists that favoured self-determination up to and including secession.

The strongest insurgencies were in Eritrea. The ELF launched an insurrection in 1961 in response to Haile Selassie's annexation of Eritrea and achieved considerable military success (Pool 1998). However, the ELF subsequently fragmented along ethnic lines and suffered major reversals in the late 1960s (Woldemariam 2018). Several splinter groups merged to form the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) in 1972 (Pool 1998). Both the ELF and EPLF benefitted from the diversion of revolutionary upheaval and the Somali conflict, extending their territory across much of Eritrea. Following the end of the Somali conflict, however, the Ethiopian military focused on Eritrea and came close to eliminating both groups. The ELF never recovered as a major force, while the EPLF managed to resist repeated attacks. After years of stalemate and in coordination with the Tigrayan People's Liberation

⁶ The Derg acknowledged the right to self-determination in the 1976 Programme of the National Democratic Revolution (Clapham 1988, p. 199), but retreated from any talk of regional autonomy following the Somali conflict.

Front (TPLF), discussed below, the EPLF wore down the Ethiopian army, securing full control of Eritrea in the late 1980s and subsequent independence.

Another ethno-nationalist insurgency that pre-dated the revolution is the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF). Despite forming the largest ethno-linguistic group in Ethiopia, Oromo ethno-nationalism arose relatively late on. Haile Selassie's efforts to build a centralised state provided an important impulse to Oromo ethno-nationalism through access to education, state bureaucracy and imposition of Amharic. As [Baxter \(1978, p. 290\)](#) argues, the 'new pan-Oromo consciousness was generated in the army, the University and the Parliament itself'. An important step was the creation of the Mecha and Tulama Self Help Association formed to promote Oromo identity in 1967. Alarmed, the Imperial regime banned the organisation and arrested its leadership. Nonetheless, Mecha and Tulama provided the inspiration and many of the members of what became the OLF, which was founded in late 1973 in Bale and Hararghe. While the EPLF and TPLF benefitted from the distraction of the Somali conflict, the OLF instead found itself caught in the midst of the war, and subsequently relocated its base to Wellega in western Ethiopia ([Keller 1995](#), [Woldemariam 2018](#)). Though the OLF made some gains against the Derg, these did not compare to those of the EPLF and TPLF in the north. The OLF remained militarily weak by 1991 when the Derg was removed from power.

Competing Revolutions: The Derg's Military Marxism

The Derg not only ended seven hundred years of the Solomonic dynasty, but also transformed the economic, social and political basis of the country. Among its first and most significant acts, the Derg nationalised all rural land in March 1975, one of the most radical and far-reaching land reforms in the world. However, neither land reform nor the resulting transformation of the agrarian structure was set in stone from the beginning. While the need for some agrarian reform was widely acknowledged, there was considerable debate as to the best way forward. For revolutionaries, radical land reform was essential to promote equality, while for moderates the principal objective was the promotion of agricultural productivity through limited land redistribution and privatisation ([Cohen 1985](#), [Oosthuizen 2020](#)).

The decision to pursue a radical land reform was heavily shaped by the student movement ([Tareke 2009](#), [Zelege 2019](#)). Moreover, the Derg's decisive break from the Imperial regime – symbolised by the November 1974 execution of leading aristocrats – enabled land reform as a means

of destroying the economic basis of the nobility, which posed a powerful obstacle to state authority (Clapham 1988). In late 1974, Zegeye Asfaw – a former official in the Ministry of Land Reform that had failed to secure any changes under the Imperial regime – was approached by two of the radical faction of the Derg officers for advice. These officers were quite clear that, 'We don't want to make amendments every year. We want to have an ultimate law to end the feudal regime' (Zegeye Asfaw, cited in Oosthuizen 2020, p. 28).⁷

The resulting proclamation nationalised all land, and distributed usufruct rights to peasant households up to a maximum limit of 10 hectares (a limit that was rarely reached in practice), as well as prohibiting sales, rental, inheritance, mortgaging and wage labour to prevent land consolidation and labour exploitation (PDRE 1975a). Land was to be redistributed every 2–3 years to take into account demographic changes. Moreover, the rural land reform was followed by the nationalisation of urban land in July 1975 (PDRE 1975b). According to Zegeye, the intention was to put an end to the 'counter revolution' by landlords who also dominated urban land ownership and were thought to be regrouping to 'sabotage the revolution' (Oosthuizen 2020, p. 45). Finally, the few large-scale agricultural investments, mostly foreign owned, were turned into state farms.

Peasant Associations were established beneath the wereda as means of 'creating a new political and social organization in the countryside', incorporating the administrative and judicial functions of the *chika shum* and effectively forming another tier of state administration (Ottaway 1977, p. 80, Rahmato 1984, Clapham 1988). According to official figures, by 1977, 24,700 Peasant Associations had been established with 6.7 million members (Ottaway 1977, p. 79). In addition, the Derg sent campaigns of high school and university students to bring the revolution to the countryside, while conveniently removing an influential group from the cities as the Derg consolidated power (Ottaway 1977).

While land reform was undoubtedly influenced by socialist ideology, nationalisation was a prime example of *coercive distribution* whereby rival elites are displaced and the state consolidates its control over the peasantry (Albertus et al. 2018). The revolution inevitably led to 'an enormous upsurge in popular political mobilisation, which needs to be channelled and restricted in the post-revolutionary period' (Clapham 1988, p. 9). Land redistribution and the expansion of state infrastructural power through peasant associations, urban dwellers' associations

⁷ The nature of the landed class and the relevance of feudalism to Ethiopia has been hotly contested (see Cohen 1974, Ellis 1976 and Crummey 1980).

and mass organisations aimed to consolidate the regime's control of the urban and rural masses.

Implementation of these radical reforms was remarkably thorough, with the exception of parts of Eritrea and Tigray where Derg authority was challenged by competing revolutionaries. A 1979/80 survey found that peasant holdings covered 87 per cent of the cropland area, with collective and state farms making up the remainder, a stark contrast to the prevalence of tenancy pre-revolution (Rahmato 1984, p. 72). Land reform secured significant popularity in the south where agrarian relations – overlaid on ethnic divisions – were extremely exploitative. The main impact was not so much about land distribution, since most farmers continued to cultivate similar holdings, but rather eliminating the exactions of the landed elite (Rahmato 1984). In the north, previous tenure regimes were generally less exploitative and land reform less popular. Indeed, the Derg's top-down approach to land reform at times alienated northern peasants (Clapham 1988, Young 1997). Nonetheless, state ownership meant the abolition of *gult* and fit with key principles of previous northern tenure systems – that community members had the right to a share of community land, rather than individual rights to a particular plot (Hoben 2001). Land reform transformed the agrarian structure from one of considerable heterogeneity in the Imperial era towards the homogeneity of peasant production (Rahmato 2006).

While land reform improved the circumstances of the rural population, it also removed the mechanism of surplus extraction based on the nobility. The result was an urban food crisis that necessitated further reforms to provide food for the cities (Clapham 1988). The Agricultural Marketing Corporation consequently required farmers to provide fixed quotas of crops at low prices. While this ensured a supply for urban areas, it removed farmers' production incentives and imposed considerable hardship (Clapham 1988). From 1983 onwards, there were attempts to promote collective agriculture through producer cooperatives and villagisation, aiming to achieve economies of scale, enhance control over agricultural production and support conscription for the armed forces (Clapham 1988).

The Derg's industrial strategy likewise entailed bringing industrial production of any substantial scale under state ownership, nationalising the small number of existing factories from their foreign owners (Clapham 1988). Industrial expansion, meanwhile, rested on financial and technical support from aligned socialist countries, with a tendency towards a small number of large, symbolic projects aimed at domestic supply, including the Mugher cement factory, a textile mill in Kombolcha and

a tractor factory in Nazret. Industry remained a small, though growing, part of the economy with the state-dominated sector concentrated in Addis Ababa, Dire Dawa and the string of towns along the railway, and Asmara. Most state firms, however, were highly inefficient and lacked incentives for productivity improvements.

The Derg therefore pursued a new direction in its attempt to resolve the agrarian question, motivated by political concerns, but drawing heavily on socialist ideology and the models of the Soviet Union and China. In terms of the relations of production, the pre-capitalist landed elite was dispossessed, and replaced by peasant farmers, collective agriculture and state farms. As under Stalin's Soviet Union, this agrarian system was expected to generate an agrarian 'surplus', which could then be extracted by the Agricultural Marketing Corporation to subsidise the cities and industrial development. Over time, Peasant Associations evolved from initially autonomous entities formed by the peasants into an additional tier of the state administration. The result of these reforms, as [Rahmato \(1984\)](#) has argued, was that the state effectively replaced the nobility as the landlord of the peasantry.

Politically, the Derg established the Ethiopian Workers' Party in 1984 as a vanguard party to lead Ethiopia to state socialism. Despite an official commitment to the working class and the peasantry, however, the attitude towards the peasantry was 'contemptuous' ([Crummey 2000](#), p. 245). Peasants were 'seen as a problem rather than an asset, as tradition-bound, unthinking, and obdurate innocents who will react negatively to any new policy, and who must be forcibly re-educated to understand their own best interests' ([Brietzke 1976](#), p. 654). While the land reform initially secured significant popular support in southern Ethiopia, this reserve of goodwill was subsequently eroded by state extraction and control.

The Derg's failings were apparent to observers of the time. The removal of incentives for peasant and collective agriculture resulted in stagnant or declining agricultural productivity, while population growth and regular land redistributions meant the gradual erosion of landholding size ([Rahmato 1984, 1991, 1993](#)). Meanwhile, state farms that received a disproportionate share of the state budget were poorly managed and grossly inefficient ([Clapham 1988](#)). In 1990, the Derg announced reforms aimed to win back support from insurgents in Tigray and Eritrea, including de-collectivisation, heritable land rights, removal of the restriction on hired labour, and the removal of quotas to the Marketing Corporation. These reforms had little impact, however, due to the rapid advances of the TPLF and EPLF.

The Derg era was therefore characterised by a continuous violent struggle as the regime sought to consolidate power. While the military

regime came close to eliminating the threat posed by the EPLF and TPLF, it never quite succeeded in establishing full territorial control. Nonetheless, the reforms carried out under the Derg made a major contribution to expanding the capacity and reach of the state, as well as its autonomy from societal groups. Land reform and nationalisation eliminated the landed elite and the nascent capitalist class, leaving the state relatively free from organised societal interests. Moreover, the Derg expanded bureaucratic capacity and significantly extended its territorial reach through a process of *encadrement*, whereby land redistribution, and the establishment of cooperatives and collective agriculture, incorporated the peasantry into structures of control (Clapham 2002). In doing so, the Derg's revolution undoubtedly made a major contribution to the establishment of structures capable of state-led development, even if this potential was initially unrealised.

Competing Revolutions: The TPLF's Peasant Insurrection

At the end of the 1970s, the main challenge to the Derg lay in Eritrea, in the form of the ELF and EPLF. However, soon after the 1974 revolution, the TPLF also commenced an insurgency that, after many years, would end in the Derg's defeat and the TPLF's ascent to national power.

The TPLF originated in the student movement at Haile Selassie I University. In the days after Haile Selassie was deposed in September 1974, a group of students formed the Tigray National Organisation, committing to launch a rural insurrection, which began in February 1975. This insurgency commenced with just a handful of members and four rifles at Dedebit in western Tigray, with the group renamed the TPLF (Berhe 2008). The group was inspired by Eritrean liberation movements and received training and support from the EPLF early on. Based on the practical reality of the area in which they found themselves, the TPLF adopted a Maoist strategy of organisation and warfare, with the Front's survival dependent on the support of the peasantry (Young 1997, Berhe 2008). As Meles Zenawi, future Prime Minister, succinctly summed up later, 'If they [the peasants] gave us food, we would have enough to eat. If they didn't, we would go hungry' (Meles, cited in Gill 2010).

Despite the fact that early TPLF leaders comprised children of the lower ranks of the nobility (Young 1997), they were unusual amongst African liberation movements in following Mao in committing 'class suicide' by abandoning urban lives of the petty bourgeoisie 'to swim among the masses like fish in the water' (Mkandawire 2002, pp. 181–182).

Potential supporters and opponents were identified using a straightforward class analysis, with the poor and middle peasants considered the Front's core constituency. Equally, the urban poor and working class were considered an ally, albeit the insurrection remained a rural affair until the late 1980s. In contrast the 'feudal' elite and the comprador bourgeoisie were identified as the TPLF's opponents. The nature and revolutionary potential of the rich peasants and the national bourgeoisie were subject to considerable debate, drawing heavily on Marx and Mao, with the national bourgeoisie ultimately classified as a 'wavering strategic ally' (Tadesse and Young 2003; Berhe 2008, p. 223) while rich peasants could be 'friends of the revolution' (Young 1997, p. 137).⁸ This ambiguity regarding the bourgeoisie was a recurrent issue for the EPRDF, as discussed in Chapter 4.

The key to the TPLF's success lay in its ability to align the interests and ideological convictions of its urban intellectual leadership with those of the peasantry. Tigray in the 1970s certainly experienced widespread poverty and legitimate grounds for grievance. However, it is not clear that the rural population was on the verge of mass revolt until the TPLF mobilised the peasantry for this purpose. To do so, the TPLF relied on a dual strategy of mass distribution along class lines and the symbolic appeal of ethno-nationalism, underpinned by the organisational capacity of a Leninist party structure. As shown in Chapter 4, this combination also formed the basis of the party's political strategy on taking national office.

A central feature of the TPLF's distributive strategy was land, the key resource in any agrarian economy. While the Derg conducted land reform across Ethiopia, the TPLF and other revolutionary groups conducted their own land reforms in liberated areas from 1976. According to TPLF leaders at the time, land reform was not initially a top priority, but as the Derg and then the EPRP – displaced by the Red Terror to eastern Tigray – conducted land redistribution, the TPLF launched its own reforms to compete for peasant support (Young 1997, Berhe 2008). As with the Derg, TPLF land reform served as the first step in a strategy captured by the concept of 'coercive distribution', consolidating control of liberated areas by undercutting rival elites – the nobility, the Derg and the EPRP – and establishing direct ties of dependence with the peasantry.

⁸ 'Rich peasants' was something of a relative term, given that few, if any, Tigrayan peasants in the 1980s could realistically be described as wealthy. Debate regarding the national bourgeoisie was the trigger for a major split in 1985 that strengthened the position of future leader Meles Zenawi and led to the departure of several founding members (Young 1997, Tadesse and Young 2003, Berhe 2008).

A TPLF publication from the time echoed the Derg in justifying land reform as a means of freeing the Tigrayan peasantry from the 'yoke of feudal rulers' (People's Voice 1982: 1, cited in Chiari 2004, p. 62). However, for the TPLF these 'feudal rulers' were particularly associated with the Shewan-Amhara nobility. Like under the Derg, TPLF land reform distributed rights to a share of community land and prohibited land sales and mortgaging that could otherwise lead to class differentiation. However, the TPLF differed in ways that demonstrated flexibility rather than ideological rigidity. In contrast to the Derg's top-down reforms, the TPLF pursued a participative approach, involving communities in design and implementation, as means of building popular support (Young 1997, Chiari 2004, Berhe 2008). Notably, the TPLF allowed tenancy, wage labour and land rental, unlike the Derg's prohibitions which had led to great resentment in Tigray where many relied on seasonal labour migration (Hendrie 1999, Chiari 2004).⁹

Access to land was the first part of a political strategy that sought peasant support through material distribution. However, this distributive strategy was always balanced with the overwhelming imperative – which approached ideological status – of self-reliance given the extreme resource shortages and minimal external support received by the Front.¹⁰ The result was that the TPLF sought to mobilise the population to improve their circumstances, with any TPLF distribution accompanied by community contributions of labour and resources. This distributive strategy comprised the training of teachers, health workers and agricultural extension agents who were drafted to communities to establish basic services that had to that point been virtually non-existent. Education, health and agricultural productivity were all valued both as means of improving the lot of the peasantry and strengthening the physical and ideological capacity of TPLF fighters. The TPLF also formed the Relief Society of Tigray (REST) – formally an NGO, but essentially a wing of the TPLF – to provide emergency relief, with REST assuming a particularly important role during the 1984/85 famine. Once again, however,

⁹ The TPLF also allocated equal land shares to men and women, rather than the Derg's focus on household heads, with important gender implications (Hendrie 1999, Chiari 2004, Lavers 2017).

¹⁰ Self-reliance extended beyond the individual level, with self-reliance of the Front considered key to limit imperialist domination – a common critique of the Derg, which received support from the Soviet Union. In turn, Meles Zenawi expressed his admiration for Albania under Enver Hoxha as the one true socialist regime, precisely because of their national independence in its opposition to both USSR and China (Meles, cited in TPLF 1990).

the TPLF sought to link food aid to productive activity by making support conditional on participation in public works (Lavers 2019a, 2019b).

Alongside this mass distributive strategy, the TPLF sought to mobilise the peasantry through the symbolic power of ethno-nationalism, drawing on student debates regarding the national question. Unlike the Derg, which viewed ethnicity as a diversion from class consciousness, for the TPLF, 'the Leninist "nation, nationality or people" was the largest unit across which the solidarity necessary for the mass mobilization they desired was possible' (Vaughan 2011, p. 627). As with other ethno-nationalist movements at the time, the TPLF was able to exploit existing grievances, but did not encounter fully formed ethnic self-identification amongst the peasantry. As Gebru Tareke argues,

most Tigrayans, who were peasants, had little concept of their nationality. More than 90 percent of the population were illiterate farmers and pastoralists who lived in isolated villages, each governed by a backward tradition of the spoken word. It was a world without roads, schools, newspapers, or postal and telegraph services. The world beyond the boundaries of the village and its parish was another country. Given the limited contact peasants had with either the state or other ethnic communities, they had little awareness of a social identity or collective destiny that transcended their rural communities. (Tareke 2009, p. 80)

Rather it was the TPLF, in applying concepts developed and adapted in the student movement, that helped forge Tigrayan ethno-nationalism through its programme of mass mobilisation. The TPLF framed its struggle as building on the glorious legacy of the Aksumite civilisation and the first Weyane's valiant resistance to Shewan-Amhara oppression in 1943. Meanwhile, Tigray's long-term economic decline was attributed to Shewan-Amhara exploitation that had divided the Tigrigna speaking population in Eritrea and marginalised the province (Tareke 2009). The TPLF struggle was therefore cast as a Second Weyane that would pursue self-determination for Tigray.¹¹

Central to both the distributive and symbolic appeals of the TPLF was the need for political organisation, enabling the party to reach out to the masses. The TPLF adopted a Leninist party structure based on the principles of revolutionary democracy and democratic centralism. As others have noted, revolutionary democracy is a somewhat flexible concept that has evolved over time (Bach 2011, Vaughan 2011). According to one of the TPLF's founding members, revolutionary democracy was taken from Lenin's work on 'Bourgeois Democracy and the Proletarian Dictatorship' (Berhe 2008, p. 234). In contrast to parliamentary

¹¹ The TPLF briefly outlined a secessionist agenda, which was quickly abandoned in favour of Tigrayan autonomy within Ethiopia.

or ‘bourgeois democracy’, revolutionary democracy entailed ‘a politically trained vanguard party representing “the masses”’ (Berhe 2008, p. 234). For the TPLF, land reform – undertaken in all liberated areas – turned rural society into a “homogeneous mass” with common needs, interests, and political outlook’, enabling the Front to act in their interests as the vanguard (Vaughan and Tronvoll 2003, p. 117). Under democratic centralism, meanwhile, debate on policy and strategic positions was encouraged, with the vanguard party the sole actor able to take the ‘scattered and unsystematic ideas’ of the masses and concentrate these into a programme for action (Berhe 2020, p. 89). Once a decision was taken by the vanguard, it was binding on all members, with dissention and factionalism ‘strictly prohibited’ and severely punished (Milkias 2003, p. 13). The TPLF was based on collective leadership through elected executive and central committees, and the party congress. Accountability at all levels was ensured through *gim gema* (based on the Tigrigna word for evaluation), which requires all members to regularly self-critique their performance in front of their peers, before facing criticism of others.

Given the foundational need to win and maintain the support of the peasantry, from very early on the TPLF built administrative structures in areas liberated from the Derg to provide security and the infrastructure with which to distribute resources and promote its ethno-nationalist message. In effect, therefore, the TPLF was building party-state structures in competition with those of the Derg. Local administrations were established at *tabiya* (sub-district) level in 1980, initially with responsibilities for land reform and security, but subsequently expanding into economic and social affairs (Young 1997, Berhe 2020). This administrative system was extended to higher levels – namely, the *wereda* (district) and *zoba* (zone) – and down to the *kushet* (village) below the *tabiya*, which at that time reportedly comprised 40–50 households (Berhe 2008, Segers et al. 2009, Vaughan 2011). In addition, the TPLF created mass associations by 1979, organising the population of liberated areas into associations for peasants, women, youth, traders and students (Vaughan 2011, Berhe 2020). Political leaders, volunteer agricultural extension agents and community health workers worked through these structures to provide services (Adhanom et al. 1996, Barnabas and Zwi 1997), in effect tying distribution to the Front.

Several accounts of the TPLF by foreigners who spent time in Tigray in this period emphasise the Front’s participative nature and how it cultivated peasant support (Young 1997, Hammond 1999). Clearly the TPLF’s enormous success was dependent to a great extent on its ability to align itself with the peasantry and to secure popular support. However,

it should be acknowledged that even at this early stage, the TPLF's approach to political mobilisation centralised power within the political leadership and *demanded* peasants' allegiance. The TPLF's approach to land and social services closely approximates coercive distribution and there is evidence that where peasant support was not forthcoming, outright coercion underpinned the TPLF's organisational strategy (Tareke 2009). It can hardly be a surprise, therefore, that on assuming national power, the TPLF did not show much inclination to compete for or share the power it had won militarily.

As discussed in Chapter 5, the basic principles of the agricultural development strategy that the Front subsequently pursued once in power nationally built on initiatives during the conflict. In particular, land reform and regular land redistributions created a class of relatively undifferentiated peasants as the Front's core constituency. Meanwhile the TPLF sought to raise the agricultural productivity of *all* these farmers as means to 'the final strategic aim of self-reliance in the agricultural sector' (TPLF 1986, p. 8 cited in Chiari 2004). Specific measures included: training agricultural extension workers (Hammond 1999, Berhe 2020); distributing traditional and modern fertilisers, and select seeds; and a 'standardisation' policy, whereby leading farmers were supported to raise their productivity, as well as being encouraged to share their expertise with less effective farmers to bring all up to the same level (Chiari 2004, pp. 86–87). The TPLF also sought to balance socialist ideology with the necessity of securing peasant support, in doing so, avoiding many of the economic reforms that alienated the peasantry in Derg-controlled areas. The TPLF debated collective agriculture, but rejected it based on the negative experiences in Ethiopia and elsewhere (Young 1997, Chiari 2004). Likewise, while the TPLF formally committed to a planned economy (TPLF 1983) and initially experimented with trade and marketing controls, these were abandoned due to resistance from poor peasants working as traders (Young 1997). The TPLF's agricultural strategy was also spatially differentiated from early on: while the peasantry was the central focus in densely-populated highlands, there was an attempt to lease larger plots to agricultural investors in more sparsely-populated areas of lowland Humera in the late 1980s (Bruce et al. 1994, Chiari 2004). As such, the TPLF's political strategy provided the outline of an agricultural development strategy, albeit that available documents fall short of a complete response to the agrarian question, with little apparent discussion of the role of agriculture within accumulation and its contribution to industrialisation.

The TPLF's progression from rural insurgency to national government was long and arduous. The conflict and the TPLF's evolving

political and military strategy inevitably placed enormous strain on the TPLF leadership. The result was a number of leadership splits, and the departure and death of several influential figures.¹² Nonetheless, the system of collective leadership was retained, with several founding members – including Seyoum Mesfin and Abay Tsehaye – and early recruits – including Meles Zenawi and Sebhat Nega – maintaining senior roles in the Front and taking senior positions in the new national government after 1991. Meles Zenawi, who came to play an outsized role, rose to chairman of the TPLF and EPRDF in 1989, though very much as first among equals within the system of collective leadership.

When the TPLF launched its insurgency in 1975 it undoubtedly benefitted from the revolutionary upheaval, the Somali war and the Derg's focus on more established insurgencies in Eritrea. While the Derg paid comparatively less attention to the TPLF, the Front nonetheless faced major challenges from competing groups in Tigray. These included the Tigrayan Liberation Front that aimed to create a Greater Tigray including Tigrigna-speaking populations in Eritrea, the monarchist Ethiopian Democratic Union in the west and the remnants of the EPRP in Eastern Tigray. Ultimately the TPLF defeated each of these competitors by 1978 (Young 1997, Tareke 2009). The battle-hardened TPLF then focused its attention on the Derg, employing a Maoist strategy of small, highly mobile units that sought to wear down the army through surprise attacks rather than direct confrontation.

Throughout the war, relations with the EPLF to the north were mixed. Undoubtedly the two Fronts benefitted from each other's presence, and it is likely that neither would have succeeded alone. Yet collaboration was difficult to achieve. The EPLF initially favoured the EPRP, rather than the TPLF, while the TPLF and EPLF fell out around 1985 over the national question in Eritrea and military tactics, leading the EPLF to block passage of food aid to Tigray in the midst of the catastrophic famine (Young 1997, Berhe 2008, Tareke 2009). Ultimately, the two Fronts renewed contact and formed a tactical alliance from 1988, enabling them to coordinate attacks and achieve major successes first in Eritrea and then in Tigray (Tareke 2009). Attempts to form a comparable alliance between the TPLF and OLF were even less successful, with TPLF leaders doubting the OLF's organisational capacities and revolutionary credentials.

Gradually, the conflict, economic crisis and withdrawal of Soviet support for the Derg after the fall of the Berlin Wall led to the collapse of the Ethiopian army, resulting in the liberation of Tigray and Eritrea in 1989

¹² Berhe (2008), Young (1997) and Berhe (2020) provide detailed accounts.

and the capture of Addis Ababa in 1991.¹³ As the TPLF advanced it confronted the question of how to extend its political strategy beyond Tigray. As Thandika Mkandawire notes, by extending Mao's famous metaphor, a regional rebel movement outside its home base risks becoming 'fish on dry land' (Mkandawire 2002, p. 201). The TPLF's strategy was to extend its approach to political mobilisation in Tigray, based on peasant mobilisation through mass distribution and ethno-nationalism, to the rest of Ethiopia. The TPLF formed the Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), a coalition of ethnic parties to represent Ethiopia's diverse 'nations, nationalities and peoples'. The first ally was the Ethiopian Peoples' Democratic Movement (EPDM), formed by an EPRP splinter group which had already established some operations in Wello, to the south of Tigray. The organisation was subsequently renamed the Amhara National Democratic Movement (ANDM), limiting its operations to Amharic-speaking areas. In 1989, the TPLF formed the Oromo People's Democratic Organisation (OPDO), originally consisting of Oromo prisoners of war captured by the TPLF and subjected to political training (Vaughan 2003, 2011).¹⁴

Conclusion

The key point of this chapter is to analyse how the history of state formation and the revolution shaped the structure of the state and its potential role in state-led development. The revolution thrust to the fore two fundamental questions about the nature of the Ethiopian state and society, namely those concerning land and nationalities. The Derg and other revolutionary movements sought to address the land question by dismantling the previous tenure system and the class structure on which it rested, distributing usufruct rights to landholders. While doing much to address inequality, subsequent policies tended to undermine production incentives, however. Rapid population growth, land shortages, low productivity and low levels of industrialisation meant that land reform only provided a partial and unsatisfactory answer to the broader agrarian question.

The Derg's failure to tackle the national question was even more definitive. As should be clear from the preceding discussion, the process leading to the creation of a linguistically, religiously and culturally diverse population is a long and complex one that defies simple

¹³ Tareke (2009) provides a detailed discussion of the progress of the conflict.

¹⁴ The fourth EPRDF member, the Southern Ethiopian Peoples' Democratic Movement (SEPDM) was established in 1992.

characterisation. Over the past millennium at least, there has been considerable fluidity in the territorial control of different polities, just as there has been fluidity in language, religion and culture, with forced and, perhaps, voluntary assimilation of different ethnic groups. Nonetheless, the historical record provides certain pieces of evidence that can be, and have been, cherry-picked by different actors to present sharply contrasting narratives (Gudina 2006). The first emphasises the continuity of the Ethiopian state over the last 2,000 years to the Aksumite Empire (or 3,000 if this is stretched to the myth of Solomonic descent), the maximum territory secured prior to Ahmad Gragn's invasion and thereby the historic integrity of 'Greater Ethiopia'. The second frames Menelik's territorial expansion as a colonial conquest, in which non-Amhara were forcibly incorporated by the Shewan-Amhara state, reducing modern Ethiopian history to a single century of ethnic oppression. The Derg's attempts to consolidate control of the expanded territory inherited from Menelik and Haile Selassie, and to build Ethiopian nationalism was subsequently replaced by ethno-nationalists who sought to apply the principle of self-determination to resolve the challenge represented by Ethiopia's diverse and, increasingly, ethnic self-identifying population.

As Theda Skocpol argued, the removal of the ancien régime inevitably results in a power vacuum with contending revolutionary groups competing for power, a struggle that only ends when one develops sufficient organisational capacity to establish control. In Ethiopia, the Emperor's displacement resulted in competing revolutionary movements in urban and rural areas. While the military was initially best placed to take power, the Derg never managed to extinguish competing rural revolutionary movements. It was only with the victory of the EPLF and TPLF in 1991 that the revolutionary fervour unleashed in the 1970s finally played out. As such, the TPLF is, in important respects, a product of the student movement of the 1960s and 1970s, and the revolution that displaced the Emperor. As such, I argue that a critical assessment of the EPRDF's time in office must be rooted in an understanding of the revolutionary processes that led to its formation. This stands in contrast to much of the literature, which tends to analyse Ethiopian politics in terms of a sequential periodisation, with the Derg responding to the challenges presented by the Imperial era, while the EPRDF responded to the failings of the Derg era. The TPLF was forged through its assessment of and response to the Imperial era, as much as its struggle with the Derg.

The legacy of the revolution was that the EPRDF inherited a state structure that, in certain respects, provided significant potential for

state-led development. First, the new government had considerable autonomy from societal groups. There was no landed elite, no capitalist class and all competing revolutionary groups had either been defeated, seceded (EPLF) or had struggled to make significant progress (OLF). The absence of a capitalist class would pose a major challenge for subsequent attempts at industrialisation (see [Chapter 6](#)). Yet, on taking power, the EPRDF faced little in the way of powerful, organised interest groups. Second, Haile Selassie and the Derg had transformed the mediated state of the past, considerably enhancing bureaucratic capacity and the infrastructural power of the state. As Christopher Clapham argued, the legacy of the Imperial regime was ‘its strength (when appropriately transformed) as a source of centralised national government’ ([Clapham 1988](#), p. 4). While the bureaucracy lacked expertise and efficiency, it dominated society. In this sense, the land reforms of the 1970s and the accompanying creation of peasant associations were a defining moment in Ethiopian politics, greatly expanding state autonomy and capacity. Indeed, as with state-led development in East Asia, it is hard to believe that the EPRDF’s subsequent developmental successes would have been possible without prior land reform.

The situation facing the EPRDF was not all positive, however. The new government confronted the national question, which represented a growing challenge in light of the TPLF’s origins in just one small corner of the diverse country that is Ethiopia, as well as a growing sense of ethno-nationalism resulting in part from the mobilisation of groups such as the TPLF. This challenge in the country was replicated with particular intensity within the EPRDF. The TPLF was a revolutionary party, with all the characteristics that tend to underpin durable authoritarian regimes such as a coherent and ideologically aligned elite, strong party discipline and control over the military ([Lachapelle et al. 2020](#)). However, in extending the conflict beyond Tigray and creating the EPRDF coalition, the TPLF incorporated three quite different parties, none of which had the same ideological alignment, a siege mentality forged through existential crisis or a solid rural base. From the beginning it was unclear to what extent these other three parties could legitimately claim to represent their ethnic communities.

4 Distributive Threats, Elite Cohesion and the Emergence of the ‘Developmental State’

Chapter 2 argued that the main political drivers of state-led development entail the formation of a state with a high degree of autonomy and capacity, and elite threat perceptions that shape how political leaders use the state for developmental ends. The EPRDF inherited from the Derg a state with a high degree of state autonomy and considerably enhanced capacity and territorial reach compared to its Imperial predecessor. This chapter focuses on how elite political dynamics shaped the government’s development strategy from EPRDF’s arrival in office in 1991 to the death of the Prime Minister, Meles Zenawi, in 2012. Despite being militarily dominant on taking office, the EPRDF remained politically vulnerable due to its lack of a political base outside Tigray. This perception of vulnerability amongst the political elite resulted in the new government employing an approach derived from their successes in Tigray, seeking to consolidate control of the ethnically diverse Ethiopian peasantry through a dual strategy: establishing a federal system that, in principle, provided for ethnic self-determination; and pursuing a broad-based development strategy that aimed to secure compliance through mass distribution. Importantly, this development strategy was motivated in part by the challenge of population growth. From early on, the government recognised that land access would, in the medium term, be undermined by rapid population growth, necessitating industrialisation and mass employment creation to maintain mass acquiescence.

Progress with each prong of this strategy was initially limited, however. The federal system provided for the use of local languages in administration and the recruitment of regional officials from the titular ethnic group of the region, an important break from the past. Yet the reality was that centralised, top-down control within the ruling party and the requirements of a centrally defined development strategy restricted regional autonomy. Moreover, growing divisions within the ruling elite, resource shortages and limited state capacity undermined implementation of the development strategy. During the late 1990s and early 2000s, the EPRDF leadership experienced a series of crises, which the

leaders themselves referred to as ‘Armageddons’, that threatened their hold on power. These crises resulted in increased elite cohesion through the centralisation of power around the Prime Minister, Meles Zenawi, and a shared sense of the threat facing the ruling elite. The result was what became known as Ethiopia’s ‘developmental state’ model, with a renewed focus on infrastructure development, industrialisation and agricultural commercialisation, as means of delivering the economic growth required to meet the mass distributive challenge facing the regime. The government also pursued a massive expansion of party-state infrastructural power with a view to delivering both rapid development and political control.

The analysis begins by reflecting on the political challenge facing the EPRDF on taking national power before examining how the transition from a rural insurgency to a national government led to growing fragmentation within the ruling party and a series of political crises in the early 2000s. The chapter then examines how these crises resulted in the formation of a coherent political elite with a common vision for development and a commitment to expanding the capacity of the state to realise its ambitious plans.

The EPRDF in Power: Consolidating Dominance

The EPRDF entered Addis Ababa and seized national power in May 1991. The Front was politically and militarily dominant thanks to its victory in the civil war. However, the EPRDF was also extremely politically vulnerable since it had spent almost the entire civil war mobilising the Tigrayan peasantry along ethno-nationalist lines, had no established political base outside Tigray and had only expanded the EPRDF coalition beyond the TPLF in the final years of the conflict. The challenge facing the new government therefore was, on the one hand, to forge a cohesive ruling coalition amongst the EPRDF parties and, on the other, to secure a mass base amongst an ethnically diverse population.

The EPRDF took a number of immediate actions to consolidate its position. The former Ethiopian army was demobilised and the TPLF army became the Ethiopian National Defence Force (Berhe 2017). In contrast, the civil service was retained, with bureaucrats requested to return to work and continue their duties. For an insurgency that had secured political power through force, the EPRDF’s initial approach to national politics was surprisingly open and inclusive. Rather than seeking to govern alone, the EPRDF organised a National Conference in July 1991 inviting a range of predominately ethnic-based parties – from long established movements like the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) to more

ad hoc creations with little established support – to participate in a debate about the country's future (Vaughan 1994, Lyons 1996). The National Conference established a Council of Representatives and a Transitional Government, with representation of a range of parties, albeit that the EPRDF had a majority of seats and cabinet posts. The Transitional Charter acknowledged ethnic groups' right to self-determination including secession, laying the groundwork for Eritrean secession following a 1993 referendum and the creation of a federal system in Ethiopia under the 1994 Constitution.

The inclusive spirit did not last long, however. The most established parties, other than the EPRDF, were the OLF and the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF), which was formed from a splinter group of supporters of the Somali invasion in 1977–1978 (Woldemariam 2018). Though both initially participated in the Transitional Government, they departed acrimoniously due to the EPRDF's creation of competitor ethnic parties in their home regions and what they considered to be unfair restrictions on their local election campaigns. Both were suppressed militarily. Most of the OLF's armed forces were wiped out and some 19,000 Oromo were arrested in 1992 (Tronvoll 2009a, p. 454). While the OLF was severely limited as a military force from that point, it retained significant popular support in the region. The military attacked the ONLF in 1994, leading to the arrest or death of most of its leadership, reducing the organisation to small scale operations on the Somalia border (Woldemariam 2018). The Transitional Government ended in 1995 with the election of a new national government, and the elections duly confirmed the de facto distribution of power, with EPRDF parties and affiliates winning almost all seats and forming the new government with EPRDF chairman, Meles Zenawi, as Prime Minister. Most opposition parties boycotted the polls, a situation that was repeated in 2000.

While the EPRDF was quickly able to assert its dominance militarily and in national politics, it nonetheless faced a major challenge in terms of its lack of a popular base in the country. For almost the entirety of the civil war, the TPLF mobilised the peasantry in rural Tigray. To a lesser degree, its junior partner in the EPRDF coalition, then named the EPDM, had carried out similar mobilisation efforts in Wello. A very different situation applied in the rest of the country, where newly created EPRDF-linked parties had not spent time mobilising the ethnic groups they sought to represent and lacked local legitimacy, being viewed, not unreasonably, as top-down creations of the TPLF.

In seeking to build a popular base in the country as a whole, the coalition applied a very similar class analysis to that used previously by the

TPLF (see [Chapter 3](#)). As laid out in a 1993 party document, the coalition viewed the peasantry – accounting for some 85 per cent of the population – as the Front’s key constituency, alongside the far less numerous urban proletariat,¹

Just as the center of our economic development program is the rural part of the country, so, too, the focus of our political work is the peasantry (EPRDF 1993).

Indeed, the overwhelming political importance of the peasantry was reiterated by Meles Zenawi in a 1995 address to the House of Peoples’ Representatives,

Let the peasants never be disaffected. Once they are disaffected, it will be the end of the world. But whatever happens, with the support of the peasantry we may stagger, but we would surely make it (Meles, cited in [Markakis 2011](#), pp. 248–249.)

In crafting a political and economic strategy to secure the control of the peasantry, the EPRDF applied a variation of the same approach that the TPLF had used with great success in Tigray: ethno-nationalism; broad-based distribution; and, where necessary, coercion. The EPRDF built on its origins in the Ethiopian student movement and the debates about the national question, with the party convinced that peasants could be best mobilised in their own language and by members of their own ethnic group ([Vaughan 2003](#), [Zelege 2019](#)). The result was the reconfiguration of the Ethiopian state based on ‘the wholesale takeover of Stalin’s theory of the national question as an approach to the problem of Ethiopia’s ethnic diversity’ ([Clapham 2006](#), p. 148).² Not only was the EPRDF coalition constructed along ethnic lines, but the Ethiopian state was reconstructed as a federal system by the Transitional Charter and subsequent 1994 Constitution, with the country divided into ethno-linguistic regional states (see [Figure 4.1](#)). The government delineated ethnic regions based primarily on the dominant language in an area, providing for self-administration of these regional states and the right to self-determination, with the new constitution guaranteeing the right to secession. Each of the newly created regions was ruled by an EPRDF party or affiliate.

¹ The EPRDF remained ambiguous regarding the national bourgeoisie, which although ‘not a primary enemy as such, this class is nevertheless a vacillating force ... [that] wants to promote its interests at the expense of those of the people’ (EPRDF 1993). In a prelude to subsequent debates in the 2000s, the EPRDF approach was that the ‘upper stratum’ of the national bourgeoisie should be ‘neutralized’, while the ‘lower stratum could be drawn towards us’ (EPRDF 1993). The result was an early distinction between developmental and ‘rent seeking’ capitalists (TGE 1994, p. 2).

² Indeed, [Young \(2021\)](#) shows how closely the new constitution was shaped by the experience of the USSR.

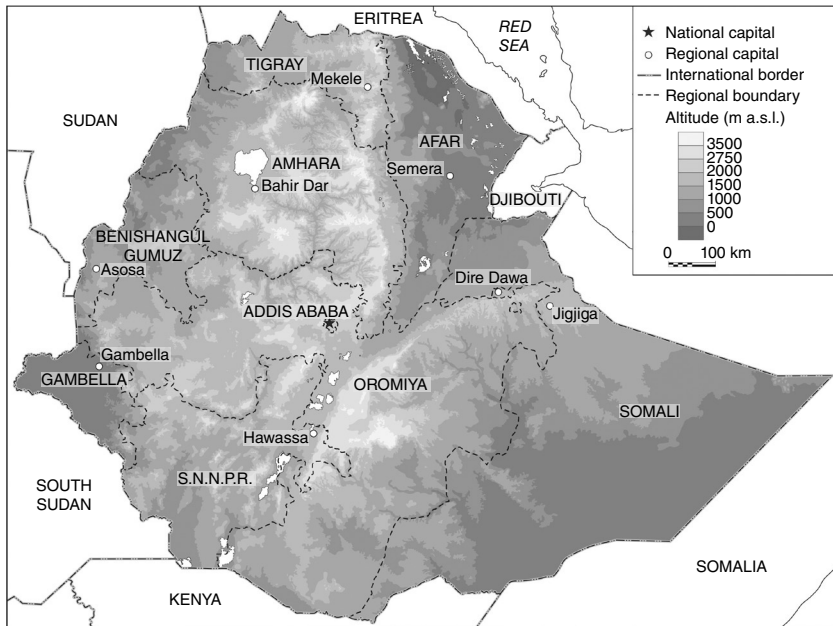


Figure 4.1 Ethiopia's federal boundaries
Source: author/Manchester Cartographic Unit.

The federal system constituted a major practical and symbolic shift from the nation-state building project of past regimes. For the first time, local languages, rather than Amharic, became the working language of the state and were expanded as means of primary education in each of the ethnic regions.³ Moreover, ethnically defined regional states, rather than the federal government, became the central reference point of day-to-day state–society relations. Federalism signalled a sharp shift from previous regimes regarding the official narrative of Ethiopian history. Haile Selassie had sought legitimacy in the Solomonic myth that linked the Emperor to Menelik I, 3,000 years previously, while the Derg had maintained an emphasis on the historic integrity of Ethiopia. In contrast, the EPRDF took the view – common within the student movement – that Ethiopian history was primarily a story of Amhara expansionism and exploitation over the past century (Tronvoll 2009b). Indeed, Meles Zenawi explicitly questioned key Ethiopian national symbols when he was quoted as arguing,

³ Secondary and tertiary education are conducted in English.

The Tigreans had Axum, but what could that mean to the Gurague? The Agew had Lalibela, but what could that mean to the Oromo? The Gonderes had castles, but what could that mean to the Wolaita? (Lyons 2019, p. 52)

As argued in Chapter 3, Ethiopian history is characterised by a high degree of fluidity in territorial control, language, and the degree of ethnic self-identification. Yet, the ethnic federal system applied a rigid, primordialist conception of ethnicity that drew heavily on Stalinist theory and used language to identify ethnic territories and individuals' singular ethnic identity (Vaughan 2003, Kymlicka 2006).⁴ This simplistic approach was inevitably a poor fit for many parts of the country where history was considerably more complex than the nineteenth century Shewan-Amhara colonisation and oppression of distinct nations, nationalities and peoples. Prominent flashpoints have included: predominately Amharic-speaking urban centres in southern Ethiopia (see Chapter 6); significant Oromo populations in Wello in Amhara region; ethnically diverse Raya and Welkait which were included in Tigray, but in past periods had been administered by other provinces; the numerous ethnic groups with very small populations which were abruptly grouped into the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Region (SNNPR) for administrative convenience (Vaughan 2003); and contestation over questions of indigeneity in and political boundaries between most regions, but particularly those where mobile livelihoods are common: Afar, Benishangul-Gumuz, Gambella, Oromiya and Somali (Young 1999, Feyissa 2005, Kefale 2013).

As with the TPLF's peasant mobilisation in Tigray, the EPRDF's attempts to consolidate a base amongst the peasantry built both on the symbolic appeal of ethno-nationalism and material distribution. Mass distribution in Tigray entailed land reform and modest attempts to expand agricultural extension, health, education and emergency assistance within the constraints of the conflict and the imperative of self-reliance, all channelled through party structures. Similar principles underpinned the EPRDF's distributive approach nationally, which, as discussed at length in Chapter 5, rested on a strategy of Agricultural Development-Led Industrialisation (ADLI). The EPRDF inherited a country in 1991 in which low productivity smallholder agriculture accounted for 77 per cent of employment and 59 per cent of GDP, and in which GDP per capita was lower at just \$187 than it had been in 1981. As a result, 71 per cent of the population fell below the World Bank's \$1.90 poverty

⁴ For a detailed analysis of the Leninist-Stalinist approach to the nationalities question, see Martin (2001).

line in 1995.⁵ The 'fiscal situation inherited from the Derg was disastrous' as a result of the limited tax base and massive military expenditure during the civil war (Mascagni 2016, p. 30). Moreover, as Marxist-Leninist rebels, EPRDF had little expectation of securing large-scale support from western donors. ADLI therefore sought to combine mass distribution aimed at securing the control of the peasantry, with productive investment, promoting 'self-reliance, meaning dependence on national resources and independent national development' (MoPED 1993, p. 16). The main thrust of the strategy was to expand access to improved agricultural inputs such as fertiliser, seed and irrigation for peasant farmers who already depended on the state for their access to land. Improved agricultural productivity, in turn, was expected to produce a surplus that could be used to support industrialisation, thereby creating dynamic linkages between agriculture and industry. Expansion of infrastructure, education and health aimed to support growth in both sectors. As such, the strategy was explicitly focused on economic growth and structural transformation, but also 'equity, including regional equity' (MoPED 1993, p. 16). ADLI therefore moved beyond the land question of the 1970s in an attempt to address the challenge of the agrarian question in Ethiopia.

ADLI's political importance derived not only from the EPRDF's need to consolidate a peasant base outside Tigray in the short term, but also recognition of what the government described as 'the specter of accelerating population growth' (MoPED 1993, p. 14) that represented the 'single overriding challenge of Ethiopia in the next three decades' (TGE 1994, p. 8). Following the land redistribution of the 1970s, state power rested to a considerable degree on the enmeshment of the peasantry through state land ownership and the distribution of usufruct rights. By the time the EPRDF took office, however, Ethiopia's population was growing at more than 3 per cent per year, with rapid growth in both rural and urban areas (Hailemariam 2019).⁶ Consequently, the National Population Policy of 1993 viewed population growth as a major threat to stability, leading to rural landlessness and food insecurity, and migration to urban centres where employment was limited (Office of the Prime Minister 1993).

⁵ GDP per capita is measured in constant 2010 US\$. All figures are taken from the World Development Indicators.

⁶ The World Development Indicators give an even higher figure of 3.5 per cent per year in 1991. By the early 1990s, Ethiopia had a very young population in the early stages of the demographic transition, with a fertility rate of 6.2 per cent in 1990–1995 (Hailemariam 2019, p. 375).

As such, the Population Policy laid out plans to ease the problem by reducing fertility through increased use of contraceptives, raising the minimum age of marriage and education campaigns promoting small family sizes, as well as through broader initiatives to increase women's education and labour force participation. Ultimately, however, the government recognised that upkeep of the system of coercive distribution and political control in the context of population growth required the distribution of new resources beyond the agricultural sector, in a context in which state revenues were extremely limited. ADLI was therefore explicitly conceived as a strategy for agricultural intensification to support a growing rural population in the short-term, while enabling a shift to an industrial economy over a period of 20 years, creating mass employment to absorb surplus labour. The political imperative of ADLI's success was succinctly summarised by Newai Gebre-Ab, one of the Prime Minister's leading economic advisors,

The race between demography and growth in agriculture has to be won in favour of growth.⁷

Elite Fragmentation and Stalled Development

Despite this attempt to frame national development as a key means of addressing mass distributive pressures, the EPRDF's transition from a Maoist insurgency mobilising the Tigrayan peasantry to a national government promoting structural transformation brought to the fore a number of tensions that gradually undermined the cohesiveness of the ruling coalition. These tensions concerned the relationships between the political leadership and foreign donors; between the party and the state bureaucracy; and within the EPRDF coalition itself.

The first challenge was that the EPRDF came to power in 1991 at a time when socialism was widely discredited and at the height of the Washington Consensus and its focus on market liberalism. The new government desperately needed external support to finance reconstruction and its plans for economic development. The EPRDF strategy was to shift its discourse, at least as presented externally, from the Marxist language of the past to that of markets and democracy in an attempt to placate western donors. However, this raised important, unresolved questions about the new government's true intentions and the appropriate role for state and market in its development strategy. The EPRDF government signed up to modest structural adjustment programmes

⁷ Interview with Newai Gebre-Ab, respondent EG35, Addis Ababa, 1 October 2018.

with the World Bank and IMF in 1993 and 1996 that reduced tariffs and taxes, removed price controls and privatised some state enterprises (Borchgrevink 2008, p. 202). However, implementation lagged and the government refused to go further, insisting on a managed exchange rate and refusing any discussion of privatisation of key sectors such as finance, land, energy and telecommunications. The government's resolve was tested in the late 1990s when IMF loans were conditioned on reduced government spending and further privatisation of the financial sector (Stiglitz 2003, Manyazewal 2019). However, the government, and Prime Minister Meles in particular, refused to back down, despite the IMF cutting off lending, sending a signal to donors that it was willing to make sacrifices to defend its policy autonomy.⁸ The result was that the EPRDF government received relatively little aid in its early years, while the confrontation raised questions within the party regarding the role of the state and market going forward.

The second challenge concerned the relationship between the new government and the bureaucracy. Retaining Derg era officials had facilitated the maintenance of order and service delivery. Nonetheless, many bureaucrats were sceptical or outright resistant to the new government (Vaughan and Tronvoll 2003, De Waal 2015). The EPRDF's response was to strengthen party control over the bureaucracy, putting party officials through rapid training in the Civil Service College and placing them into key positions, while also extending the *gim gema* evaluation system used by the TPLF to the entire civil service (Tadesse and Young 2003, Vaughan 2011, Weis 2015, Berhe 2020). The creation of regional governments from scratch presented a distinct challenge, particularly regarding the recruitment of sufficiently qualified and capable officials proficient in local languages. A common practice was for TPLF officials to be allocated to regional governments to support this regional state and party building. Inevitably, however, the formulation of a national development strategy by the federal government, the EPRDF's concerns about maintaining political control and the weakness of the new regional administrations meant that there was a continual tension between the formal devolution of powers under federalism and the de facto distribution of power between the federal government, political party and regional administrations. In practice, decision-making remained highly centralised (Fiseha 2006, Aalen 2011).

The third source of tension concerned growing divisions within the EPRDF itself. A central challenge concerned the incorporation into the

⁸ Interview with respondent ED54, former senior World Bank official, by Skype, 23 July and 10 November 2015. See also Wade (2001), Stiglitz (2003) and Feyissa (2011a).

EPRDF of ethnic-based parties that did not share the TPLF's revolutionary history and which lacked a popular base in the regions they claimed to represent. The EPRDF consisted of four parties, namely the TPLF, ANDM, OPDO and the SEPDM, along with a range of affiliated parties created to administer the peripheral regions. While subordinate to the TPLF within the EPRDF, ANDM nonetheless built on the EPDM, an established organisation prior to joining the EPRDF coalition. In contrast, the TPLF created the OPDO and SEPDM in 1989 and 1992, respectively. In establishing these parties, the TPLF avoided reaching out to social actors with independent legitimacy in their communities since most had ties to either the Imperial government, the Derg or the OLF. Instead, EPRDF parties recruited first among re-educated prisoners of war and then those with basic education, such as teachers who would come to form a new political class which depended on the party, not popular legitimacy, for its power (Vaughan 2003, 2011). Relations between the EPRDF and affiliated parties formed to govern the peripheral regions of Afar, Benishangul-Gumuz, Gambella and Somali have proven even more problematic, with leaders recruited primarily to keep the peace locally and execute federal orders, but with little concern for popular representation (Young 1999, Feyissa 2005, Haggmann 2005). The inevitable result was both the 'ideological watering down' of the TPLF, as well as growing frustrations among other ethnic groups at TPLF dominance and the illegitimacy of their assigned regional leaders (Tadesse and Young 2003, p. 395).

These strains were also reflected within the TPLF itself, with the unity and collective leadership forged during the insurgency in Tigray gradually fragmenting during the 1990s (Milkias 2003, Tadesse and Young 2003). The main fracture point was between the federal government in Addis Ababa and the TPLF party structure in Tigray. Meles Zenawi became chairman of the TPLF and EPRDF in 1989 and took the leading role in the federal government after 1991, first as President of the Transitional Government and then, from 1995, as Prime Minister. Meanwhile key officials in the TPLF leadership in Tigray began to form an alternate centre of power, particular after Meles' decision to post critics such as Siye Abraha – the former Minister of Defence – out of the way to Tigray (Africa Confidential 2001). Moreover, many senior TPLF officials were tasked with the separate job of building the regional states in Oromiya, SNNPR and elsewhere (Vaughan 2011). The result was an emerging division between two factions, one involving Meles and his allies and another in Tigray involving Siye and others.

On coming to power, therefore, the new government identified mass distributive pressures as a major threat to its power and a combination of rapid, broad-based development and a federal system as means of securing mass acquiescence. Nonetheless, the government's ability to act on this strategy was constrained not only by the challenge of post-conflict reconstruction and the shortage of resources, but also elite factional and ideological divisions. Addisu Legesse, ANDM chairman and deputy Prime Minister from 2001, highlighted the difficulties at this time,

During the struggle we had a socialist or communist ideology. But after the fall of the USSR this was not possible anymore, it didn't have a place. But it did contribute a lot in terms of being pro-poor. The westerners had doubts about whether we were communists. So they pushed privatisation, land reform, power. There were so many challenges. There was confusion within the party at that time regarding which way to go. We needed to clarify this internally and externally ... we didn't have the same ideas on development, about how to go forward.⁹

Elite Threat Perceptions: Armageddons and Renewal

The EPRDF leadership faced a series of crises from the late 1990s that came to be known internally as the 'Armageddons'.¹⁰ These crises resulted in a major split in the ruling coalition, an increase in elite cohesion and renewed commitment to a slightly revised development strategy as an imperative for the EPRDF's political survival.

The first crisis was the Eritrean war (1998–2000). Despite collaboration between the TPLF and EPLF in the final stages of the civil war, interactions between the parties had always been problematic. Relations deteriorated significantly in the 1990s, with disputes over economic policy between the newly separated states playing an important role. In Ethiopia's efforts to protect the domestic economy and promote industrialisation, it limited Eritrean imports, investment in key economic sectors such as banking, electricity and air transport, as well as rejecting Eritrea's proposal that its new currency would trade at parity with that of Ethiopia (Negash and Tronvoll 2000). Tensions came to a head over disputed territory along the border, which had never been adequately demarcated since the Italian occupation of Eritrea. The Eritrean Army invaded and made initial gains in 1998, but was subsequently repelled by an Ethiopian counter-offensive in 1999, which re-captured lost territory and advanced into Eritrea, forcing the Eritreans to accept a previously rejected peace treaty. The war served to exacerbate the emerging

⁹ Interview with Addisu Legesse, respondent EG21, Addis Ababa, 15 October 2015.

¹⁰ According to deputy Prime Minister Addisu Legesse, this was a phrase coined by Meles (int. respondent EG2).

division within the TPLF, with Prime Minister Meles marginalised during the conflict by the establishment of a Central Command in Tigray, which was dominated by the leadership in Tigray (Tadesse and Young 2003, Vaughan 2011). In negotiating the end of hostilities, Meles, sensitive to external pressures, took a more conciliatory approach, while the dissidents were more aggressive, seeing the opportunity to demolish the Eritrean military.

Following the war, the TPLF held a meeting in early 2001 to evaluate the party's performance over ten years in office and this meeting became the battleground for a far-reaching debate over the future of the party that pitted the two factions against each other. The debate was framed in Marxist terms. On one side, Meles submitted a 700-page document that drew on Karl Marx's *The 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (1869), accusing his opponents of Bonapartism – essentially a regime which relies on political support from the peasantry and as a result of a lack of opposition can use its power to enrich itself through corruption (Tadesse and Young 2003, Simon 2011). In contrast, for his opponents, Meles' camp was 'selling out to capitalism', abandoning the party's anti-imperialist stance in its subordinate relations with the USA and IFIs, and guilty of being far too lenient on Eritrea (Africa Confidential 2001). After a lengthy debate, Meles' faction prevailed by the narrowest of margins through a combination of procedural manoeuvre and power grab, with the dissidents expelled from the party.

Subsequently, Meles launched a process of renewal (*tehadso*) intended to purge his opponents first from the TPLF and then other EPRDF parties. The ANDM leadership, including Addisu Legesse and Bereket Simon, came out strongly in favour of Meles and, as a result of their loyalty, was spared (Tadesse and Young 2003). In contrast, key figures in the other parties such as Kuma Demeksa – the OPDO leader since its founding in 1989 – and Negasso Gidada – then President of Ethiopia, as well as a key OPDO leader – and Abate Kisho – President of SNNPR – supported the TPLF dissidents and were expelled. Kuma and Negasso had, in the years leading up to the split, become increasingly frustrated at TPLF's dominance and the lack of Oromo autonomy (Milkias 2003). As such, Kuma and Negasso were labelled as 'narrow nationalists' and their removal from office and the party quelled for the time being the push for greater regional autonomy. Moreover, their dismissal enabled the promotion of a new leadership loyal to Meles, including: Abadula Gemedo, a trusted military leader since the struggle, first as Minister of Defence and then Oromiya regional president, and Girma Birru in the OPDO; and Kasu Ilala and Hailemariam Dessalegn – Meles' eventual successor as Prime Minister – in SEPDM. This new leadership's

political fortunes depended heavily on Meles, limiting potential for further splits and heightening the sense of shared threat in the face of the Armageddons that followed. The result was the erosion of the TPLF's collective leadership and the centralisation of power around Meles and a handful of advisors, with 'Meles assuming a position of unchallenged supremacy' over party and state (Tadesse and Young 2003, p. 397, Vaughan 2011). While these crises served to strengthen elite cohesion, they did so through the consolidation of power by one individual, rather than the institutionalisation of party.

In the wake of this rupture, the EPRDF leadership faced another series of 'Armageddons' seen as existential threats to their authority and indeed the integrity of the country. In April 2001, protests at Addis Ababa University demanding an independent students' union and civilian policing on campus turned into riots across the city that were forcibly put down with the loss of thirty-nine lives (BBC News 2001, Gebremariam 2017). For Bereket Simon, a close confidant of Meles, this was interpreted as a 'wake up call' regarding the dangers of urban unemployment (Simon 2011). This was followed by protests that were violently suppressed in western Oromiya (March and May 2002) and in Hawassa in the first half of 2002 (May 2002). In the midst of these protests, in 2002/03, the country experienced the most serious food crisis since the 1984/85 famine precipitated by a severe El Niño. The crisis left some 14 million people requiring emergency assistance and forced a re-evaluation of the emergency food system and, indeed, the very viability of ADLI's focus on raising the productivity of all smallholder farmers, many of whom were struggling for subsistence (see Chapter 5).

Finally, in 2005, following the most open electoral campaign in Ethiopian history, the EPRDF was surprised by the coherence of the opposition coalitions and the support they received. With the EPRDF party structure, from the elite to grass roots, undermined by the 2001 split and the process of renewal, the elections took place at a moment of relative party weakness (Tronvoll 2009a), undermining its ability to deploy low visibility and low intensity forms of coercion to control the electoral process. Moreover, the Eritrean War had resulted in resurgent Ethiopian nationalism, which translated into increased support for the pan-Ethiopian opposition Coalition for Unity and Democracy (CUD) (Clapham 2009, Bach 2013, Lyons 2019). A series of opposition events drew large crowds, culminating in a rally attended by a million people in Addis Ababa shortly before the election. Official results gave the opposition nearly one-third of the seats in the new parliament, and almost all seats in Addis Ababa and several other urban centres. Moreover, large-scale opposition demonstrations were organised in Addis Ababa and elsewhere in May and June

2005 to protest against apparent electoral manipulation by the government and to claim overall victory for the opposition.

For the EPRDF leadership these crises came one after another, leading to the impression that they were indeed facing an existential threat. In the words of then deputy Prime Minister Addisu Legesse,

The renewal was critical, that was an Armageddon, then the drought was another Armageddon, the 2005 elections was another.¹¹

The response to these crises was twofold. First, a cohesive and united EPRDF leadership took decisive action to suppress electoral protests forcibly in May and June 2005, resulting in the deaths of more than 200 protestors and arrest of tens of thousands, including many of the opposition leadership ([BBC News 2006](#)).¹² Subsequently, the opposition was dismantled, with the government employing a range of strategies to fragment the parties, harass their leaders and limit their ability to campaign, with most key figures ultimately forced into exile ([Aalen and Tronvoll 2009](#)). Moreover, legislation in 2009 on Anti-Terrorism and Non-Governmental Organisations was widely interpreted as means of suppressing political and civil society organisation. The result was that within a year of the elections the opposition had been effectively neutralised and ceased to pose any electoral threat. Regional elections in 2008 and federal elections in 2010 and 2015 were a non-event, used primarily to project EPRDF dominance ([Aalen and Tronvoll 2009](#), [Tronvoll 2011](#), [Arriola and Lyons 2016](#)).¹³

The use of coercive powers to suppress the protests and prevent future political mobilisation grabbed the headlines and this has been the main focus of much academic research. Yet, the Armageddons also spurred the now cohesive elite to reflect on the sources of the political upheaval. The EPRDF interpreted these crises through essentially the same lens that it had used during the TPLF struggle and the early years of the EPRDF, with the food crisis and mass unrest seen as distributive crises – a symptom of the slow pace of economic development and rapid population growth – while rapid agricultural development and structural transformation were the solutions, providing the resources required to secure

¹¹ Interview with Addisu Legesse, respondent EG21, Addis Ababa, 15 October 2015.

¹² A marked contrast to the fragmented elite response to protests that took place in 2014–2018, as discussed in [Chapter 10](#).

¹³ After 2005 the main source of instability lay in the ONLF, which renewed its insurgency in the Somali region with Eritrean support ([Woldemariam 2018](#)). Though this caused major upheaval in the region, this was an insurgency at the margins of the state that posed little threat to national power. The federal army supported the build-up of a formidable regional armed force that waged a brutal counter-insurgency campaign that limited ONLF activity ([Hagmann and Korf 2012](#)).

mass acquiescence. Nonetheless, the crises cast doubt on the viability of the existing development strategy, with the food crisis in 2002/03 demonstrating the limits of ADLI's primary focus on smallholder agricultural productivity, while urban protests in 2001 and 2005 highlighted the dangers of treating urban development, industrialisation and employment creation merely as a long-term outcome of an agriculture-focused development strategy. The crises also underscored the danger of regional autonomy fostering potential rival centres of political power and the potential power of nationalism as a means of popular mobilisation. The result was a gradual change in the orientation of the development strategy and a massive expansion of the party-state to deliver on these plans, while further restricting regional autonomy in the interests of a state-led development strategy.

As Gebresenbet (2014) has argued, after 2001 the government framed rapid and broad-based development as an issue of national security, with the failure to realise these goals presenting an existential threat both to the EPRDF and to the country as a whole. Bereket Simon – a senior ANDM leader, Minister of Information and close confidant of Meles – wrote that,

the dangers these issues brought to the ruling party were described by Meles as being an impending avalanche and Armageddon in the making. Not only was growth needed but rapid growth. Otherwise, the avalanche will swallow the system resulting into chaos. Therefore this became a question of survival for the EPRDF. (Simon 2011)

Moreover, repeated statements by senior officials, in policy documents and internal party documents make it clear that the government's concern was not just any form of economic growth, but 'broad-based growth in which the majority of the population is able to benefit' (MoFED 2003, p. 9). Since, development 'that leaves the bulk of the population as mere spectators of a well-endowed few would not rescue the country from engulfing crisis' (EPRDF 2010, p. 3). Indeed, Meles and many other government statements tied the mass distributive threat faced by the EPRDF to the fate of the country as a whole, 'I am convinced that we will cease to exist as a nation unless we grow fast and share our growth' (De Waal 2013, p. 154).¹⁴

Despite the EPRDF's intensified commitment to rapid, broad-based development and mass distribution as a solution to its political problems, the government's fiscal position in the early 2000s remained extremely weak. The EPRDF had made some efforts to increase tax mobilisation

¹⁴ Other examples of comparable statements can be found in MoI (2002a, p. 7), MoFED (2003, p. 11) and EPRDF (2010, p. 2).

during the 1990s. However, this was constrained by the small tax base in an economy dominated by peasant agriculture, and the Eritrean war had drained state coffers. While the government undertook a series of tax reforms throughout the 2000s aimed at increasing compliance and broadening the tax base, the only way to significantly expand tax revenues would be through economic development (Mascagni 2016). Moreover, foreign aid receipts remained modest, reaching a low point during the Eritrean war, as donors pushed for an end to a conflict regarded as pointless and avoidable (see Figure 4.2).¹⁵ Aid receipts only slightly increased following the war and were again reined in as donors protested the government's handling of the elections in 2005. Indeed, the donor response to the election fallout was to divert general budget support previously allocated to the federal government to wereda administrations through the Protection of Basic Services programme, supporting service delivery while limiting federal government discretion over spending. Moreover, the general inclination of Ethiopia's main donors continued to be the promotion of a market-based approach to development, albeit in the context of the post-Washington Consensus focus on poverty reduction and social services (Amsden 2010, Mkandawire 2010). State-led development and industrial policy were not in fashion and there was widespread pessimism about the prospects of an East Asian-style developmental state in Africa (Mkandawire 2001). Certainly Ethiopia, widely regarded as a 'basket case', did not seem a likely candidate for successful state-led development. Consequently, the development strategy laid out in the early 2000s 'was very much criticised and ridiculed' by donors.¹⁶ The experience served to reinforce the government's longstanding view that while donor support might provide supplementary revenues, it was unreliable and the government's strategy should focus first and foremost on self-reliance.

As Figure 4.2 shows, OECD donors did significantly increase support to Ethiopia from the late 2000s. However, this was primarily in response to what they considered to be an emerging success story and a government capable of delivering on its promises, rather than aid being a driver of developmental performance (Feyissa 2011a, Fantini and Puddu 2016).¹⁷ The result was that although total aid increased, aid as a percentage of GDP was in decline. Moreover, the emergence of Chinese financial assistance provided

¹⁵ 'Two bald men fighting over a comb' was a typical outsider view of the conflict (*The Economist* 1998)

¹⁶ Interview with respondent ED54, former senior World Bank official, by Skype, 23 July and 10 November 2015.

¹⁷ For the US government, Ethiopia was seen as a strategic partner in Bush administration's 'War on Terror' and a counterbalance to neighbouring Somalia and Sudan (Interview with respondent ED9, a former senior USAID official, by Skype, 3 November 2015).

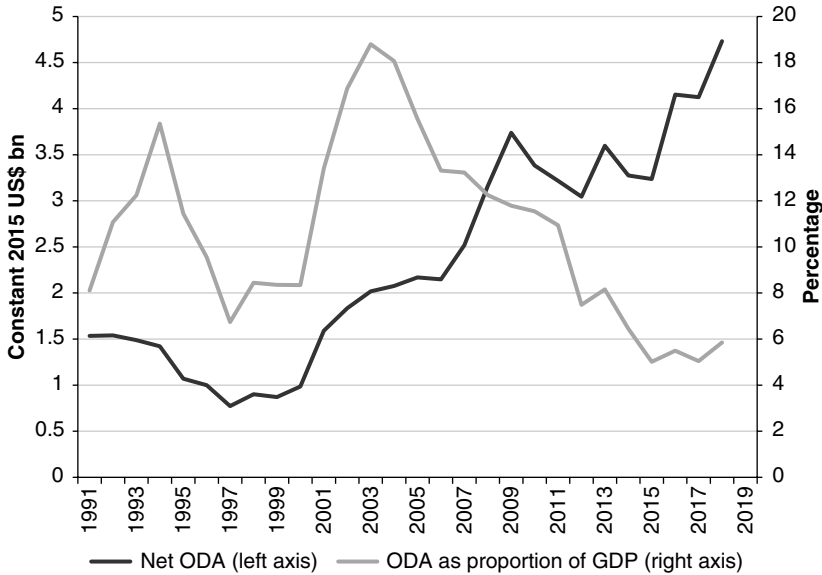


Figure 4.2 Net overseas development assistance to Ethiopia
 Source: author, based on World Development Indicators, World Bank.

an important alternative source of finance, particularly for infrastructure development projects, including roads, bridges and dams, that were key pillars of the government's plans but which western donors were reluctant to fund (Cheru and Oqubay 2019). Ultimately, domestic politics and EPRDF ideology, rather than donor influence, were the central factors that shaped the government's development strategy, with the government aggressively defending the policy autonomy carved out during the 1990s. Moreover, the government explicitly sought to manage donors strategically (MoI 2002a), seeking donor support for sectors with shared priorities, including primary education and basic health, capacity building and social protection, while reserving government resources for priorities that donor were unwilling to fund such as infrastructure, agriculture and industry (Furtado and Smith 2009). The result has been that while donors were quite influential at points within particular sectors, they had relatively little insight into and little influence over the big issues shaping the government's development strategy.

By the early to mid-2000s, therefore, Ethiopian politics came to approximate the conditions identified in Chapter 2 as being suited to state-led development. The state autonomy and capacity forged through the revolution of the 1970s was now accompanied by a coherent political elite that viewed rapid and broad-based development to be the only

feasible solution to the existential threat posed by growing mass distributive pressures and severe resource constraints.

The Emergence of the 'Developmental State'

While the TPLF split was primarily a power struggle between contending factions, many of the dissidents expelled from the party were also among the more committed Marxists. Consequently, the removal of the left wing of the party ultimately contributed to an ideological shift and consensus on a new approach. This ideological consensus leaned heavily on the party's longstanding commitments to self-reliance and the importance of state intervention, but also represented a notable change. In particular, the EPRDF embraced capitalist development, rather than socialism, opening up the party to the national bourgeoisie and pursuing integration into the global economy, changes that would surely not have been accepted by the expelled dissidents on the party's left wing (Tadesse and Young 2003, p. 392, EPRDF 2006, 2010, Simon 2011). In Bereket Simon's words,

Marxist Leninist ideologies were replaced by a capitalist outlook. While capitalism may not be the perfect system, the leadership agreed that there is no better alternative. It is the only system that was tested and succeeded. It is the only system that can take Ethiopia out of its centuries old backwardness. The leadership reached a consensus on this. (Simon 2011)

It is important to acknowledge here that while structural factors shaping the ruling elite were hugely important, this is not to deny the importance of agency and ideas. As much of the existing literature has argued (De Waal 2015, Clapham 2018), Meles Zenawi, his political position now solidified, was enormously influential in outlining the future direction of the national development strategy, apparently drafting most policy and party documents himself, as well as taking the lead in educating his colleagues. Indeed, according to one senior official in the Ministry of Capacity Building,

At a certain point Meles decided that he was the one to have the ideas, from his books and his reading and even his close colleagues became implementers. He was training senior colleagues by video link from the palace – Addisu [Legesse], his deputy, and Bereket [Simon].¹⁸

Meles drew heavily on his reading of the experiences of South Korea and Taiwan in his efforts to build an Ethiopian 'developmental state',

¹⁸ Interview respondent EG47, former senior official in the Ministry of Capacity Building, Addis Ababa, 18 February 2020.

framed in contrast to a rather caricatured 'neo-liberalism' (EPRDF 2006, Zenawi 2006a, 2006b, 2012). This shift in development model built seamlessly on the EPRDF's longstanding commitments to state-led development and the importance of self-reliance dating back to the TPLF insurgency, with all available resources to be mobilised by the state in the pursuit of development. This shift to a capitalist model of development also entailed a significant change in the class analysis underpinning the Front's political and development strategy. The private sector had previously been viewed negatively. However, drawing on the developmental state literature on state–business relations, Meles' statements and other government documents began to highlight the important role for the private sector. From this perspective, the central function of a 'developmental state' was to direct the private sector towards productive activity and away from 'rent seeking',

One of the distinguishing characteristics of a developmental state is its relations with the private sector. While the developmental state has to establish a very close relationship with the private sector engaged in productive activities, it has to curtail the activities of those engaged in rent-seeking activities and, hence, has to have adequate autonomy from both sections of the private sector, to provide directive support to the first and restrict and ultimately overcome the second. (Zenawi 2006a)

The result, following the renewal, was greater openness to private investment from both foreign and domestic sources that had previously been held in 'suspicion' (MoI 2002b, p. 2, EPRDF 2006, 2010). While the EPRDF continued to see itself as 'fundamentally an organization of the peasantry', which also enjoys the support of the 'broad masses in urban areas' (EPRDF 2010, p. 6), the national bourgeoisie was classified as a key constituency and a group that would have to be won over given their 'special (vital) role in our development endeavor' (EPRDF 2010, pp. 6–7). As noted above, the EPRDF had long distinguished between developmental and 'rent seeking' private sector actors (TGE 1994, p. 2). However, from the early 2000s the distinction between productive investors and 'parasitic' rent seekers became central to the government's 'developmental state' discourse (EPRDF 2010, p. 7). Moreover, the government began to label almost any form of corruption or political opposition as 'rent seeking' and 'anti-development', implying that political opposition reflected not just a different viewpoint, but a threat to national security (Vaughan 2011, Gebresenbet 2014).

Ethiopia's 'developmental state' therefore identified a central role for 'constructive government' in the development process, centralising rent allocation to enable the state to prioritise 'developmental' private enterprises pursuing 'productive' activities and limit access for parasitic

rent seekers (EPRDF 2006). Moreover, where the private sector was unable or unwilling to engage in sectors identified by the state as being of developmental importance, the state would need to intervene directly (EPRDF 2010, p. 5). The state's ability to influence and discipline the private sector depended on state control of two key resources that were likewise essential to state-led development in Korea and Taiwan: finance and land (Woo 1991, Amsden 1992, Castells 1992). Both finance and land were nationalised under the Derg, and the EPRDF had resisted donor pressure in the 1990s to relinquish state control. In the 2000s, donor pressure for privatisation periodically continued, yet government resistance was increasingly justified with reference to the 'developmental state'. Newai Gebre-Ab, one of Meles' main economic advisors throughout his time as Prime Minister, was clear that,

on finance our views were very different from the World Bank and IMF. We thought the state should have a strong influence on finance. That was prior to the developmental state. It was the same with land, the thinking was before. But yes, when thinking about the developmental state, those two factors were instrumental.¹⁹

The EPRDF also responded to the resurgent nationalism evident during the Eritrean War and 2005 elections by framing its renewed developmental project within a form of Ethiopian nationalism. Meles cast the 'developmental state' as a means of realising an 'Ethiopian Renaissance', restoring the glories of past Ethiopian civilisations (Bach 2013, Orlowska 2013). In his speech on the occasion of the Ethiopian Millennium in 2007 he argued that,²⁰

We do not have written records telling us how Ethiopians celebrated the end of the first millennium and the banging of the second one a thousand years ago. We can therefore not be certain as to what their festivities might have celebrated with a well deserved pride in their achievements. They after all could rightfully have claimed to be the makers of one of the most advanced nations of the day ... A thousand years from now, when Ethiopians gather to welcome the fourth millennium, they shall say that the eve of the third millennium was the beginning of the end dark ages in Ethiopia. They shall say that the eve of the third millennium was the beginning of Ethiopian renaissance.²¹

Having previously argued that Ethiopia had only one hundred years of history, dating from Menelik's conquests, and that Aksum had no

¹⁹ Interview with Newai Gebre-Ab, respondent EG35, Addis Ababa, 1 October 2018.

²⁰ The Ethiopian calendar differs from the Gregorian calendar by approximately seven years and nine months, with the result that the Millennium was celebrated in September 2007.

²¹ Available at: www.africa-ata.org/et_ml.htm

relevance to people from southern Ethiopia, this marks a fairly radical change of perspective. Meanwhile, the symbolic embrace of Ethiopian nationalism and further centralisation of power by the federal government as part of the 'developmental state' raised additional concerns among many federalists about the limits to ethno-regional autonomy.

These ideological changes had a gradual impact on the details of the government's development strategy. Shortly following the TPLF split, the federal government released a series of sectoral strategies outlining the government's priorities. Beginning with the Rural Development Strategy in November 2001 (translated into English in 2003), these sectoral strategies expanded on ADLI and its focus on raising the productivity of peasant agriculture as a means of stimulating industrial development and structural transformation (MoFED 2003). Subsequent strategies focused on building state capacity to deliver these ambitious development plans, the first industrial strategy (MoI 2002b) and the Foreign Policy and National Security Strategy, which framed economic development as the main driver of national security (MoI 2002a).²² Indeed, one former minister, deeply involved in the planning process, emphasised that rather than a major change in direction, the initial impact of these crises was,

Urgency. It shows that we are still not making progress. So we had better organise a support system to raise productivity. We need to place a weight on the implementation speed and the design of institutions.²³

However, over subsequent national development strategies, beginning with the Plan for Accelerated and Sustained Development to End Poverty (PASDEP, 2005–2009) (MoFED 2005) and continuing with the Growth and Transformation Plans (2010–2015 and 2016–2020) (MoFED 2010, NPC 2016) the 'developmental state' model came to the fore. The result was an important evolution of the government's developmental and distributive strategy well beyond anything envisaged in ADLI. The changes related to agriculture, urban development, industrial policy and social protection are analysed in detail in the following chapters. In summary, the government came to focus to a much greater extent on urban development with a major push for infrastructure expansion and industrialisation fuelled by foreign investment rather than an agrarian surplus. This did not mean the neglect of the agricultural sector, but rather a new focus on commercialisation of high potential smallholder farmers and the promotion of capital-intensive agricultural investments.

²² The government produced its Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper for donors at this time, replicating existing government documents (MoFED 2002).

²³ Interview with respondent EG28, Addis Ababa, 1 November 2018.

Vitaly, this change in approach entailed a shift in the government's distributive strategy, which to this point had focused on guaranteeing mass access to land and agricultural inputs. From the mid-2000s, the government came to accept the limits of land access as a means of mass distribution in the light of population growth, displacement for agricultural investments, infrastructure and urban expansion. Instead, industrialisation was to secure mass acquiescence through large-scale employment creation. These changes ultimately also translated into recognition of the need for some limited form of social protection for those unable to secure a livelihood through access to land or employment.

Building the Infrastructural Power of the Party-State

The elite cohesion and sense of shared threat in the wake of the Armageddons not only led to consensus on the new development and political strategy, but also a focus on building the capacity of the party-state to deliver on these plans. This meant strengthening capacity in federal ministries and agencies but also the administrative capacities of regional and local state structures. Moreover, this expansion of infrastructural power went well beyond formal state structures, with an expansion of the party-state as a means of reaching into communities and households, thereby channelling the symbolic, coercive and, in particular, distributive powers of the state towards securing EPRDF control.

With the evolution of the EPRDF's guiding ideology and development strategy, there was a concerted attempt to instil the paradigm of the 'developmental state' throughout the party-state. The EPRDF remained a vanguard party within a framework of revolutionary democracy and democratic centralism (EPRDF 2010, p. 36). As such, the expectation was that key decisions made by the leadership – in this case the turn to developmentalism – would be accepted without question by the rank and file. Indeed, Meles explicitly sought to make developmentalism a 'hegemonic' ideology within the party, state and society (Zenawi 2012, p. 167). To this end, pamphlets were distributed within the party, outlining the successes and limitations of various examples of historical development, the successes of East Asian state-led development and the applicability of these models to Ethiopia. Elsje Fourie cites one senior EPRDF MP who commented on one such party document, *Development, Democracy and Revolutionary Democracy* (EPRDF 2006), claiming, 'We believe in this, as Christians believe in the Bible' (Fourie 2012, p. 139). As such, this approach to capacity building in Ethiopia differs markedly from the standard picture of East Asian state-led development that emphasises a

Weberian bureaucracy with high levels of technical expertise based on meritocracy and a strong sense of purpose, which is politically empowered to drive decision-making based on technical criteria (e.g. Johnson 1982, Evans 1995, You 2015). In Ethiopia, in contrast, it was the political elite and the party that provided ideological direction and policy detail, with the bureaucracy focused on implementing politically defined strategies (see Weis 2015, Gebresenbet and Kamski 2019, Lavers et al. 2021).

The civil service was also reformed with a view to improving implementation and alignment with government plans. After 2001, what became known as 'superministries' were formed focusing on the key priorities of the development strategy and headed by senior party officials close to Meles, namely: Rural Development (Addisu Legesse, deputy Prime Minister), Infrastructure Development (Kasu Ilala), Federal Affairs (Abay Tsehaye) and Capacity Building (Tefera Walwa). Furthermore, as the federal government institutionalised the five-year national development plans, ministries were required to produce their own five-year sectoral plans, setting targets aligned with national strategy. The introduction of a Result Oriented Performance Appraisal System (World Bank 2017, p. 18) meant that annual and five-year targets were cascaded down through the tiers of state administration providing the basis for performance assessment of each official and department. The key means of evaluating performance continued to be the system of *gim gema* adopted by the TPLF during the struggle and extended to government since.²⁴ In 2006, the government also adopted Business Process Re-engineering, a new public management tool intended to re-design bureaucratic processes to focus efforts on service delivery and performance (World Bank 2017). These reforms were seen by a former senior minister as key steps that expanded the state's capacity to deliver,

In 2003/04 we also started the civil service reform to promote efficiency, effectiveness and service delivery. Every ministry should have a strategic plan. The public services and servants now, compared to the past, are duty bound and service oriented. We established the Ministry of Capacity Building up to the wereda level and also federal and region. It completely re-oriented the work attitude—we are talking in a relative context—for the first time modern management concepts were introduced.²⁵

Similarly, there was considerable investment in increased capacity within regional governments, with regional bureaux established to mirror

²⁴ There was subsequently an attempt to introduce another new public management tool, Balanced Scorecards, as another means of assessing performance. However, this was rather inconsistently applied across ministries.

²⁵ Interview with respondent EG28, Addis Ababa, 1 November 2018.

federal ministries. Despite the important symbolic shift that came with the introduction of federalism, regional administrations had little autonomy and primarily acted as implementing agencies, transmitting federal instructions to lower levels of the state and coordinating their activities. This focus on building capacity also focused heavily on lower levels of the state. A central priority in the reforms launched after 2001 was the *wereda* (district) decentralisation process that established representatives of line ministries at the *wereda* level and financed *wereda* activity through central block grants that provide a degree of budget responsibility (Vaughan 2011). Indeed, the donors' decision in 2005 to redirect foreign aid from the federal government to *wereda* administrations through the PBS programme actually served to support this important government agenda of building local state capacity.

Under the EPRDF, the *kebele* – or sub-districts that built on the Derg-era peasant associations – also greatly expanded in capacity. Initially consisting of unpaid, elected leaders, these unpaid posts have expanded considerably with the creation of various committees to oversee issues such as land administration and peace and security, a local militia, as well as the expansion of the *kebele* council to comprise 200–300 elected members (Emmenegger et al. 2011, Lefort 2012a). Moreover, paid positions for a *kebele* manager, 3–4 development agents (agricultural extension officers), two health extension workers and schoolteachers were created in every *kebele* from the early 2000s. The result was to increase the number of development agents nationally from 2,500 in 1995 to more than 47,500 in 2008 (Spielman et al. 2011, p. 26, Berhanu and Poulton 2014, p. s198), while by 2009/10, the government had trained 30,000 health extension workers and constructed 14,000 health posts nationwide (Bilal et al. 2011, p. 11).

The result was a tripling of the number of public employees between 2004/05 and 2013/14, following a more steady increase since the 1990s (see Figure 4.3). Yet, this huge expansion of the civil service did not lead to a major increase in the wage bill thanks to efforts to suppress wage growth, as well as mass recruitment of relatively junior officials at *wereda* and *kebele* level who were at the low end of the salary scale. Regular salary increments for civil servants were stopped in 2003 in favour of periodic ad hoc increases that have fallen well below inflation (World Bank 2017, p. 9). Indeed, low salaries for all officials, from junior civil servants to ministers, was a point of pride within government, maximising the resources that could be directed to key projects of the 'developmental state'. Addisu Legesse recalled a visit to Vietnam, where for the first time he found a country that paid its ministers less than Ethiopia,

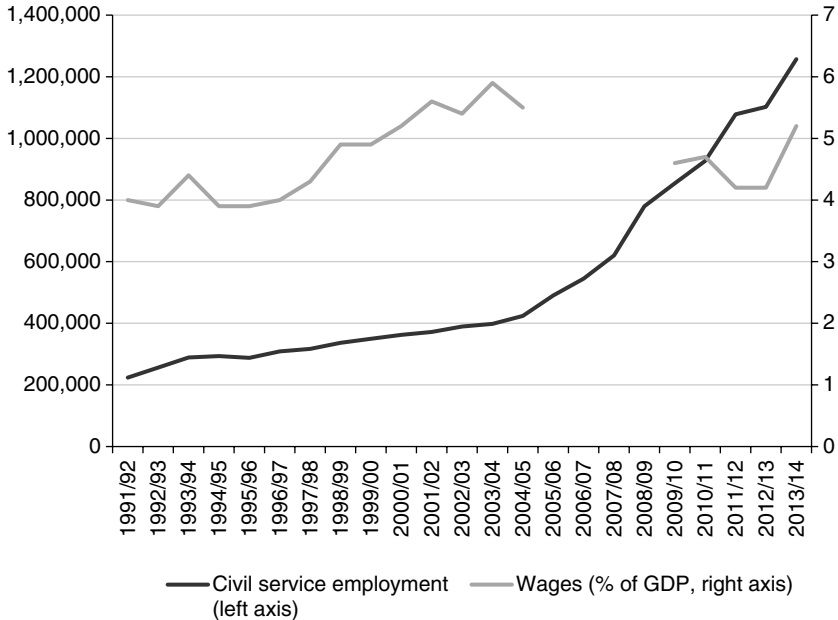


Figure 4.3 Civil service employment

Source: author, based on [World Bank \(2017, pp. 5–6\)](#). No data available for wages, 2005/06 to 2009/10.

I went to Vietnam and found that our government ministers are better paid by \$20. So I came back and told Meles, ‘there is somewhere that pays ministers less than we do!’²⁶

While this enormous state expansion improved service delivery, it has also enhanced the reach and control of the EPRDF, with almost all employees also party members with party political responsibilities. This expansion of the party-state reached beyond the *kebele* level, with the government establishing sub-*kebele* structures at the village level (*kushet* in Tigray, known by other names in other regions) and attempting to mobilise every household in the country through the creation of development teams (comprising thirty households) and 1-to-5 networks (five households) for men, women and youth. This development team structure – also described as a development army – resembles a military hierarchy and forms part of the ‘securitisation of development’, whereby poverty and backwardness are themselves framed as a key security

²⁶ Interview with Addisu Legesse, respondent EG21, Addis Ababa, 15 October 2015.

threat, justifying the mobilisation of the entire population (Gebresenbet 2014).²⁷ Moreover, these developmental structures are fused with the party, with leaders of development teams and 1-to-5s invariably also party members.

In principle, then, the EPRDF's party-state building project established a direct chain of command through 6–7 tiers of administrative hierarchy from the federal government through the region, zone, *wereda*, *kebele*, *kushet*, development team and 1-to-5 network to every individual in the country.²⁸ As discussed in Chapter 9, the effectiveness of these structures varied in practice, working most effectively in Tigray, to a moderate degree in Oromiya and little more than an administrative fiction in Afar (Lavers et al. 2020), for example. Nonetheless, where functional, these structures provided the party-state with a vital infrastructure with which to promote the EPRDF's developmental ideology, distribute the material benefits of the 'developmental state' in ways that tied individuals to the regime, and monitor and control the population. As one Oromo farmer evocatively described the system,

The government has its hands and the *garee* [development team in Afaan Oromo] are like the fingertips.... The *garee* is very near to you. The kebele was not. (HRW 2005, p. 26).

The development team structure advanced farthest in rural communities where individuals and households were most dependent on the resources they distributed. Nonetheless, the EPRDF aimed to extend this mobilisation strategy to the entire population, which was divided up into three 'wings' – the party, state and public (World Bank 2017). As a Ministry of Capacity Building official noted, 'civil servants, universities, students – all were formed into 1-to-5s'.²⁹

In addition to the development teams, the 'public wing' was mobilised through mass associations and cooperatives that engage in regular consultations with party and state representatives (World Bank 2017). As noted in Chapter 3, the TPLF had formed mass associations during the struggle, but the EPRDF made the decision in 1998 to separate these organisations from the party. Following the shock of the 2005 elections,

²⁷ My respondent believed that the development team structure was taken from China (int. respondent EG47). Certainly these structures bear a striking resemblance to the *bao-jia* in the Chinese Imperial era and the residents' committees under the Communist Party, and similar related structures in Korea and Taiwan (Read 2012).

²⁸ Zones vary in importance between regions. In Oromiya – the largest region – they retain some significance, but in Tigray – one of the smallest – they play little administrative role.

²⁹ Interview respondent EG47, former senior official in the Ministry of Capacity Building, Addis Ababa, 18 February 2020.

this decision was reversed, with the 2006 party congress announcing the creation of new women's and youth leagues (Berhe 2020). Furthermore, major efforts were made to promote mass membership in the party in response, with party membership rising from 760,000 in 2005 to more than four million in 2008, and more than five million by 2010 (Aalen and Tronvoll 2009, Vaughan 2011). As well as party branches at *kebele* level, party cells were formed in local communities in parallel with the development teams. In practice, many development team leaders – as party members – also became cell leaders, with the result that the two parallel structures are often used interchangeably, with both involved in party political as well as developmental activities.

The overall result of these efforts was a massive expansion of the party-state, both in terms of the technical skills required to implement the national development strategy and, in particular, the territorial reach of the fused party-state to reach into communities and channel the symbolic, distributive and coercive powers of the party-state towards the maintenance of political order.

Conclusion

The series of political crises or 'Armageddons' in the early 2000s were a key turning point for the EPRDF and Ethiopia. The political upheaval of this period resulted in a high degree of elite cohesion within the ruling party, a sense of collective threat from mass unrest and a shared vision for achieving rapid economic development as a means of transforming the country and meeting the distributive needs of a growing population. The result was that the government was finally able to build on the legacy of state autonomy and capacity inherited from the Derg, further strengthening party-state capacity and utilising these structures to pursue a project of state-led development. The headline results of this political shift are undeniably impressive, as shown in Figure 1.1, with an unprecedented period of economic growth from 2004 onwards, a massive expansion of infrastructure and the reduction of poverty in every region of the country.

The 'developmental state' model built heavily on the class analysis and ideological orientation of the party going back to the insurgency against the Derg, with a focus on self-reliance, securing acquiescence of the masses and framing developmental progress as a political imperative. Nonetheless, the embrace of capitalism and attempts to fast-track development had vitally important implications for the state's distributive powers that were key to the EPRDF's strategy of political control. The following chapters explore these developments and their distributive

implications across sectors, starting with access to land and the agrarian question (Chapter 5), before moving to industrial policy and access to jobs (Chapter 6), urban expansion and land expropriation in the urban periphery (Chapter 7), access to social protection (Chapter 8) and the ways in which the expanded infrastructure of the party-state was used to channel the symbolic, distributive and coercive powers of the state towards the objective of political control (Chapter 9).

An important point to reiterate with respect to the arguments developed in Chapter 10, however, is that while the crises of the early 2000s resulted in a high degree of elite cohesion, this was achieved primarily through the concentration of power in one individual, Prime Minister Meles Zenawi, rather than the institutionalisation of the party as a means of limiting elite divisions and binding together a cohesive elite. While this centralisation of power temporarily addressed the elite divisions that had undermined the government in the 1990s and enabled the rapid development that followed, it left the EPRDF highly exposed to the challenge of succession that is common to all authoritarian regimes. The party was forced to confront this challenge in 2012 when Meles Zenawi passed away. The EPRDF initially managed a smooth transition with deputy Prime Minister, and Meles' chosen successor, Hailemariam Dessalegn, taking over. However, despite the appearance of continuity and stability, Meles' death re-opened longstanding faultlines between and within the EPRDF parties. This erosion of elite cohesion would prove a key factor in the EPRDF's subsequent collapse, as discussed in Chapter 10. First, however, I turn to the 'developmental state' and its distributive implications.

5 Land Tenure and Changing Responses to the Agrarian Question

The 1970s land reforms addressed the exploitation and inequality of the Imperial land tenure regime. Yet, the Derg's Soviet-style collectivisation fell short of addressing the agrarian question. Since 1991, the EPRDF sought to transform the country's economy and, while industrialisation was the ultimate objective, the new government was centrally concerned with the core components of the agrarian question. This chapter examines the government's evolving agricultural development strategy and the importance of access to land and agricultural inputs as tools for mass distribution. This analysis is framed in terms of the three aspects of the agrarian question, as proposed by Terrence Byres and developed by others (Byres 1991, 1996, Bernstein 2004, Akram-Lodhi et al. 2009). These relate to: first, industrial accumulation and the role of an agrarian surplus; second, class relations within agriculture, including differentiation within the peasantry; and third, how political forces shape processes of agrarian change.

The chapter charts the EPRDF's evolving development strategy, beginning with the initial approach to the agrarian question, which was rooted in the TPLF's strategy for fighting the Derg and the focus on the peasant majority as the party's political base. As such, the government sought to secure the acquiescence of the peasantry through the distribution of land and agricultural inputs that would raise agricultural productivity and generate a surplus that could finance industrial expansion. However, the government recognised early on that rapid population growth posed a central challenge and that agricultural development that spurred industrialisation was essential to creating mass employment and alleviating pressure on rural land.

The political crises of the early 2000s forced a re-evaluation of this agriculture-first approach, however. Faced with growing land shortages in densely populated highlands, the government focused on raising agricultural productivity at the cost of inequality and differentiation. To this end, the chapter examines, first, the government's focus on high potential smallholders and measures to protect individual tenure security; and,

second, the selective expropriation of peasant producers to make way for agricultural investments. Official figures show rapid growth of small-holder agricultural productivity as a result. However, in the context of rapid population growth, the individualisation of land tenure inevitably meant that growing numbers of people – particularly young adults – had little prospect of access to land and an agricultural livelihood, while existing landholders were threatened by state-directed investments. The result has been to erode land access as a tool for mass distribution, heightening the political importance of rapid industrialisation and mass employment creation.

A Socio-economic and Political Strategy for National Government

The EPRDF's central concern on taking national power was to secure a political base amongst the peasantry. Under federalism, the EPRDF sought to mobilise a peasantry that is homogeneous in class terms but divided along ethnic lines, through ethno-regional administrations and EPRDF-affiliated parties 'with its own members, in its own language, using its own cultural traditions and knowledge system' (Vaughan and Tronvoll 2003, p. 118). To do so, the government relied on state land ownership and the distribution of usufruct rights to *enmesh* the peasantry. However, the *upkeep* of these relations of dependence on the party-state required additional forms of distribution and therefore a concerted effort to expand available resources. As such, the Agricultural Development-Led Industrialisation (ADLI) strategy was conceived both as an economic development strategy and a strategy for maintaining EPRDF political control.

Land reform was a key pillar of the TPLF's strategy for mobilising the Tigrayan peasantry, and the EPRDF viewed state ownership as essential to establishing control over the peasantry once in national office. However, the EPRDF's commitment to state ownership was not shared by foreign donors or opposition parties. As Meles Zenawi later noted, the 'advice we got from practically everyone was that we should privatise land ... but we were not convinced' (Zenawi 2006a). Initially, the transitional government compromised, proposing a referendum on land tenure after the transition period (TGE 1991, p. 21). As with the EPRDF's approach to sharing political power, however, this initial openness did not last. The referendum was abandoned and the 1994 Constitution vested land ownership in the 'State and peoples of Ethiopia' (FDRE 1994, para. 40). Meles declared to parliament that land privatisation would only happen 'over the EPRDF's dead

body',¹ with the Constitutional provision intended to end the land debate,

You know the game of chicken, with the two cars coming at each other? The best way to play it if you don't want to 'blink' is to remove the steering wheel and throw it out of the window ... I think they [the international financial institutions] recognized that the issue was dead. (Meles, cited in Gill 2010, pp. 93–94)

State ownership maintained the distributive role of the 1970s reforms, with the state providing land access to a homogeneous peasant class, while preventing the re-emergence of a capitalist or 'feudal' landed elite (EPRDF 1993, 2006). Indeed, the government framed state ownership as 'the only social security the peasants have' (Meles, cited in Marcus 1995). In contrast, land privatisation and market forces were a threat to the peasantry and thereby political order, with Meles repeatedly questioning the logic of privatisation,

By fully privatizing land ownership, one starts the process of differentiation. The creative, vigorous peasant farmer gets to own larger pieces of land and the less effective get to be left to live in doubt. And that is supposed to improve agricultural production and productivity in Ethiopia. We beg to differ on this issue. We do not believe this is the right approach in our country. (Meles, cited in The Reporter 2000)

The EPRDF retained the last land redistribution before 1991, by the TPLF in Tigray and the Derg in the rest of the country, with some local initiatives to incorporate landless households through allocation of unused land during the 1990s (Rahmato 1994). The exception was Amhara, which in 1997 became the sole region to conduct land redistribution under the EPRDF. EPDM / ANDM had carried out land reforms in liberated areas of Wello during the conflict, and Amhara state officials framed the 1997 redistribution as a means of addressing Derg-era inequality and corruption in the rest of the region.² In reality, redistribution punished Derg officials who were given reduced landholdings (Ege 1997, Hoben 2001). As such, this redistribution was entirely consistent with the strategy of coercive distribution, which displaced rival elites and enmeshed the peasantry in relations of dependence.

The EPRDF acknowledged, however, that land access alone was insufficient to deliver improved livelihoods and retain mass acquiescence. In the early 1990s, agriculture was dominated by low productivity

¹ Interview with Addisu Legesse, EG2, former deputy Prime Minister, Addis Ababa, 7 October 2015, also Devereux et al. (2005, p. 122).

² Interviews ED35, former government official, Addis Ababa, 4 December 2009; and ARG1, senior official in the Amhara Bureau of Environmental Protection, Land Administration and Use, Bahir Dar, 18 March 2010.

peasant production, while food insecurity remained a major problem. This was most vividly illustrated by the 1984/85 famine, which particularly affected Tigray, but also the subsequent annual appeals for international emergency assistance to avert further catastrophe. Moreover, by the early 1990s it was already apparent that population growth was resulting in growing numbers of young adults without land access. Further land redistribution could only lead to the allocation of ever smaller and increasingly unviable landholdings to a broader section of the peasantry (Bruce et al. 1994, Rahmato 1994, Habtu 1997). The government feared that 'the weight of population pressure will decimate agriculture' and the political order it underpinned (TGE 1994, p. 8).

ADLI was therefore conceived as a strategy for agricultural and industrial development, and thereby a political strategy for maintaining power by expanding the resources available for mass distribution. ADLI was first articulated under the transitional government (MoPED 1993, TGE 1994), building on the TPLF's approach to mobilising the Tigrayan peasantry, but incorporating new ideas on agricultural development and structural transformation.³ According to Newai Gebre-Ab, Economic Advisor to the Prime Minister, the main influences were: Irma Adelman's model of Agricultural *Demand-Led* Industrialisation (Adelman 1984) and its focus on expanding the domestic market for industrial goods; Michael Lipton's critique of urban bias and proposal of an inverse relationship between farm size and productivity (Lipton 1977); and John Mellor's insights regarding the links between agriculture and industry (Mellor 1995).⁴

ADLI's short-run focus was to increase agricultural production, with state land ownership enabling the government to allocate key factors of production – land, labour and capital – in the most efficient combinations. In the highlands, where labour was plentiful and capital in short supply, labour-intensive, smallholder agriculture was prioritised, with larger-scale, capital-intensive production considered a waste of resources (Meles, cited in *The Reporter* 2000, MoFED 2003, p. 10). Consequently, ADLI focused on the intensification of peasant agriculture through extension services, improved seeds, fertiliser and irrigation, access to credit and basic education. In contrast, in sparsely populated lowland areas, where labour was less plentiful and the government routinely disregarded the land use of politically marginal populations employing pastoralism and shifting cultivation, ADLI aimed

³ A more detailed version was published in Amharic in 2002 and subsequently in English (MoFED 2003).

⁴ Interview, EG35, Addis Ababa, 1 October 2018.

at agricultural extensification through ‘expansion of large-scale farms’ (TGE 1994, p. 9, see also MoPED 1993, MoFED 2003).

ADLI was based on the assumptions that, first, improved inputs are scale-neutral and, second, that there is an ‘inverse relationship’ between agricultural yields and landholding size due to the intensive cultivation practices of smallholders. As such, ADLI sought to address both food insecurity and low productivity by expanding access to improved agricultural inputs for *all* peasant producers (TGE 1994, p. 16). In the words of Meles’ main economic advisor and an architect of ADLI,

the commitment was to provide the maximum outreach to *all smallholders*. *All smallholders* with the right inputs can increase their productivity.⁵

ADLI therefore sought to enmesh the entire peasantry through the distribution of land and improved inputs. In doing so, ADLI also explicitly sought to limit urban migration since this would otherwise create ‘massive social problems’ and ‘be detrimental to peace and stability’ (MoFED 2003, p. 27, Office of the Prime Minister 1993, TGE 1994). According to a former State Minister of Agriculture in the early 2000s, ADLI was ‘a policy to ensure that people stay where they are, at least until there are jobs for people. The fear of migration was for this’.⁶ State land ownership tied people to the land, by preventing sales and constraining rental markets, while agricultural inputs would improve agricultural livelihoods. In the words of former deputy Prime Minister, Addisu Legesse, ‘If there is progress [in rural areas], then people won’t migrate, that was the strategy’.⁷ As such, although the EPRDF retained state land ownership from the Derg, the government’s approach to the agrarian question sharply differed. Rather than agricultural collectivisation as a means of achieving scale economies, the EPRDF sought to provide land access and improved inputs to all peasant farmers, regardless of holding size, based on the assumption that all farmers could raise productivity.

ADLI’s focus on agriculture, however, was not intended ‘as an end in itself but a means of accelerating industrial and commercial development which would then siphon off manpower from the rural areas’ (Meles, cited in BBC News 2005). The increase in agricultural production was expected in the medium to long term to support industrialisation by providing a source of foreign exchange – particularly through export

⁵ Interview with Newai Gebre-Ab, EG35, Economic Advisor to the Prime Minister, Addis Ababa, 1 October 2018, emphasis implied.

⁶ Interview with EG1, former State Minister of Agriculture, by Skype, 28 October 2015.

⁷ Interview with Addisu Legesse, EG2, former deputy Prime Minister, Addis Ababa, 7 October 2015. See similar comments by Meles Zenawi in *The Reporter* (2000).

of coffee and *chai*⁸ – to enable capital imports, cheap food to reduce industrial labour costs and inputs for agro-processing (MoFED 2003). Meanwhile, the growing wealth of smallholders would create a market for domestic industry producing farm tools and agricultural inputs such as fertiliser. Building on the emphasis on self-reliance throughout the civil war, and in the context of limited domestic and external revenues, Newai Gebre-Ab argued that ADLI,

was considered a feasible strategy because we would not need to depend on foreign assistance. ADLI would lead to an autonomous growth process.⁹

ADLI prioritised low technology industrial production that maximised employment creation by focusing on agro-processing and industry oriented to the domestic market (MoPED 1993, p. 21)(discussed in detail in Chapter 6). The long-term objective, therefore, was that ‘agriculture should be the starting point for initiating the structural transformation of the economy’ over a period of 20 years (MoPED 1993, p. 5). In that way, restrictions on urban migration could gradually be removed, enabling urbanisation in parallel with industrialisation, with expanding industrial employment serving as a distributive resource with which to maintain political order.

The government, however, made limited progress implementing ADLI in its first decade in office. To a considerable degree, these failings can be attributed to the challenging situation the EPRDF faced, with a lack of financial resources, the challenge of post-conflict reconstruction and the Eritrean War from 1998. These challenges were exacerbated, however, by divisions within the ruling party and between the political leadership, the bureaucracy and foreign donors, as discussed in Chapter 4.

The government did begin its efforts to expand the supply and utilisation of improved agricultural inputs. From 1993, the non-governmental organisation Sasakawa-Global 2000 established demonstration plots to highlight the potential of agricultural extension, credit and improved inputs. Meles’ visit to the pilot led to this model being used as the basis for the government’s National Agricultural Extension Intervention Program (NAEIP) launched in 1995 (Keeley and Scoones 2000, Howard et al. 2003). Nonetheless NAEIP was impeded by several factors. First, with just 2,500 development agents to cover the entire country in 1995 (Spielman et al. 2011, p. 26, Berhanu and Poulton 2014, p. s198), the state’s territorial reach in rural areas remained limited during the 1990s.

⁸ Known as *khat* in Arabic, a mild stimulant and major cash crop in Ethiopia.

⁹ Interview with Newai Gebre-Ab, EG35, Economic Advisor to the Prime Minister, Addis Ababa, 1 October 2018, see also MoFED (2003).

Likewise, the EPRDF initially avoided the use of service cooperatives to provide credit, marketing and input supply until the late 1990s, as a result of the negative associations with Derg-era producer cooperatives (Kodama 2007).

Second, seed and fertiliser supply was a recurrent problem. No domestic fertiliser production was established in this period. The import and distribution of seed and fertiliser were state monopolies under the Derg, but were liberalised under structural adjustment reforms in the early 1990s. Nonetheless, EPRDF-party-owned endowment companies were given the fertiliser supply contracts for NAEIP, effectively monopolising distribution (Jayne et al. 2003).¹⁰ The government's view, with some justification, was that the private sector would have insufficient market incentives to undertake the broad distribution to all peasant farmers required by ADLI and that party-state intervention was necessary (Spielman et al. 2011). Yet, this further routed the distribution of key resources through party-state structures, while numerous studies highlighted the inefficiency of these party-state affiliates (Jayne et al. 2002, 2003, Spielman et al. 2010, 2011).

Finally, agricultural production was impeded by limited market access. ADLI intentionally slowed urban development and thereby demand for agricultural products. Moreover, the poor state of transport infrastructure meant that agricultural markets were segmented. Overall, the result was that use of improved inputs and agricultural productivity remained stagnant, with modest, if any, increase during the 1990s (see Figure 5.12). Meanwhile, the main outcome of government efforts to promote large-scale commercial agriculture were investments in sesame production in Humera, western Tigray (Ali et al. 2017).

With stagnant agricultural production and insignificant expansion of industrial employment (see Chapter 6), the rapidly growing rural population translated into growing numbers of landless or near landless households with tiny plots insufficient for household reproduction (Rahmato 1994, Habtu 1997). Land shortages therefore presented an economic and political dilemma, to which the government's response was ambiguous. Derg and TPLF land reforms built on the central principle of previous tenure regimes, namely that farmers have a right to a share of communal land, rather than exclusive rights to specific plots. Indeed, the Constitution states that land is 'a common property of the Nations, Nationalities and Peoples of Ethiopia', while peasants have the 'right to

¹⁰ The endowment companies are discussed in Chapter 6. Regarding fertiliser, the main player was Guna Trading House, owned by the Endowment Fund for the Rehabilitation of Tigray (EFFORT) (Vaughan and Gebremichael 2011).

obtain land without payment' (FDRE 1994, para. 40), suggesting a continuation of this principle and implying that regular redistribution was required. Yet, Amhara was the only region to redistribute land, and an early statement that explicitly allowed land inheritance (TGE 1991, p. 21) suggested that individuals had rights to specific plots, not just a share of common property. Moreover, the constitution was ambiguous as to who was responsible for fulfilling this right to land: the federal government for Ethiopian citizens; ethno-regional administrations for members of ethnic groups; or kebele administrations for members of particular communities.

New Answers to the Agrarian Question under the 'Developmental State'

The Armageddons of the early 2000s and evolving ideas within the party leadership challenged ADLI's assumptions, leading to a change in strategy. This was not a one-off reform, but a gradual accumulation of new policy priorities that resulted in a quite distinct approach to the agrarian question, the role of land tenure and mass distribution. As shown in [Chapter 4](#), the 2001 TPLF split concentrated power in Meles Zenawi and led to the explicit acceptance of capitalist development. Protests in Addis Ababa in 2001 and 2005, meanwhile, highlighted the political dangers of urban neglect that came with agricultural-led development. The most direct challenge to ADLI, however, was the 2002/03 food crisis.¹¹ For the EPRDF leadership, ADLI was framed as a race against population growth to raise agricultural productivity and stimulate industrial employment creation to enable industry to absorb the growing labour surplus and thereby maintain mass acquiescence and political order. The consequence of losing this race would be that,

In the nightmare scenario case, what we would have is agricultural productivity and non-farming employment would not increase significantly. New mouths to feed will obviously crop up in the rural areas in big numbers. They will have no access to non-farming employment because it is not being created in enough numbers. (Meles, cited in [The Reporter 2000](#))

In 2002/03, a severe El Niño disrupted rainfall across Ethiopia with the result that 14 million people required emergency assistance. Emergency appeals had continued every year since the 1984/85 famine, much to the government's frustration. However, the 2002/03 food crisis was on a far larger scale (see [Figure 5.1](#)), and raised the possibility that Ethiopia had

¹¹ Interview with Addisu Legesse, EG2, former deputy Prime Minister, Addis Ababa, 7 October 2015.

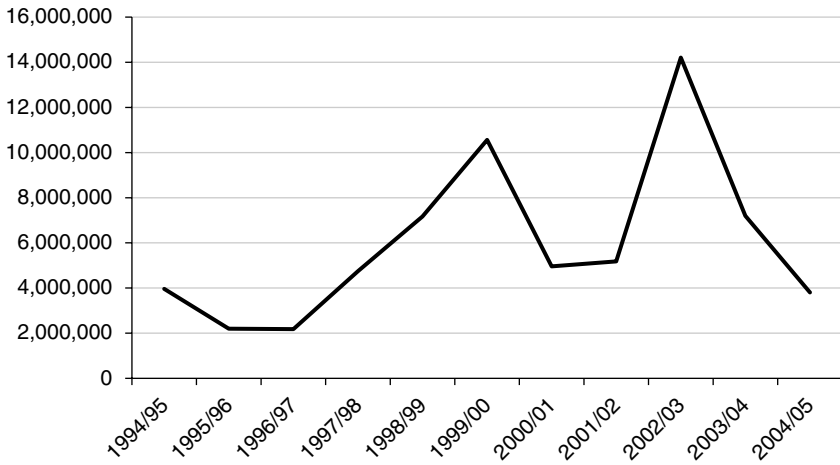


Figure 5.1 Estimated humanitarian requirements

Source: author, based on Joint Government and Humanitarian Partners' Documents, various years.

already reached Meles' 'nightmare scenario', with modest productivity growth outpaced by rapid population growth, resulting in widespread land shortages, unemployment and hunger.

The government's initial response remained within the spirit of ADLI, launching a new Food Security Strategy that comprised an 'access to land' or voluntary resettlement programme and the Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP). The resettlement programme that ran during the mid-2000s relocated those with insufficient land in densely populated areas of Amhara, Oromiya, SNNPR and Tigray to more sparsely populated areas within the same regions, particularly in the western lowlands (MoFED 2003). At best, such an extensification strategy could be a temporary solution, given the limits to land availability and population growth rates. Moreover, Hammond (2008) highlighted major implementation challenges. The PSNP, meanwhile, was launched in 2005 to provide regular cash and food transfers to some eight million chronically food insecure people to limit the effects of food shortages and promote graduation from assistance, primarily through the same approach as ADLI – improved smallholder productivity (see Chapter 8).

Subsequent five-year plans that outlined the 'developmental state' model, beginning with the 2005 Plan for Accelerated and Sustained Development to End Poverty (PASDEP), and consolidated in the 2010 and 2015 Growth and Transformation Programmes, marked a more

definitive break from ADLI.¹² Like ADLI, the ‘developmental state’ sought to raise smallholder productivity and promote linkages between agriculture and industry. However, the ‘developmental state’ had quite distinct distributive implications. First, agricultural policy shifted from supporting *all* peasants to raising the productivity of *high potential* smallholders (EPRDF 2006, MoARD 2010a). Second, the government promoted domestic and foreign private agricultural investments far beyond the limited role envisaged in ADLI in an effort to accelerate agricultural growth and exports. Third, as discussed in Chapter 6, the focus of industrial policy shifted from the extraction of an agrarian surplus and the creation of a domestic capitalist class to the promotion of foreign direct investment to accelerate industrial development.

This evolving strategy changed the roles that state land ownership was expected to play. The government maintained its focus on controlling the peasantry and the distributive role of land tenure in doing so. However, population growth and the absence of redistribution meant that, over time, land access provided protection for, and thereby state control over, a smaller and smaller proportion of the population. Land access could no longer be the sole basis of mass distribution or a barrier to large-scale urban migration. Instead, as argued in Chapter 6, industrial policy was to take on the burden of mass distribution, with mass industrial employment intended to absorb surplus labour. In place of the multiple roles played by state ownership under ADLI – protecting and controlling the peasantry, and limiting class differentiation and urban migration – under the ‘developmental state’ the primary function of state land ownership was instead to centralise state control over rent allocation, enabling the state to direct productive activity in line with the national development strategy. In Meles’ words,

The decision we took in terms of the land ownership system [maintaining state ownership] is therefore one of the critical decisions that have made it possible for us to try and implement an alternative to the neo-liberal paradigm ... Our strategy has thus been based on putting in place a land ownership system that curtails rent-seeking behaviour and promotes value creation. (Zenawi 2006a)

Under the ‘developmental state’, state land allocation prioritised two forms of production, which are considered in turn in the following sections: commercial smallholders and agricultural investors.

¹² These strategies continue to frame themselves as being in line with ADLI. While there are continuities, development strategies and agricultural policy from about 2005 took a distinct approach to differentiation and the source of industrial capital. In this chapter, the name ADLI is reserved for the strategy outlined in government documents in 1994 and 2003.

Commercialisation of Smallholder Agriculture

From the mid-2000s, the government began to recognise that, contrary to ADLI, not all farmers could sustain investment in improved inputs and produce for the market, and that less productive farmers would need to move into off-farm activities, enabling more effective farmers to expand production. As one of the main architects of Ethiopia's development strategies for 30 years acknowledged,

Out of 14 million farmers not all of them will produce a surplus. They are bound to move out, so we need to provide employment.¹³

By 2010, the Ministry of Agriculture's ten-year strategy acknowledged the need for differentiation, focusing efforts on raising the productivity of those with potential, while the remainder would need to seek employment,

The primary beneficiaries of production and productivity enhancement will be smallholders adopting improved agricultural practices that increase food production and cash income generation. These will tend to be located in the higher potential areas where the prospects for improving productivity are best ... Unemployed and under-employed people will enjoy improved income earning opportunities from employment in rural farm and non-farm enterprises. (MoARD 2010a, pp. 28–29)

From PASDEP onwards there was a much more explicit focus on smallholder commercialisation, which entailed the concentration of agricultural spending on high potential areas and high potential farmers (MoARD 2010a). This push for increased smallholder productivity has entailed important changes in land tenure, and a major push to expand agricultural extension services and market access, as discussed in turn below.

The Evolution of Land Tenure and Generational Divisions in Land Access

While the Constitution guarantees the right to land, access to land had gradually diverged from this principle. The last land redistributions to accommodate new households were undertaken towards the end of the 1980s in most regions other than Amhara. Yet, as Figure 5.2 shows the rural population grew rapidly, even as the rural population declined as a proportion of the total, resulting in the declining availability of agricultural land. Figure 5.3 gives an indication of the impact of population growth, by calculating the average area of cropland per economically

¹³ Interview EG28, a former minister, Addis Ababa, 1 November 2018.

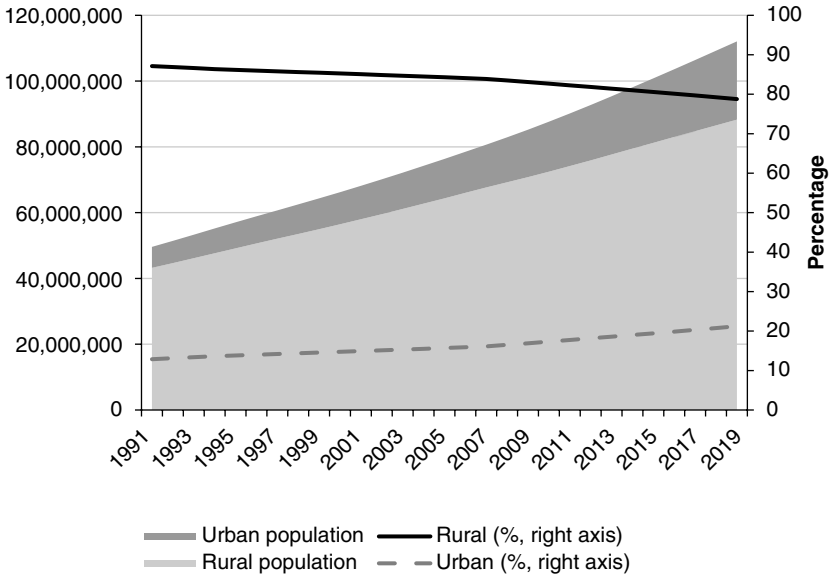


Figure 5.2 Rural and urban population
 Source: author, based on World Development Indicators.



Figure 5.3 Crop land per economically active person in agriculture
 Source: author, based on FAOStat.

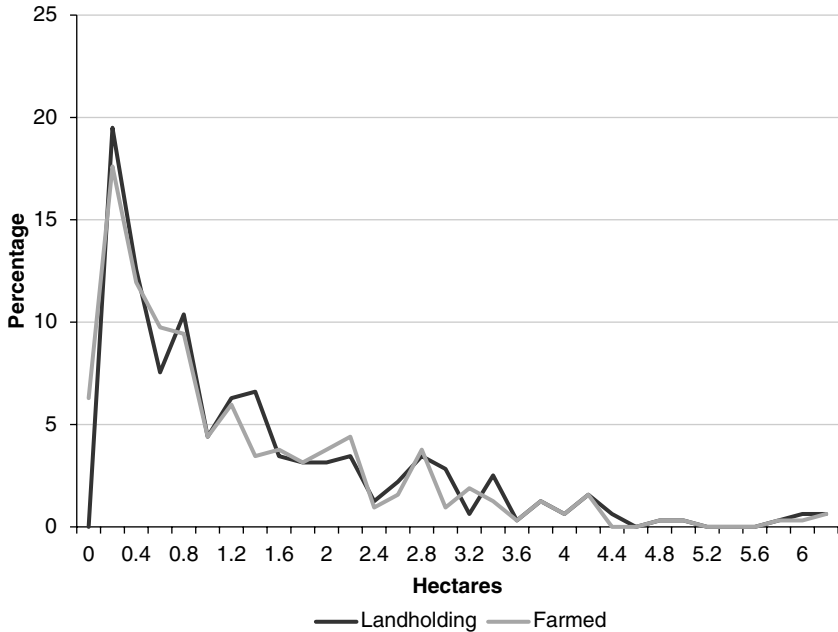


Figure 5.4 Households by landholdings

Notes: The sample for this graph is limited to rural households with some involvement in agricultural activities such as crop or livestock production.

Source: author, based on World Bank/CSA Socioeconomic Survey, Wave 3, 2015–2016.

active person in agriculture, which approximately halved since the 1980s. Cultivated area expanded significantly in the 2000s due to resettlement, and the allocation of communal grazing and forest land in an attempt to accommodate young adults.¹⁴ However, this supply was exhausted from around 2010, with the result that land availability began to decline once more. These average figures for land availability translate into very small landholdings for most farmers. Figure 5.4 presents data on landholdings and cultivated area from a large-scale household survey conducted in 2015/16. The median household cultivated just 0.6 hectares. The data include land for housing, which likely explains why many households with very small landholdings do not cultivate any land.

¹⁴ During research in Oromiya and Tigray in 2009/10, for example, kebele administrations allocated communal grazing, forest and marginal land to young farmers, often working in groups. This is discussed briefly in Chapter 9.

In addition to land shortages and the early 2000s political crises, the government faced renewed pressure from opposition parties and foreign donors to revisit the land question. The Coalition for Unity and Democracy (CUD), which secured electoral gains in 2005, vocally advocated for privatisation based on the argument that state ownership undermines tenure security, investment incentives and agricultural productivity.¹⁵ Equally, foreign donors, and USAID in particular, promoted privatisation, sending Hernando de Soto, a well-known advocate of land titling, to meet Meles and the Council of Ministers.¹⁶ While the government resisted privatisation, it did undertake reforms that individualised tenure, with important distributive consequences.

The first major step towards the individualisation of land tenure – whereby farmers have rights to particular plots rather than shares of communal land – were land proclamations in Tigray in 1997 (TNRG 1997, para. 6(1)) and Amhara in 2000 (ANRS 2000). These proclamations effectively prevented future land redistributions and required land certification. Based on the Amhara experience, the Prime Minister instructed Oromiya and SNNPR to follow suit, while subsequent federal and regional proclamations from 2005 established a minimum landholding size of 0.5 hectares to prevent sub-division into economically unviable plots (FDRE 2005a, ANRS 2006, ONRG 2007).¹⁷ Land registration and new proclamations therefore marked a definitive break from past tenure regimes, giving individual landholders indefinite rights to particular plots, as well as the right of inheritance. For proponents, this move strengthens tenure security and thereby investment incentives and rental markets (Deininger and Binswanger 1999, Deininger et al. 2011).

Whatever the impact on productivity, however, in the context of rapid population growth, the inevitable result was the inability to fulfil the constitutional right to land and the gradual erosion of the government's strategy of coercive distribution, which was based on mass land access. Indeed, land access became sharply divided along generational lines. Figure 5.5 shows the distribution of land certificates by age, while also

¹⁵ See, for example, a report by one of the party's leaders (Nega et al. 2002).

¹⁶ Interviews ED9, a senior donor official, by Skype, 3 November 2015; and ED35, former government official, Addis Ababa, 4 December 2009.

¹⁷ Interview ED35, former government official, Addis Ababa, 4 December 2009. This 'first stage' registration merely identified the holders of each plot, a low technology and low cost approach praised for its suitability to Ethiopian requirements (Deininger and Jin 2006, Deininger et al. 2011, Holden et al. 2011). However, poor record keeping and the failure to update certificates undermined the process. Second stage certification, involving GPS mapping of plots, was piloted since the mid-2000s, but was only launched at scale in 2013.

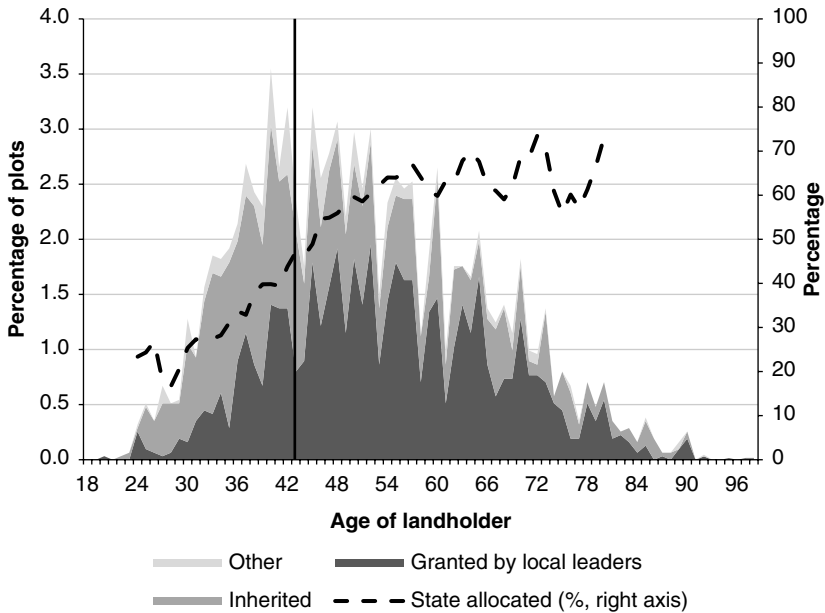


Figure 5.5 Method of acquisition for plots with land certificates by age
 Notes: The vertical line at age 43 estimates the minimum age of those eligible to receive land at the time of the last land redistribution. The survey was conducted in 2015. So, in most of the country those aged 43 in 2015 would have been 18 in 1990 and potentially eligible to receive land. In Amhara, anyone aged 36 or over in 2015 would have been 18 in 1997 and potentially eligible. The dashed line representing the proportion of land that was state allocated is a five-year rolling average. Source: author, based on World Bank/CSA Socioeconomic Survey, Wave 3, 2015–2016.

disaggregating how those with land certificates acquired their holdings.¹⁸ The graph shows that the vast majority of those with land certificates were at least 43 in 2015 and therefore would have been adults at the time of the last land redistribution in the final years of the Derg. Indeed, for these older landholders most land was ‘granted by local leaders’ – that is, state distribution. In contrast, landholders who reached adulthood after the last redistribution are in a minority and state allocation plays a minor role for this group. By far the main source of land for younger adults

¹⁸ A major challenge to the analysis of landlessness is the absence of any official statistics either at national or local government level. The only academic research that has focused on the problem to date employed case study analysis, finding that between 25 and 43 per cent of households in a handful of study kebele lacked land access (Adugna 2018, p. 76, Rahmato 2018, p. 7).

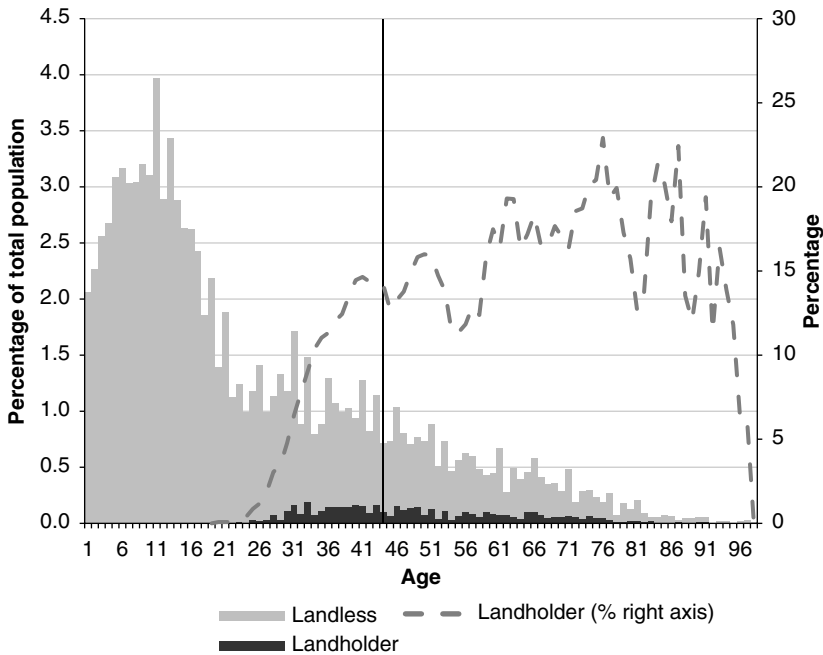


Figure 5.6 Distribution of primary decision-makers on land and rural population by age

Notes: As in the previous graph, the vertical line at age 43 is an estimate of the minimum age of those eligible to receive land in the last redistribution. The exact age differs in Amhara and depending on the exact timing of the last redistribution in each locality. The dashed line representing landholders as a proportion of total population is a five-year rolling average.

Source: author, based on World Bank Socioeconomic Survey, Wave 3, 2015–2016.

is inheritance, with parents' landholdings often divided up between multiple siblings resulting in particularly small landholdings (Bezu and Holden 2014, Adugna 2018).¹⁹ Meanwhile, gender dynamics continue to be influential, with parents often prioritising sons over daughters in inheritance (Bezu and Holden 2014).

Given that most land certificates were issued in the mid-2000s, Figure 5.5 could be misleading since younger adults that acquired land subsequently would not have a certificate. To address this, Figure 5.6 shows

¹⁹ While land proclamations prohibit the sub-division of landholdings into less than 0.5 hectares, this rule does not appear to be widely implemented.

the age of the primary decision-maker regarding each plot of land, regardless of whether or not they have a certificate (abbreviated to ‘landholder’ in the graph), compared to the rest of the rural population (marked ‘landless’).²⁰ The graph shows that the proportion of those who are primary decision-makers on a particular plot declines sharply for those aged under 43, particularly for young adults in their twenties. Moreover, given population growth and land shortages, there is no realistic possibility of providing land to all of the current young adult population or the large numbers of children that will soon enter adulthood.

While young adults have little land of their own, there remains the possibility of accessing land and thereby an agricultural livelihood through rental markets. Landholders who lack farm labour and oxen for ploughing often sharecrop or rent out their land, potentially providing an opportunity for those without land of their own.²¹ Survey data suggest that rental markets have a limited role in land access, however. [Figure 5.4](#) already compared households’ own landholdings with cultivated land. The very small differences between the two lines suggest that rental markets have a limited effect on land access. Indeed, this conclusion is supported by research that shows that the tenure system and legal restrictions on rental present a major barrier to rental markets ([Gebru et al. 2019](#)). In addition, [Figure 5.7](#) shows that it is larger landholders – rather than those with small or no initial holdings – that most commonly rent in land to expand their production, while those with very small landholdings are slightly more likely to rent out their land. These data therefore suggest that rental markets lead to some land consolidation, rather than providing a mechanism by which the landless can access an agricultural livelihood.

In sum, the land tenure regime evolved from the early 2000s to provide greater individual tenure security with a view to promoting agricultural productivity growth, but at the cost of excluding a generation or more of young adults from access to state distributed land. In effect, the government shifted its distributive strategy, accepting that land access would provide a livelihood for and thereby political control over a diminishing, albeit significant, proportion of the population, with industrial employment ([Chapter 6](#)) and social protection ([Chapter 8](#)) required to maintain mass enmeshment.

²⁰ The data show only the primary decision-maker for each plot. Clearly landholdings support entire households, rather than just single individuals.

²¹ A shortage of labour might be because of age, disability or gender. In most of Ethiopia, women are not expected to plough. As such, female-headed households often have to rent or sharecrop their land.

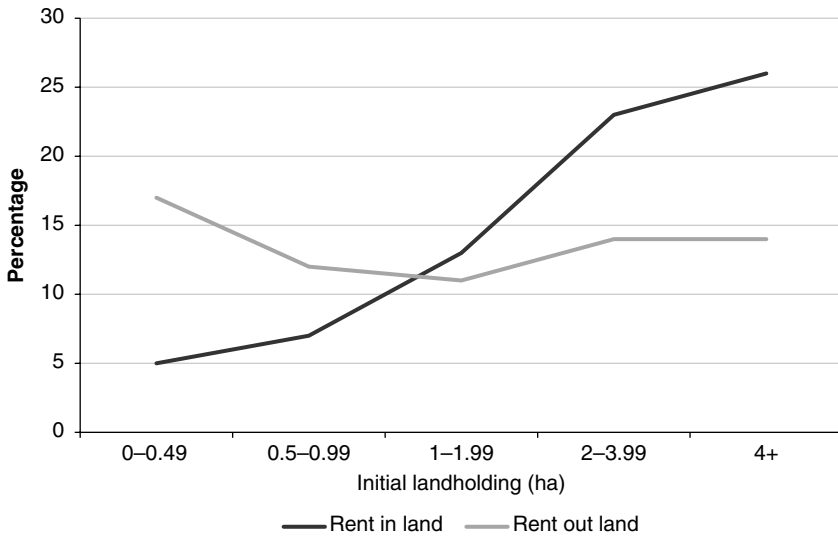


Figure 5.7 Prevalence of land rental by initial landholding size
 Source: author, based on World Bank Socioeconomic Survey, Wave 3, 2015–2016.

Renewed Efforts to Raise Agricultural Productivity

Alongside tenure reforms, the government also greatly expanded agricultural extension services from the early 2000s, resulting in significant increases in agricultural productivity. While the successes of these efforts have been acknowledged in recent research, existing studies have neglected two vitally important points. First, the agricultural extension system relied on party-state structures that reinforced the enmeshment of those with land access. Second, generational inequality in land access meant that the push to raise agricultural productivity had important distributive impacts, with many young adults excluded from the improvements experienced by landholders.

The renewed focus on agricultural productivity is evident in government agricultural expenditure, which rose rapidly in absolute terms and as a proportion of government spending from 2003 (see [Figure 5.8](#)). Importantly, this agricultural push was a government initiative, rather than a donor priority. Donor support for agriculture was limited during the 2000s, and only increased at the end of the decade as donors aligned with government plans. Major programmes such as the World Bank and USAID-funded Agricultural Growth Programme and the Gates Foundation-funded Agricultural Transformation Agency (ATA),

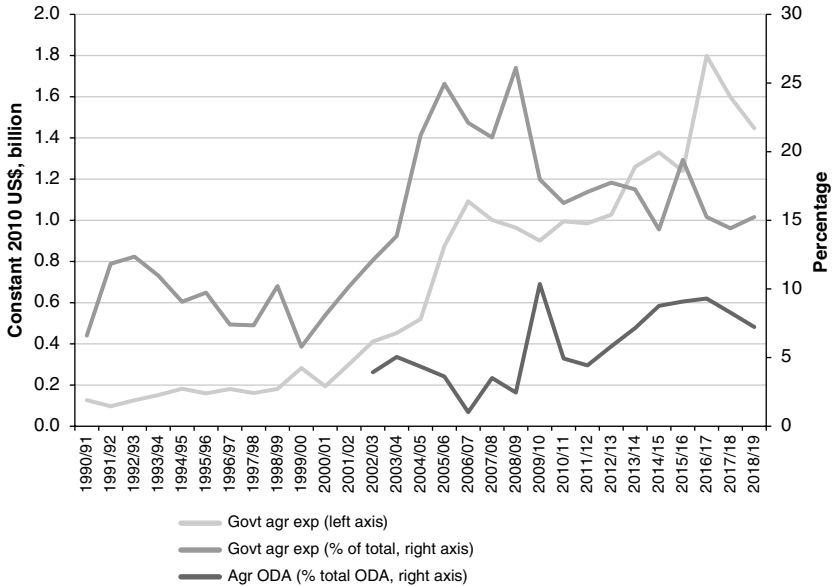


Figure 5.8 Government and donor spending on agriculture
 Source: author, based on ReSAKSS (Regional Strategic Analysts and Knowledge Support System). 2020. www.resakss.org.

both of which began in 2011, have played important roles, but built on longstanding government priorities and worked with the party-state dominated agricultural extension system. Both initiatives focused on improving market access and raising productivity through improved technology and farming techniques, particularly focusing on high potential *wereda*.

The main focus of state expenditure was the agricultural extension system and rural infrastructure (Rohne Till 2021). These investments extended the territorial reach of the party-state from the early 2000s, with this infrastructural power used to distribute agricultural inputs in line with the strategy of coercive distribution. The government trained 52,000 development agents by 2010, while constructing 9,200 Farmer Training Centres (MoFED 2010, p. 9). Within each kebele, 3–4 development agents – specialising in crops, livestock and natural resource management – were tasked with demonstrating improved farming techniques in these centres and linking farmers to the party and state-affiliated agencies responsible for agricultural input supply. The result is that Ethiopia now has 21 agricultural extension workers per 10,000 farmers, one of the highest ratios in the world and greater than China (16) and Indonesia

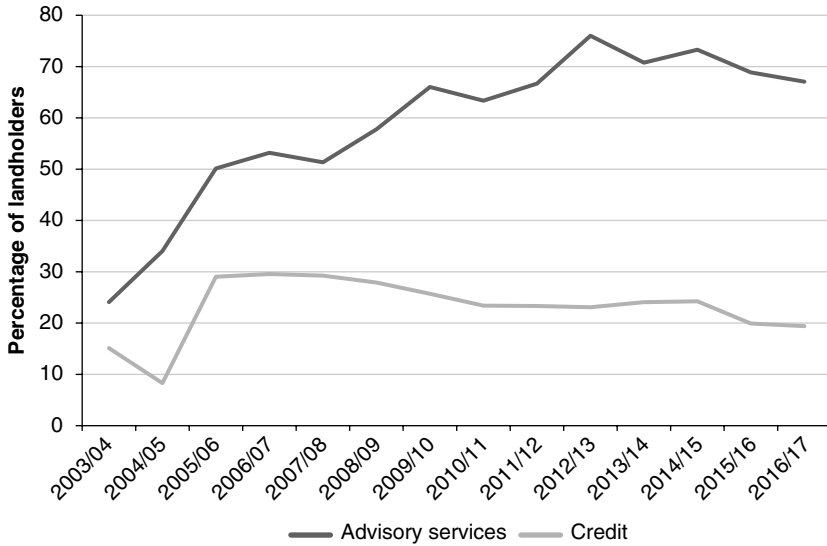


Figure 5.9 Access to extension services

Source: author, based on CSA Agricultural Sample Survey, Volume III, various years.

(6) (Bachewe et al. 2018). Indeed, Figure 5.9 shows a sharp increase in the proportion of farmers receiving advice from development agents after 2003, with extension services attributed an important role in increased uptake of improved inputs (Bachewe et al. 2018).²²

Development agents worked particularly with the model farmers who were assigned as the leaders of male development teams and 1-to-5 networks, building on the existing gendered division of labour. Model farmers had priority access to agricultural inputs and were expected to be the first to adopt new technology and demonstrate its value to their team (MoFED 2003, pp. 64–67). Moreover, model farmers and development team leaders were enrolled *en masse* as party members, strengthening ties to the party-state (see Chapter 9 and Lefort 2010, 2012). Annual and five-yearly adoption and distribution targets for improved farming techniques and improved inputs were derived from national development plans for each level of state administration from federal government

²² Valid questions have been raised about the technical expertise of development agents and their top-down approach to agricultural extension (Spielman et al. 2011, Berhanu and Poulton 2014). Nonetheless, agricultural extension is clearly linked to a rise in productivity, even if there remains further room for improvement.

down to the kebele development agents and, in some instances, even development team leaders and 1-to-5 members.²³ As discussed in [Chapter 9](#), individual farmers' access to fertiliser, improved seeds, credit and most other state services was routed through this development team structure and mediated by the development agents, with the result that landholders were almost entirely dependent on party-state structures for their livelihoods.

After 2001, the government also massively expanded the network of agricultural cooperatives, which were tasked with a central role in distributing fertiliser – replacing the party conglomerates – and improved seeds produced by the state-owned Ethiopian Seed Enterprise ([Spielman et al. 2011](#)). By 2013 there were 13,029 agricultural cooperatives with 4.3 million members ([Mojo et al. 2017](#), p. 58) and by 2012, 45 per cent of kebele had at least one agricultural cooperative ([Bernard et al. 2013](#), p. 2). As with many organisations in Ethiopia, cooperatives are formally independent of the party-state, yet in practice remained under heavy state influence. Most cooperatives were established with state support and were organised in line with the state administrative hierarchy, with primary cooperatives operating at the kebele level, and cooperative unions at the wereda.

A major focus of government expenditure has also been a massive road-building programme that tripled the total length of all-weather roads by 2013, particularly focused on improving rural access (see [Figure 1.1](#)). Past studies have shown that road access reduced transport costs and improved farmers' production incentives ([Dercon, Gilligan, et al. 2009](#), [Minten, Koro, et al. 2013](#), [Minten, Tamru, et al. 2013](#)). Furthermore, the massive expansion of primary education and adult literacy programmes has also been attributed an important role in supporting uptake of improved inputs and farming techniques ([Bachewe et al. 2018](#)).

The result of these initiatives was a marked increase in the use of improved agricultural inputs (see [Figure 5.10](#)). Most clearly, the proportion of land cultivated using chemical fertiliser and pesticide more than doubled after 2010. The amount of fertiliser applied per hectare also increased considerably, though at just 1.7 quintals per hectare in 2016/17, this remained well below recommended levels. Increased fertiliser use was complemented by an important ATA initiative to map soil types for the first time in order to tailor fertiliser types to local conditions

²³ Research in Ahferom wereda, Tigray (see [Chapter 9](#)), for example, found that 1-to-5 members signed annual performance plans committing to the purchase and use of specific quantities of fertiliser.

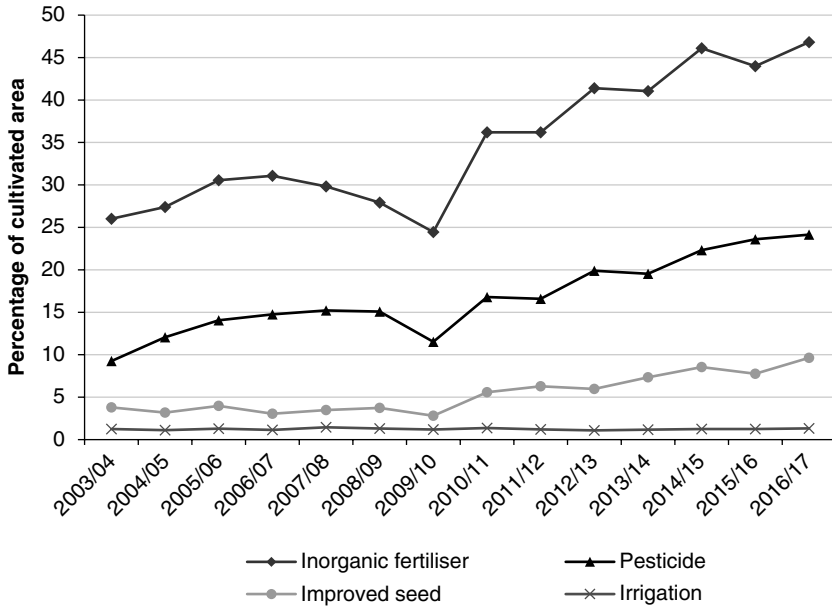


Figure 5.10 Utilisation of improved agricultural inputs

Source: author, based on CSA Agricultural Sample Survey, Volume III, various years.

(FAO 2020), a marked shift from the previous approach of issuing fertiliser quotas regardless of soil type.²⁴

Research and investment by the Ethiopian Institute for Agricultural Research and international support since 2000 resulted in a proliferation of new varieties of major crops, in particular wheat, teff and maize (Moller 2015, Mellor and Malik 2017). Official data suggest that improved seed utilisation remained very low, despite more than doubling in the last ten years. Nonetheless, researchers are convinced that official figures represent a major underestimate, since these measure the *purchase* of seeds (Spielman et al. 2011, Bachewe et al. 2018). Improved maize seeds are hybrid varieties that must be purchased annually to maintain yield. In contrast, many improved varieties for open pollinated crops, such as teff and wheat, can be re-used for several years without significant productivity loss. Spielman et al. (2011, p. 10) argue that the majority of wheat and teff was actually farmed with improved varieties and Bachewe et al.

²⁴ Interview EG42, senior official, Agricultural Transformation Agency, Addis Ababa, 2nd November 2018.

(2018, p. 291) cite a finding that 96 per cent of wheat in Oromiya was actually improved varieties.

In contrast to the increased uptake of fertiliser and improved seeds, there was little expansion of irrigation in smallholder agriculture. The main challenge is that most highland rivers are seasonal and situated in deep valleys that make it difficult to use for irrigation. State campaigns have promoted water harvesting, though this has achieved mixed results (Segers et al. 2011). In contrast, the main irrigation potential is in lowland areas where major rivers such as the Omo and Awash descend from the highlands. Many state-promoted agricultural investments have sought to expand large-scale irrigation in these areas, often linked to multipurpose dam projects, as discussed in the following section.

The provision of credit is also important, enabling farmers to buy inputs at planting time and repay after harvest. Once again the micro-finance sector expanded considerably and was dominated by party-affiliated organisations, which accounted for 89 per cent of loans in 2014/15 (NBE 2015, p. 54). Dedebit Credit and Savings Institution (DECSI) in Tigray was the largest MFI and a joint venture of the TPLF and REST (Milkias 2003), as well as being named after the village where the TPLF was founded. Likewise the Amhara Credit and Savings Institution (ACSI) was founded by the ANDM-linked Organisation for the Rehabilitation and Development of Amhara (ORDA) in the 1990s, with ANDM and ORDA retaining a majority share (Geleta 2016).²⁵ Similar relations exist between the OPDO and the Oromiya Credit and Savings Institution (OCSI) in Oromiya, and SEPDM and Omo MFI in SNNPR. These microfinance organisations have focused primarily on providing group loans based on the Grameen Bank model.²⁶ As shown in Figure 5.9, however, loan uptake remains low and has actually declined since a peak in 2008. The limited use of credit services has primarily been attributed to farmers' concerns about the risk of rain-fed agriculture and the fear of being unable to repay (Berhane and Abay 2019).

Official figures indicate that the overall result of these efforts has been impressive agricultural growth, averaging 7.6 per cent per year in 2004–2014 (Bachewe et al. 2018, p. 286), exemplified by the sharp rise in cereal production since the early 2000s (Figure 5.11).²⁷ Rising

²⁵ ORDA is the equivalent of REST in Amhara region.

²⁶ Interviews ARG10, official at ACSI, Bahir Dar, 31st October 2018; and ORG11, official at OCSI, Addis Ababa, 30 October 2018.

²⁷ Assessment of the government's agricultural development strategy confronts the challenge of data availability and reliability. The most comprehensive data are produced by the state Central Statistical Agency (CSA) and its Agricultural Sample Survey of some 40,000 smallholder farmers, covering the main farming season, which accounts

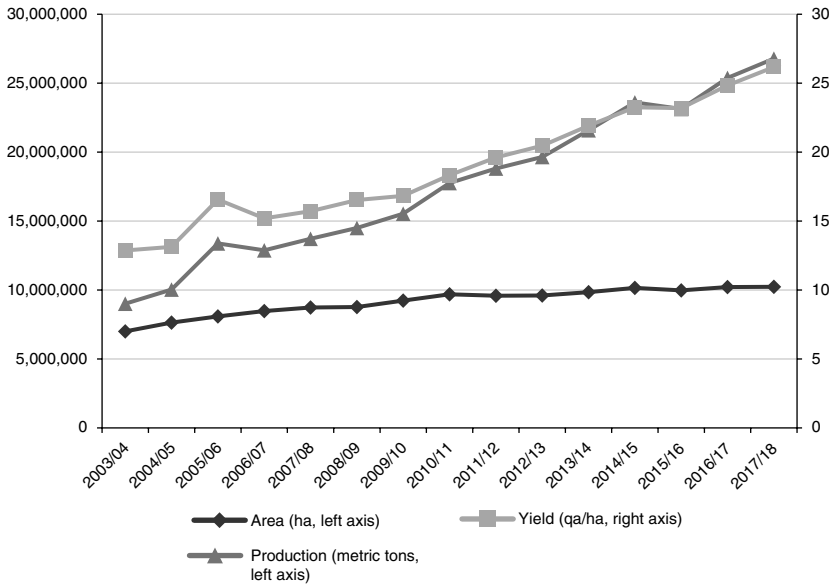


Figure 5.11 Cereal production

Source: author, based on CSA Agricultural Sample Survey, Volume I, various years.

production was partly due to an expansion of cultivated area thanks to resettlement and as local administrations sought to accommodate growing numbers of young adults. However, the stability of the total cultivated area since 2010 suggests there is little space for further expansion (Mellor and Malik 2017). Increased production was supported by a moderate increase in yields up to about 2008, consistent with improved farming techniques resulting from the expansion of the agricultural extension system and improved market access (Mellor and Malik 2017, Bachewe et al. 2018). Since 2008, however, more rapid yield growth drove total production thanks to increased utilisation of improved inputs and growth in demand from expanding urban centres (see Chapter 7)

for roughly 90 per cent of annual production. Some have questioned data accuracy in relation to particular crops (Cochrane and Bekele 2018) and productivity growth in the 2000s (Dercon, Vargas Hill, et al. 2009, p. 8). Nonetheless, others support CSA methods (Mellor and Malik 2017), demonstrating the consistency of CSA data with other sources (Bachewe et al. 2018). Even some early sceptics have concluded that while growth in the 2000s may be over-estimated, the overall trajectory and the increases from the late 2000s are plausible (Dercon and Gollin 2019). While caution is required, therefore, there is strong evidence of rapid productivity growth.

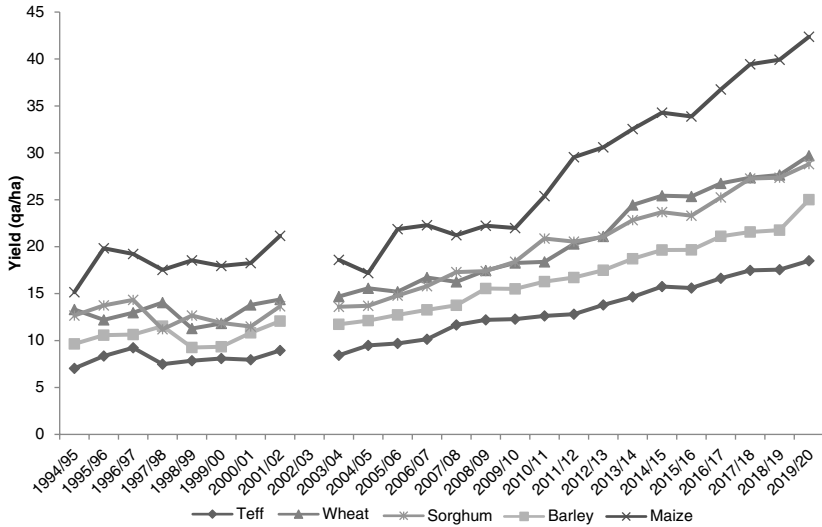


Figure 5.12 Yield for major cereal crops

Note: no data are available for 2003. Drought likely had a major detrimental effect on yields.

Source: author, based on CSA Agricultural Sample Survey, Volume I, various years.

(Minten, Tamru, et al. 2013, Bachewe et al. 2018, Vandercasteelen et al. 2018). This general pattern of initially modest and then more rapid yield growth is replicated across all major cereal crops (see Figure 5.12) and all of Ethiopia's regions.²⁸ However, the most pronounced increases and highest yields have been in the western highlands of Oromiya and Amhara, where rainfall and soil quality are most favourable.

Consequently, several assessments of the agricultural sector have proclaimed Ethiopia's success in achieving a 'Green Revolution' (Moller 2015, Mellor and Malik 2017, Bachewe et al. 2018, Dercon and Gollin 2019, Taffesse 2019, Rohne Till 2021). Despite growing evidence of productivity growth, however, the distributive implications of these changes have received very limited attention. While improved productivity does appear to have translated into improved livelihoods for those farmers with access to sufficient land and the resources to invest in improved inputs, this has come at the cost of differentiation within the rural economy. Most significant is the *generational division* between

²⁸ The picture is less favourable regarding the main export crop, coffee, with little growth in productivity (Worako et al. 2019).

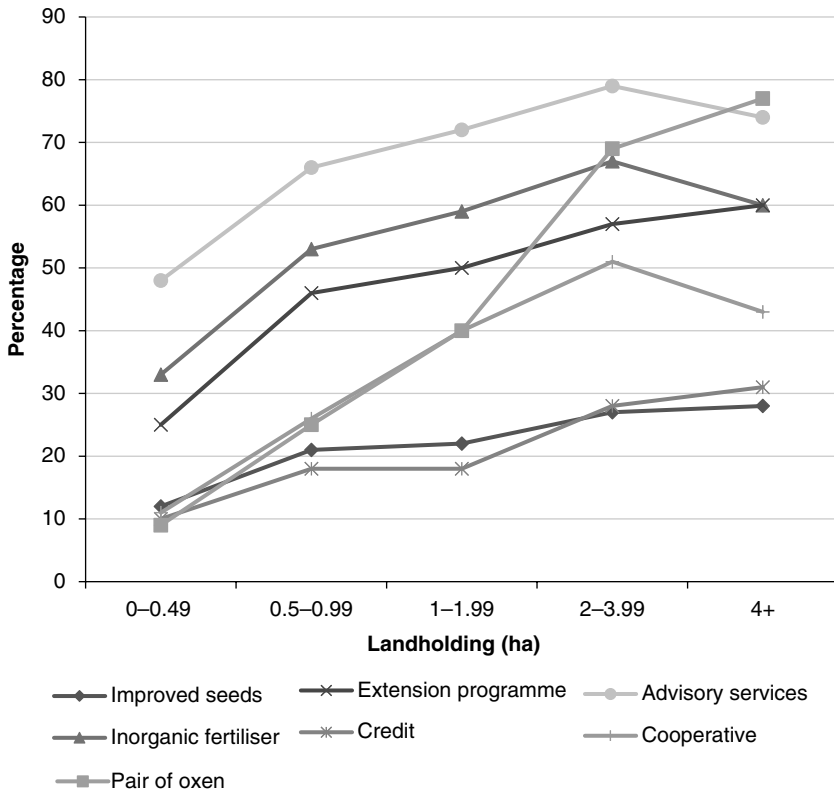


Figure 5.13 Access to agricultural inputs by landholding size

Note: data on cooperatives is based on whether the farmer got improved seeds from a cooperative, since the survey did not ask about cooperative membership.

Source: author, based on World Bank Socioeconomic Survey, Wave 3, 2015–2016.

those who received state allocated land under the Derg and those that reached adulthood since. Most of the latter have limited prospects of an independent agricultural livelihood and must either wait to inherit small landholdings from their parents or seek work outside agriculture.

Moreover, the concentration of improved inputs and extension services on farmers with greater potential has also led to a degree of differentiation between those farmers with modest, but adequate landholdings and a group of farmers with very small landholdings, who are struggling to reproduce themselves through agriculture. Figure 5.13 shows that the adoption of improved inputs is closely related to landholding size, with

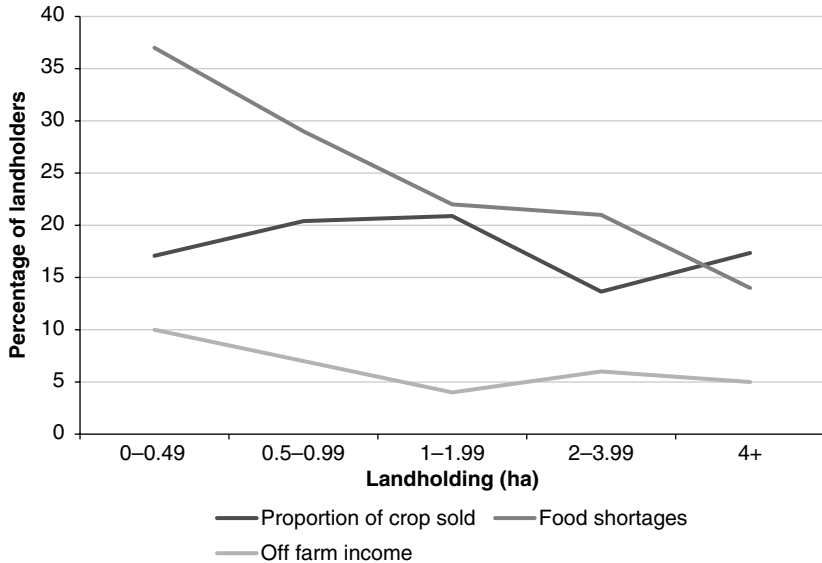


Figure 5.14 Outcomes from agriculture
 Source: author, based on World Bank Socioeconomic Survey, Wave 3, 2015–2016.

larger landholders more likely to participate in the extension programme, receive advisory services and credit, access seeds through cooperative membership, and to utilise chemical fertiliser and improved seeds. In contrast, Figure 5.14 shows that self-reported food shortages and, to a degree, off-farm employment are more common among those with very small landholdings. Indeed, research consistently finds that ‘push’ factors – land shortages and low agricultural potential – drive people into off-farm activities, usually through self-employment in low productivity activities (World Bank 2015, Schmidt and Bekele Woldeyes 2019). Adults under 35, with more limited land access are significantly more likely to engage only in off-farm activities or to mix own farm and off-farm activities than older adults (Schmidt and Bekele Woldeyes 2019, p. 117), while those with the possibility of inheriting land from their parents are much less likely to migrate for employment (Bezu and Holden 2014).

The extent of this differentiation should not be over-stated. The fact that about one-fifth of farmers with at least one hectare of land still report food shortages shows that many larger landholders also struggle to make ends meet. Moreover, the low proportion of produce sold by larger landholders suggests that increased production may be used to

supplement household consumption rather than a shift towards commercialisation. Nonetheless, the data clearly indicate that recent agricultural growth has been unequal, with growing numbers excluded from agricultural livelihoods due to their lack of or extremely limited land access. While the 'developmental state' delivered improved livelihoods for many with sufficient land, shortages mean that many young adults have escaped the government's strategy of coercive distribution.

State-Directed Agricultural Investment

The 'developmental state' entailed not just smallholder commercialisation, but also state promotion of agricultural investments, where these projects promised increased productivity and market access. Agricultural investment is legally distinct from, and sometimes in competition for land with, the smallholder sector. Though population growth presents the main challenge to the government's strategy of using land access as a distributive resource to secure mass compliance, the government's promotion of agricultural investments and other priorities of the 'developmental state' at times also necessitated the displacement of smallholders and other land users, further undermining land access.

The rapid expansion of agricultural investments from the mid-2000s was the result of both domestic and global processes. ADLI had always envisaged a spatially differentiated approach whereby the inverse relationship favoured peasant production in the highlands but large-scale, capital-intensive agricultural investments were preferred in sparsely populated lowlands. As acknowledged by Mekonnen Manyazewal, former Minister of Trade and National Planning Commissioner, increased agricultural investment was a response to ADLI's failings and the need to boost exports to finance import of capital goods for industrialisation and food to address food insecurity (Manyazewal and Shiferaw 2019). The government particularly targeted foreign investors with the resources required to establish large-scale production in the lowlands. However, from the mid-2000s the government also strongly supported foreign and domestic investments in densely populated highlands where investors promised increased productivity, market access and foreign exchange earnings compared to existing smallholders. This shift in government policy, meanwhile, was enabled by important global dynamics in the form of the intertwined crises of food, fuel, finance and environment from around 2008 that resulted in increased demand from private and public investors from advanced and emerging economies, investing in production of food and biofuel crops in Africa (Borras et al. 2010, Zoomers 2010).

State control of land and the financial sector enabled the government to promote investments in forms and locations that met its developmental objectives. The main priorities were export crops, and local processing of agricultural products, especially cotton for the textile industry, while minimising displacement and maximising employment creation.²⁹ To this end, the state Development Bank of Ethiopia (DBE) offered subsidised loans of up to 70 per cent to investors engaged in exports and agro-processing.³⁰ Moreover, the state provided tax exemptions and incentives designed to encourage exports (FDRE 2003, para. 4).³¹ Meanwhile, state land ownership enabled the government to expropriate existing users and thereby direct investors through state land allocation. Indeed, internal party documents clearly outline this function of state land ownership,

Constructive government provides land for development. In such conditions, it provides land for free or lower price to the investors. Although such individual is privileged with lower price from what has been on the market, and such kind of property offer cannot escape from being rent. Nevertheless, the land is offered for development purpose. (EPRDF 2006)

Agricultural investment was governed under separate investment proclamations rather than land laws.³² All investors applied for a licence from the federal Investment Commission, requiring a project proposal outlining the plans for employment creation and capital investment (FDRE 2002a). Only once granted a licence were investors directed to the relevant land administration to secure land. Meanwhile, land lease fees were set with the intention of directing investors to sparsely populated regions – particularly Benishangul-Gumuz, Gambella and the south of SNNPR – as well as remote areas of the other regions (TNRG 2000 [Ethiopian Calendar], SNNPR Investment Agency 2008). Investors were required to submit progress reports every six months while projects were being established and investment contracts had clauses specifying that the state retained the right to repossess land if investors failed to use it for the designated purpose. In principle, therefore,

²⁹ Interview, EG30, Manager, Development Bank of Ethiopia, Addis Ababa, 17 February 2010.

³⁰ Interview, EG30, Manager, Development Bank of Ethiopia, Addis Ababa, 17 February 2010.

³¹ Interview EG29, senior official, Agricultural Investment Support Directorate, Ministry of Agriculture, Addis Ababa, 28 December 2009.

³² Investors could rent directly from smallholders, but only to the extent that the smallholders were not displaced (FDRE 2005a, para. 8(1)). Effectively, investors could rent less than the full landholding – on average less than a hectare – making it all but impossible to accumulate a substantial landholding from such agreements.

the land lease system provided the state with considerable leverage over investors and the ability to direct their activities to government priorities.

Moreover, state land ownership gave the government sweeping powers to expropriate smallholders' land 'where it believes that it should be used for a better development project' (FDRE 2005a, para. 3(1)). Displaced smallholders were entitled to compensation of ten times their average annual income over the previous five years (FDRE 2005b, para. 8(1)). Yet, this minimal compensation was widely seen as inadequate amidst high rates of inflation, the inability to buy replacement land and the higher cost of living in urban centres. Meanwhile, landholders were well aware that their land was subsequently leased by the government at much higher rates (Abate 2019).³³

The federal government's promotion of agricultural investment also raised important issues regarding the federal division of powers. According to the constitution, the federal government has the authority to issue land laws, while regional governments administer land. The federal government's investment promotion encroached on regional responsibilities, however.³⁴ First, the 2002 investment proclamation *required* regional land authorities to provide land to investors approved at federal level (FDRE 2002a, para. 35), essentially removing regional discretion. Furthermore, in 2009 the federal government created the Agricultural Investment Support Directorate (AISD) in the federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MoARD) to allocate land to all foreign investors and domestic investments of more than 5,000 hectares.³⁵ The AISD instructed regions to identify suitable investment land and to pass this information to the AISD, which would administer this 'land bank'.³⁶ The weaker regions – Benishangul-Gumuz, Gambella and SNNPR – acceded to the request and handed control to the federal government, which oversaw 3.7 million hectares of supposedly 'unused' land in 2009.³⁷ However, the stronger regions of Amhara, Oromiya and Tigray contested what they saw as federal encroachment.³⁸ In an early

³³ The process through which landholders are expropriated is discussed in Chapter 7.

³⁴ For further details, see Assefa Fiseha and Zemelak Ayele (2017).

³⁵ The AISD became the Agricultural Investment Land Administration Agency (AILAA) in 2013.

³⁶ Interview EG29, senior official, Agricultural Investment Support Directorate, Ministry of Agriculture, Addis Ababa, 28 December 2009.

³⁷ Interview EG29, senior official, Agricultural Investment Support Directorate, Ministry of Agriculture, Addis Ababa, 28 December 2009.

³⁸ Interviews ORG6, manager, Oromiya Regional Investment Commission, Addis Ababa, 3 February 2010; ARG4, manager, Amhara Investment Promotion Agency, Bahir Dar, 16 March 2010; TRG7, manager, Tigray Investment Agency, Mekele, 1 April 2010.

sign of regional resistance to the federal ‘developmental state’ agenda, a senior manager of the Oromiya Investment Commission highlighted this tension,

The constitution does not allow this to happen. According to the constitution, land is administered by the regions, so to make the changes they [the federal government] need to change the constitution.³⁹

A representative of the Amhara Investment Promotion Agency raised similar concerns,

The idea comes from the good intention to promote development but it makes regional departments unhappy. It does not make for good relations.⁴⁰

The prioritisation of large-scale agricultural investments in sparsely populated regions was consistent with the original ADLI (TGE 1994) and, indeed, the long-term approach to agricultural development and state-building in Ethiopia. Beginning in the 1950s, Haile Selassie’s government developed and integrated peripheral areas by leasing land to investors along the Awash River and in Humera, pushing aside pastoralists in the process (Zewde 2008a, Puddu 2016). Likewise under the ‘developmental state’, large expanses of Afar, Benishangul-Gumuz, Gambella and SNNP regions were framed as ‘unutilized’ (Meles Zenawi, cited in ProKerala News 2011), ‘empty’ or ‘uncultivated’ and, consequently, deemed suitable for investment.⁴¹ The invisibility of mobile livelihoods underpinned the government’s confidence that investors could be directed to these lowlands ‘since such land has not been settled by peasant farmers, the issue of displacing farmers does not arise’ (MoFED 2003, p. 25). Indeed, the displacement of pastoralists was not merely an unfortunate by-product of investment promotion, but a specific government objective. The federal pastoralist policy presented pastoralism as unsustainable and in need of transformation (MoFA 2008), the favoured option being to settle those practicing mobile livelihoods and transition to settled agricultural production (SOZPAAB 2012). The government explicitly acknowledged the links between resettlement and the promotion of investment, given,

³⁹ Interview ORG6, manager, Oromiya Regional Investment Commission, Addis Ababa, 3 February 2010.

⁴⁰ Interview ARG4, manager, Amhara Investment Promotion Agency, Bahir Dar, 16 March 2010.

⁴¹ Interview SRG4, manager, SNNPR Investment Agency, Hawassa, 1 March 2010; Esayas Kebede, head of the Agricultural Investment Support Directorate, cited in McClure 2009; and ORG6, manager, Oromiya Regional Investment Commission, Addis Ababa, 3 February 2010.

the necessity of implementing appropriate settlement programs and creating enabling environment for private investors to set-up large-scale commercial farms and move to the next logical stage, that is investing in agro-based industries. (MoFED 2003, p. 58)

The result was that a federal resettlement or villagisation policy was pursued in parallel to investment promotion, clearing people from areas targeted for investment (Kefale and Gebresenbet 2014, Gebresenbet 2016). Moreover, given that land registration had not been extended to these lowland regions and the government questioned the land use of those employing mobile livelihoods, in most cases no compensation was provided (Moreda and Spoor 2015, Gebresenbet 2016). While the government placed great political importance on securing control over the highland peasantry, its approach to those employing mobile livelihoods in the lowlands was ambivalent; disregarding their existing livelihoods, while consolidating state control through sedentarisation.

In the initial rush of land leases, the government particularly targeted lowland regions, such as Benishangul-Gumuz, Gambella and South Omo in SNNPR, with many projects linked to plans for irrigation and dam projects. The failings of many of these vast, headline-grabbing projects have been well documented and reflect both the speculative nature of many investments, as well as the lack of state capacity to effectively monitor and regulate projects. A 100,000-hectare lease to Indian firm Karuturi in Gambella was the largest lease to a private investor.⁴² However, the firm was apparently unaware that much of the land was located on a floodplain, with the result that the first maize crop was flooded and destroyed. In total, only a few thousand hectares were ever developed and the government cancelled the contract in 2015 (Chandran and Gardner 2017).⁴³ This was a common pattern with several investors leasing vast expanses that they were unable to clear. Another Indian investor, Shapoorji Pallonji leased 50,000 hectares in Benishangul-Gumuz to grow biofuel feed crops, but was unable to clear more than a few thousand hectares (Keeley et al. 2014). One study found that, on average 55 per cent of leased land remained undeveloped (Ali et al. 2017, p. 62).

It was not just foreign investors who massively overestimated their capacities, however. In the mid-2000s, the state sugar company began to expand existing plantations in Wenji-Shoa, Metehara and Fincha'a in

⁴² The original agreement with the regional government was for 300,000 hectares. However, the federal government subsequently reduced this to 100,000 hectares.

⁴³ A lease of 15,000 hectares was apparently reinstated in 2019 following a legal challenge by Karuturi (Dejene and Cochrane 2021).

Oromiya, as well as undertaking massive new developments. The plan involved ten new sugar factories and an additional 400,000 hectares of plantations in Afar (Kessem and Tendaho), South Omo (Kuraz), Tigray (Welkait) and Amhara (Beles). The centrepiece of the strategy would be the Kuraz project in the Omo Valley with five factories and a plantation of 175,000 hectares, with irrigation enabled by the regulation of flood waters by the Gilgel Gibe III dam completed in 2016 (Gebresenbet and Kamski 2019). Like the 26,000-hectare Tendaho project in Afar, the Omo projects aimed to create large numbers of jobs, as well as turning the local pastoralist and shifting cultivator populations into outgrowers producing sugarcane. As detailed in Chapter 6, however, the sugar expansion projects quickly ran into problems and failed to deliver.

Overall, the efforts to promote large-scale, capital-intensive agricultural investments in the lowlands have been a resounding failure, with foreign private and Ethiopian state enterprises grossly overestimating their capabilities and underestimating the challenges. Moreover, despite the leverage that state control of finance and land provided, the state lacked the capacity to evaluate and monitor investors, resulting in misguided faith in investors' capabilities, particularly those of wealthy foreigners (Lavers 2012, Gebresenbet 2016). As one investment official noted in relation to a failed biofuel project in East Hararghe, Oromiya,

Nobody dreamed that it would be such a failure. We know how they worked, how they communicated with high officials, there were more than forty foreigners here.⁴⁴

Recognition of the failings of these investments led the government to announce a moratorium on new leases in 2011 and, from 2013, to limit new leases to 5,000 hectares, with further expansion conditional on performance (Keeley et al. 2014). The result was that demand from foreign investors dried up and there have been no large-scale leases since that time (Ali et al. 2017, Dejene and Cochrane 2021).

While the poor performance of large-scale leases in the lowlands has attracted most attention, there have also been many investments in highland areas. For the most part, these investments are smaller, yet constitute an important shift from ADLI's assumption of the inverse relationship between farm size and productivity. Under the 'developmental state', where investors promised new technology, expertise and access to global value chains that would significantly raise productivity and contribute to export earnings, capitalist investors were preferred to

⁴⁴ Interview with HZ1, a senior investment official, East Hararghe Zone, Harar, 21 September 2010.

peasants. Most investments took one of two forms – either horticultural projects that expropriate landholders, or outgrower schemes, both of which are relatively capital *and* labour-intensive.⁴⁵ In both cases, the aim is combine investors' expertise, global market access and capital with Ethiopian labour and land, raising productivity but limiting displacement (MoFED 2003, p. 25).

The massive expansion of the state sugar industry provides one of the main examples of outgrower schemes through the extension of the longstanding Wenji-Shoa plantation. Although the sugar factory originally wanted to displace existing landholders and directly manage the plantation, the federal and regional governments brokered a deal to establish an outgrower scheme with landholders formed into producer cooperatives to avoid large-scale displacement.⁴⁶ Wenji-Shoa built on its long experience and has managed to establish sugar production in the new project area. However, the outgrowers have benefitted little from the project. Originally forced to join the scheme by state officials against their will, they are unable to withdraw or even precisely identify their original landholdings in the vast plantation.⁴⁷ Moreover, the sugar factory, with state support, imposed low prices for the sugarcane produced, with the result that the producer cooperatives made no profit on several of their harvests, once production costs were subtracted.

Horticultural and floricultural investments, in contrast, have been concentrated in Central Oromiya and the Rift Valley, within reach of Addis Ababa airport for export (Abate 2019, p. 101) (see Figure 5.15). Following initial private sector interest, the government promoted floriculture from 2004, with access to cheap land and labour used to attract investors (Oqubay 2015). Horticulture and floriculture projects usually require the displacement of existing landholders. However, they tend to be fairly labour, as well as capital, intensive. State land ownership therefore provides a tool by which the government can re-allocate land in line with the priorities of the 'developmental state', expanding foreign exchange earnings by expropriating existing landholders at minimal cost and turning them into floriculture workers (MoFED 2010, pp. 46–47).

⁴⁵ There are also examples where the government leased former state farms.

⁴⁶ Interviews WI2 and WI3, project managers, Wonji-Shoa Sugar Factory, Wenji, 9 and 12 March 2010; WW4, wereda land administration office, Adama, 8 March 2010; and WW2, wereda investment desk, Adama, 8 March 2010.

⁴⁷ Interviews WW4, wereda land administration office, Adama, 12 March 2010; WW5, wereda land administration office, Adama, October 2018; WK6, Rural Land Administration expert, Awash Bisholla kebele, October 2018; and WK7, Kebele manager, Awash Bisholla, October 2018; Focus group WAF1 with landholders in a sugar cooperative, Dodota wereda, October 2018.

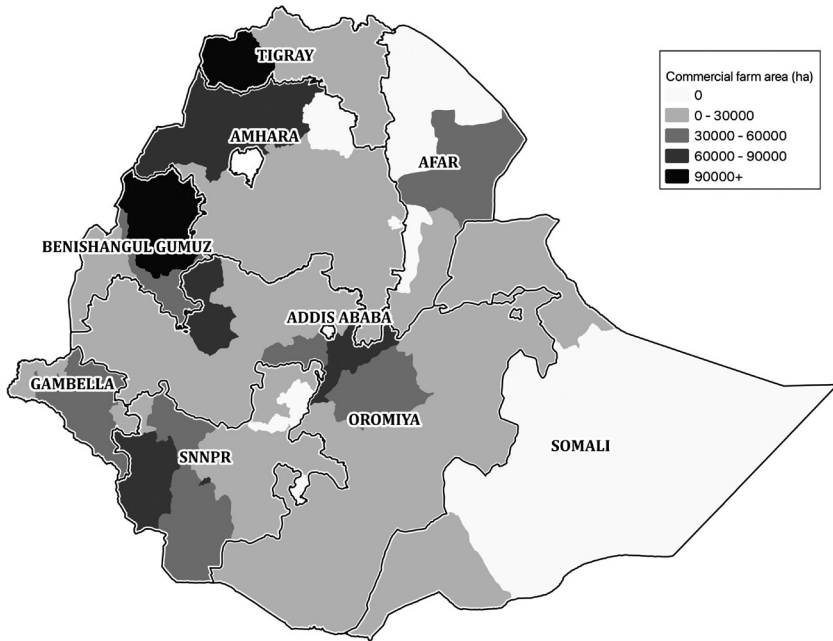


Figure 5.15 Area under commercial farms by zone
 Source: author calculations based on CSA 2014, Large and Medium Scale Commercial Farms Sample Survey.

The result was such that by 2014/15 there were sixty-six firms involved, primarily foreign owned, producing cut flowers for export on 1,623 hectares (Melese 2017, p. 9).

An overall assessment of the impact of these investments on the agrarian structure in Ethiopia is hampered by the incompleteness of data. Table 5.1 presents several data sources. Columns 3–4 present the land identified by the government in 2009 as being suitable for agricultural investment, showing how the lowlands were particularly targeted, with vast swathes of Gambella and other regions identified for investment based on assumptions about existing land use patterns. Columns 5–6 present Dejene and Cochrane's (2021) calculations based on the Land Matrix, which attempts to catalogue all investments of 200 hectares or more up to 2018. These data include foreign and domestic investments, including the state sugar estates that comprise a large proportion of land in SNNPR. However, as the authors admit, the threshold of 200 hectares means that many smaller projects, particularly domestic investments, are excluded. While these figures show that reality fell well short of the

Table 5.1 *Regional distribution of investments up to 2018*

Region	Size of region (ha)	Land identified for investment in 2009 (ha)	% of region	Land leased to foreign investors (ha)	% of region	Land cultivated by commercial farms (ha)	% of region
Afar	7,205,278	409,678	5.7	20,600	0.3	69,589	1.0
Amhara	15,470,896	347,430	2.2	54,622	0.4	193,013	1.2
Benishangul Gumuz	5,069,868	691,984	13.6	261,026	5.1	78,386	1.5
Gambella	2,978,282	1,238,005	41.6	156,012	5.2	49,328	1.7
Oromiya	28,453,784	438,212	1.5	305,212	1.1	271,177	1.0
SNNPR	10,547,600	529,181	5.0	630,448	6.0	139,205	1.3
Somali	27,925,200	–	–	2,000	0.0	398	0.0
Tigray	5,363,800	0	0.0	10,300	0.2	205,765	3.8
Unspecified	–	–	–	53,069			
Total		3,654,491		1,493,289		1,006,862	

Source: data on land identified by the government are from Lavers (2012, p. 120), data on foreign investments are from Dejene and Cochrane (2021, p. 229) using data from the Land Matrix and land cultivated by commercial farms from the CSA Large and Medium Scale Commercial Farms Sample Survey 2017/18.

government's ambitions, land under large-scale leases concentrated in lowland regions in line with government plans. Contrasting figures in columns 7–8 are taken from the CSA's Large and Medium Scale Commercial Farm Survey 2017/18. These data likely offer the most complete coverage of domestic and small-scale commercial farms, but exclude all horticultural projects, a number of large-scale foreign leases and the state sugar estates (Ali et al. 2017). In these data, where small-scale domestic investors are better represented, a greater proportion of land is located in the highland regions of Amhara, Oromiya and Tigray.

Based on these somewhat divergent figures, some elements of a pattern emerge. First, most investments and land leased took place in the period between 2007 and 2012, coinciding with the rise in global commodity prices. Following the government's limits on large-scale leases in 2011 and the fall in commodity prices, investment has reduced considerably. Second, estimates of the total land leased at 1.33–1.49 million hectares are much lower than the government's original plans and also well below past claims.⁴⁸ Third, foreign investments tended to be

⁴⁸ For example, 3.6m hectares (The Oakland Institute 2011) or 3–3.5m hectares (Rahmato 2014, p. 31).

considerably larger in terms of landholdings and capital investment than domestic investments, with many highly speculative foreign investments following government incentives to lowland regions. However, these projects have, for the most part, failed to meet their objectives, with many collapsing entirely. Meanwhile, smaller domestic investors, as well as some of the more successful foreign investors involved in horticulture, have focused on highland areas, often competing for land with the smallholder sector.

Based on CSA data for 2017–2018, large and medium-scale commercial farms accounted for roughly 7 per cent of cultivated area compared to 93 per cent for smallholders, although given the omission of several large farms from their sample, this may be a slight underestimate. Clearly the promotion of agricultural investments is in tension with the government's political strategy of using land access as a means of mass distribution to secure political control. Indeed, the promotion of large-scale investments in lowland areas has systematically disregarded the land use of pastoralists and shifting cultivators, while small-scale investments in highland areas have frequently led to smallholder displacement. Understandably, this displacement was a source of great resentment for those affected. However, the impact of investment on landlessness in Ethiopia as a whole is an order of magnitude smaller than that of population growth that has left a generation or more of young adults with little hope of accessing land.⁴⁹

Conclusion

From 1975 onwards, relevant authorities – the Derg and the TPLF – used state land allocation as a strategy of ‘coercive distribution’, cultivating political dependence and mass acquiescence. Under the EPRDF, ADLI built on this approach to craft a national development strategy that would maintain coercive distribution over time and in the face of rapid population growth, first by improving agricultural livelihoods through the distribution of agricultural inputs, then by using the agrarian surplus to finance industrialisation and mass industrial employment creation.

The political crises of the early 2000s consolidated the longstanding view within the EPRDF that mass distribution was required to secure popular acquiescence and maintain political order, yet raised questions about the feasibility of ADLI and the utility of land as a distributive

⁴⁹ Displacement caused by agricultural investments may well also be smaller than that caused by urban expansion, discussed in [Chapter 7](#).

resource. Under the 'developmental state' from the mid-to-late 2000s, the government sought to accelerate economic development, even where this further eroded enmeshment, focusing attention on high productivity producers – both commercial smallholders and agricultural investors. As such, upkeep of the system of coercive distribution would also need to evolve, with the government's distributive strategy shifting from guaranteeing land access to industrial policy aimed at creating and distributing access to jobs, discussed in [Chapter 6](#).

This strategic shift necessitated a change in the central principle underpinning land tenure. From the *rist* system in the Imperial era to the land redistributions undertaken by the Derg and TPLF, the central guiding principle was that peasants had a right to a share of communal land, rather than rights to a particular plot. In the context of rapid rural population growth, the EPRDF was faced with a choice – either maintain this right to a share of community property by carrying out regular redistributions of ever smaller, economically unviable plots, or to exclude sections of the population from land access and enhance tenure security for existing landholders. The government chose the latter, with land tenure shifting from the early 2000s to favour economic productivity and individual rights through prohibitions on redistribution, the inheritance of land rights and land certification. The result has been a process of differentiation within rural areas, excluding more than a generation of young adults from state-distributed land, eroding the government's mass distributive strategy and heightening the political importance of off-farm employment.

Ultimately, the EPRDF arrived at a quite different response to the agrarian question to that original envisaged in ADLI. In contrast to the homogeneous peasant farmers and domestic production linkages envisaged under ADLI, agricultural policy increasingly envisaged diversity of production and, as discussed in [Chapter 6](#), industrialisation through foreign direct investment. Within agriculture, there was a growing acceptance of differentiation within the peasantry to provide opportunities for high potential farmers to expand and commercialise, while less effective farmers move out of agriculture. Alongside this, the government promoted capital-intensive investments, particularly large-scale mechanised production in lowland areas, and capital and labour-intensive production in highland areas in an attempt to accelerate agricultural growth. In doing so, the state promoted 'capitalism from below' – involving differentiation within the peasantry – as well as 'capitalism from above' through the selective promotion of agricultural investments in highland and lowland areas ([Byres 1996](#)).

The result of this change was both rapid growth in smallholder agricultural productivity, but also growing inequality and differentiation

along generational lines. While progress has rightly attracted attention, what is often neglected is that this strategy restricted access to land and thereby an agricultural livelihood. Consequently, the 'developmental state' marked a significant change in the government's distributive strategy, with land access providing a means of distribution for a still large, but progressively smaller and smaller section of the population. The perpetuation of a strategy of coercive distribution therefore necessitated the creation of new distributive resources beyond agriculture, with the government focusing on industrial development as the solution to this growing challenge.

6 Industrial Policy and the Challenge of Mass Employment Creation

During its first decade in office, the government focused on agriculture and securing the peasant majority, with relatively little attention to industrial policy. This changed from the early 2000s as political crises highlighted the limitations of land as a distributive resource in the face of rapid population growth and urban unemployment. From this point, the government sought to create manufacturing jobs that could be distributed through party-state structures and thereby extend the system of coercive distribution. This chapter examines the government's evolving industrial policy and the resultant trends in employment and the labour market. While the analysis focuses on industrial policy, other economic sectors – particularly services – can, of course, be a large and important source of jobs. Nonetheless, as [Reinert \(2007\)](#) argues, the production of goods and advanced services is of particular importance since these sectors operate according to increasing returns and imperfect competition, and therefore have the potential to deliver major productivity increases. In contrast, most service sector jobs have modest potential for productivity increases, with wages largely determined by terms of trade with productive sectors.¹ For this reason, and to place limits on what is already a wide-ranging analysis, the chapter focuses on industrial policy.

As discussed in [Chapter 2](#), industrialisation has taken many different forms. From the first industrialisers in Europe to late industrialising South Korea and Taiwan, the state played key roles in creating and nurturing domestic capitalists. Subsequent industrialisation in south-east Asia and elsewhere, in contrast, relied heavily on foreign direct investment and integration into global value chains. While foreign investment can be an important source of market access and cutting-edge technology, there is nonetheless a risk that such investment brings only low-productivity assembly activities, with few linkages to the rest of the

¹ [Reinert \(2007, p. 132\)](#) uses the example of the difference in barbers' wages in low- and high-income economies, despite similar levels of productivity, to illustrate this point. Employment creation and high wages in basic services in advanced economies are based on high productivity in the production of goods and advanced services.

economy and modest impacts on employment. To maximise the benefits of foreign investment, linkages to domestic firms are essential, with domestic capitalists entering value chains as sub-contractors to foreign firms, expanding employment opportunities and raising productivity.

The chapter begins with the government's 2002 industrial strategy. This early strategy sought industrialisation through state investment in infrastructure and education, and support for domestic capitalists in a handful of labour-intensive sectors. The limited success of this initial strategy led to evolution in government industrial policy. The growing political imperative of mass employment creation and foreign exchange earnings prompted the government to turn to industrial parks to attract foreign direct investment in an attempt to accelerate the industrialisation drive. EPRDF industrial policy had a decidedly mixed record with notable successes overshadowed by high-profile failures. These industrial policy failings can be attributed to multiple factors. First, rather than the steady implementation of a perfect pre-defined plan, successful industrial policy is always a process of trial and error, with mistakes leading to learning (Cheng 1990, Moon and Prasad 1994, Whitfield et al. 2015). The EPRDF's 'developmental state' fits this pattern to a degree. However, growing political pressure to meet the intense distributive pressures resulting from mass landlessness and unemployment, and the growing politicisation of inter-regional distribution led the government to focus on increasingly high risk, mega-projects that offered the possibility of accelerating development, but often exceeded state capacity to deliver. Second, these challenges were exacerbated by the structure of the global economy and the lack of an experienced manufacturing class in Ethiopia. Inspired by the South Korean and Taiwanese experience from the 1950s onwards, the EPRDF's initial industrial policy fell short. Domestic firms with very low technological capabilities struggled to secure market access in global value chains and to bridge the technological gap required for global competitiveness (Whitfield and Staritz 2021). Meanwhile, the switch to industrial parks and foreign investors came too late to meet growing distributive pressures.

The final section of the chapter then examines what is the key point for the argument of this book: the extent to which state industrial policy delivered rapid development and, particularly, the employment that could extend the strategy of mass enmeshment. While the growing literature on Ethiopian industrial policy has done much to identify the successes and limitations of the government's approach, it has, thus far, neglected the distributive implications of the strategy in the form of employment creation and its political ramifications. Vitality, modest job creation was dwarfed by rapid population growth, leading to a growing distributive crisis of un- and underemployment, particularly affecting younger generations.

Industrialisation, Domestic Capital and Primitive Accumulation

As discussed in [Chapter 5](#), ADLI had the long-term objective of structural transformation, with manufacturing employment expected to address the central distributive challenge facing the new government. However, in the 1990s, the government focused on generating an agrarian surplus that could finance industrialisation, with no attempt to specify an industrial strategy in any detail. This agriculture-first approach changed in the late 1990s when Meles discovered Alice [Amsden's \(1992\)](#) work on South Korean industrialisation and requested that all his advisors read it.² The government was further impelled to act by the 'Armageddons' of the early 2000s. The TPLF split strengthened Meles' position and his vision for economic transformation. Meanwhile, the government took riots in Addis Ababa in 2001 as a sign of the dangers of urban unemployment, which by 1999 had reached 26 per cent, rising to 38 per cent of those aged 15–24 ([Broussar and Gebrekidan Tekleselassie 2012](#), p. 13). According to an architect of the strategy this led to great urgency,

[by 2002] It was clear that progress was not so fast. Employment is becoming a challenge. You cannot do business as usual, you need to be transformative, to think big to overwhelm the problems.³

[Figure 6.1](#) illustrates the challenge facing the government, with the total urban population and the urban labour force more than doubling between 2003 and 2016, driven by rural land shortages leading to urban migration, and the natural increase of the urban population. Government statements frequently referred to the annual addition of two million people to the national labour force and the need for mass employment creation to meet this demand. While growth in the working age population could be a demographic 'window of opportunity' ([Hailemariam 2019](#), p. 380), for the government population growth in the absence of employment presented a major political threat.

The government's first Industrial Strategy aligned with ADLI, aiming at an 'agricultural and rural centered economic and industrial development' ([MoI 2002b](#), p. 3), maximising linkages to agriculture through labour-intensive industries in rural areas to absorb surplus labour and limit urban migration.⁴ The strategy selected a handful of priority sectors

² Interview with Newai Gebre-Ab, EG35, Economic Advisor to the Prime Minister, Addis Ababa, 1 October 2018.

³ Interview with EG28, a former Minister, Addis Ababa, 1 November 2018.

⁴ This was likely inspired by rural industrialisation in Taiwan – among the main influences on Meles' thinking.

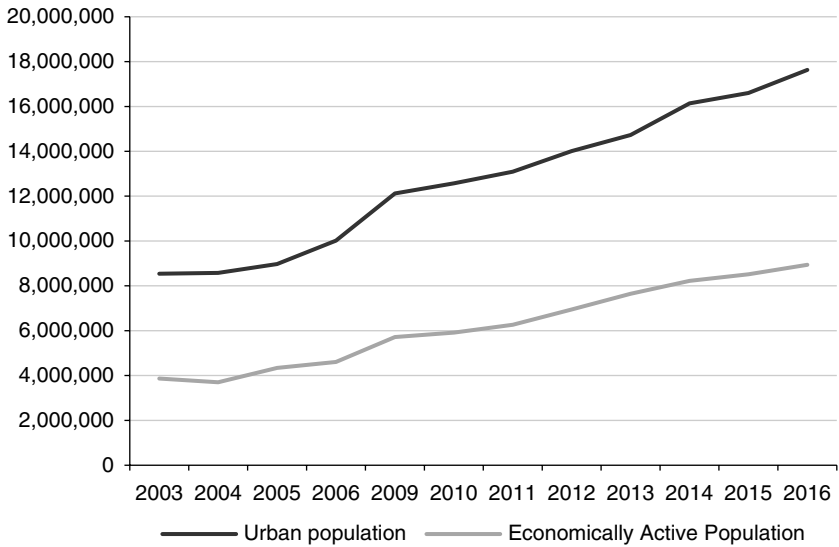


Figure 6.1 Urban population growth

Note: no survey was conducted in 2007 and 2008.

Source: author, based on CSA Urban Employment Unemployment Survey all years except National Labour Force Survey 2005, 2013.

based on their job creation potential, comparatively low capital requirements and agricultural linkages: meat, leather and leather products; textiles and garments; agro-processing, particularly of coffee, edible oils and sugar; and construction (MoI 2002b, MoLSA 2009, p. 19).⁵ Floriculture was initially omitted. However, private investors highlighted the employment and export potential of the sector around 2004, and it was added (Melese and Helmsing 2010, Oqubay 2015).

Following the EPRDF's embrace of capitalist development, the private sector was seen as essential to industrialisation. The government sought to foster a domestic capitalist class, supporting and pressing firms to raise productivity, achieve global competitiveness and to progress into increasingly capital-intensive and sophisticated industries, following in the footsteps of South Korea and Taiwan (MoI 2002b). However, the Ethiopian private sector was extremely limited. During the late Imperial era, economic transformation was based on foreign investment, while the landed elite made little attempt to re-invent themselves as capitalists. The Derg then nationalised foreign investments and most of the few

⁵ Interview with EG28, a former Minister, Addis Ababa, 1 November 2018.

domestic firms, with state enterprises remaining inefficient (Clapham 1988). The challenge facing the EPRDF was therefore that of primitive accumulation, namely a political process of allocating rents to help forge a new capitalist class (Khan 2000). The embrace of capitalists under the 'developmental state' did not eradicate the EPRDF's longstanding scepticism of the private sector, however. As noted in Chapter 3, the TPLF's relationship with the bourgeoisie had long been debated, with the Front settling on an unconvincing classification of a 'wavering strategic ally' (Berhe 2008). This ambivalence meshed with Meles' reading of Amsden and others who highlight the need for incentives and disciplinary mechanisms to direct capitalist firms towards priority sectors and productivity improvements. The result was that industrial policy would provide state support to 'genuine investors' while disciplining and discouraging 'parasitic rent seekers' (MoI 2002b, p. 15, Berhe 2008, EPRDF 2010).

Attempts to foster a domestic capitalist class entailed two main strategies. The first focused on medium to large-scale firms, with investors encouraged to purchase state-owned enterprises or establish new firms in strategic sectors. The government sought investment from domestic and diaspora investors, while actively recruiting foreign investors for joint ventures with domestic firms to promote technology transfer and modern management methods, and to utilise foreign firms' connections to international markets (MoI 2002b). However, the government also used the weakness of the existing private sector to justify the continued involvement of state enterprises and the formation of large party-owned enterprises to invest in priority sectors, given their comparatively greater resources for investment and supposed discipline. Of particular importance were the EPRDF party endowments that were established with equipment and resources accumulated during the civil war. By far the largest was the TPLF-owned Endowment Fund For the Rehabilitation of Tigray (EFFORT), although Tired (ANDM), Tumsa (OPDO) and Wendo (SEPDM) all established themselves as important economic actors. Formally, the endowment firms were autonomous from the parties that created them, although their boards of directors exclusively comprised senior party figures. The stated role of the endowments was to support the development of their respective regions, dispersing economic activity that otherwise tended to focus on Addis Ababa. Another important player in the government's industrial strategy was the military-owned Metals and Engineering Corporation (MetEC), established on Meles' instruction in 2010. MetEC brought together existing military enterprises to leverage the military's discipline and technical expertise to lead the industrialisation drive, while building domestic capacity (Gebregziabher 2019, Gebresenbet and Kamski 2019). Finally,

the largest private sector actor was Sheik Mohammed Al-Amoudi's MIDROC business empire. Born in Dessie in Amhara to Saudi Arabian and Ethiopian parents, Al-Amoudi is one of the richest men in the world thanks to investments in Sweden and Saudi Arabia. MIDROC invested in a vast range of businesses from agriculture to mining, manufacturing, construction and hotels (Sutton and Kellow 2010).

Second, the government prioritised Micro and Small Enterprises (MSEs) in rural and urban areas to 'absorb agriculturally under-employed labor, and diversify the sources of income for farming families'. In line with the rural focus of industrial policy, MSEs would disperse industrial activity and provide mass employment opportunities, while also serving as the 'seedbeds for the development of medium and large enterprises' (MoFED 2005, p. 155). The focus on MSEs, present in the 2002 strategy, increased in importance following the controversial 2005 elections, with urban youth unemployment seen as a major cause of opposition support (Di Nunzio 2015, Oqubay 2015, Gebremariam 2017). Arkebe Oqubay made clear the political importance of MSEs:⁶ 'The commitment to micro and small enterprises (MSEs) is the political and ideological corollary of commitment to small farmers' (Oqubay 2015, p. 80) and 'the basis for [EPRDF] political support' in urban areas (MoUDH 2012, p. 3). Mirroring the rural strategy of enmeshing the peasantry, credit and training opportunities for MSEs were distributed through party-state structures and used to consolidate political control (Di Nunzio 2015, Gebremariam 2018).

The government established a common set of initiatives across priority sectors designed to encourage initial investment, upgrading and export orientation. As with agricultural investments in Chapter 5, the government used state land ownership to allocate rents, subsidising industrial investors and MSEs by providing access to low-cost land, often requiring expropriation of existing landholders. Furthermore, state control of the financial sector was used to provide subsidised credit, with the Development Bank of Ethiopia providing loans of up to 70 per cent of investments, prioritising projects with potential for employment creation and foreign exchange earnings,⁷ while the Commercial Bank of Ethiopia provided additional loans for working capital (Oqubay 2015, pp. 84–85, Ayalew 2019, p. 170). Party-affiliated microfinance organisations were the main source of credit for MSEs, providing an important source of distribution that extended party-state control.

⁶ Arkebe was a former TPLF fighter, TPLF Central Committee member and Mayor of Addis Ababa. He completed his PhD on industrial policy and returned as an advisor to the Prime Minister while publishing a series of academic books.

⁷ Interview with EG30, senior DBE official, Addis Ababa, 17 February 2010.

Investor support was coordinated through the Ethiopian Investment Authority, which was upgraded to a Commission in 2014. Moreover, in the key sectors with significant private investment – textiles, leather and horticulture – the government created specialised lead agencies to communicate with investors and coordinate state support. While these agencies were created from scratch and have often struggled to develop the required expertise, case studies repeatedly highlight their important contribution to the progress that was made (Oqubay 2015, Hauge 2019, Melese 2019, Whitfield et al. 2020). Specific incentives to promote exports included tax exemptions, credit subsidies, preferential access to foreign exchange, duty free import of equipment, and subsidised salaries for foreign consultants and managers of domestic firms (Hauge 2019).

The government also invested heavily in infrastructure and education, both key requirements for industrialisation. In terms of infrastructure, the massive expansion of the road network and a major dam building programme significantly improved transportation and access to low-cost electricity (Lavers et al. 2021) (see Figure 1.1). This infrastructural investment was partly financed by an Industrial Development Fund used to channel profits from state enterprises and a requirement that private banks use 27 per cent of loans to buy central bank bills (Oqubay 2015, pp. 86–87, Ayalew 2019, pp. 169–170, Manyazewal 2019, p. 186). Likewise, the government prioritised the expansion of education throughout its time in office. With donors focused on primary education in line with the Millennium Development Goals, the government directed its resources towards secondary and, particularly, tertiary education (Furtado and Smith 2009). For the government, secondary and tertiary would provide the expertise and trained employees required for expanding industry and state bureaucracy. The government also heavily invested in Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) to support MSE development and the creation of an industrial workforce. The TVET system expanded from 72,000 students in 2002–2003 to some 300,000 by 2016–2017 (Ronnås and Sarkar 2019, p. 33).

Educational expansion has been impressive, as shown in Figure 6.2, with younger generations increasingly likely to have experience of primary education and, in some cases, also secondary and tertiary. Despite major progress, however, much remains to be done. Overall, educational attainment remains low, with less than half of children completing primary school, while four out of five do not pursue education beyond primary level (Ronnås and Sarkar 2019, pp. 31–32). Educational attainment remains much lower for girls, those living in rural areas and those in low-income households. Moreover, like in many countries, massive

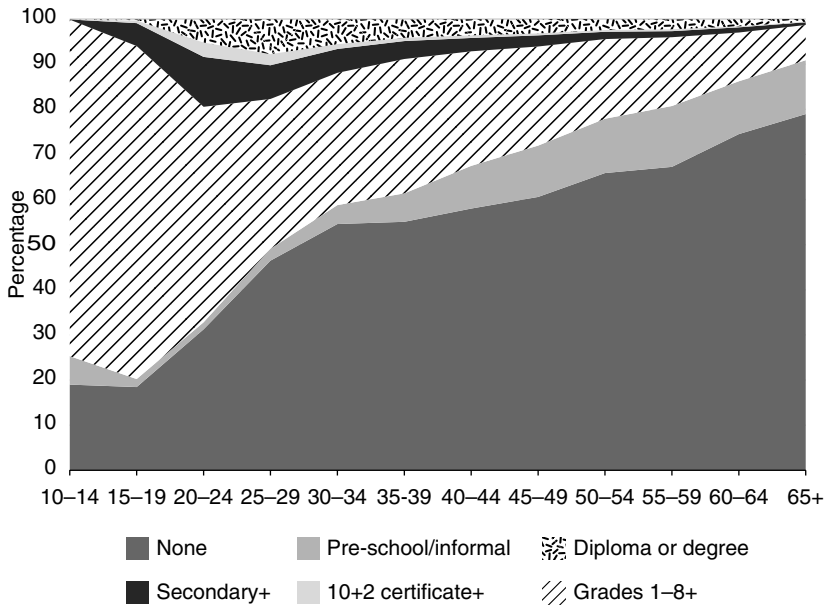


Figure 6.2 Highest level of education attained by age
 Source: author, based on CSA 2013 Labour Force Survey

expansion of access has increased quantity at the cost of declining quality of education (Samaro 2019, p. 446).

Uneven Experiences with Industrial Policy

The results of this initial industrial push were highly uneven between sectors. Identification of the factors shaping performance therefore requires sector-specific analysis. The sectoral experiences discussed below suggest that variation was largely due to the production requirements of each sector, whether the market was domestic or foreign, and the resulting demands these placed on the limited capacity of both the state agencies designing and executing industrial policies, and the domestic firms that were the focus of these policies. The discussion focuses on what were the main priorities during the 2000s: cement, floriculture, leather, textiles and apparel, sugar and MSEs.

Cement manufacture is an import substituting industry that is capital intensive and has relatively little potential for direct job creation. While cement therefore differs from most priority sectors, a domestic cement industry was seen as essential to facilitate infrastructure development

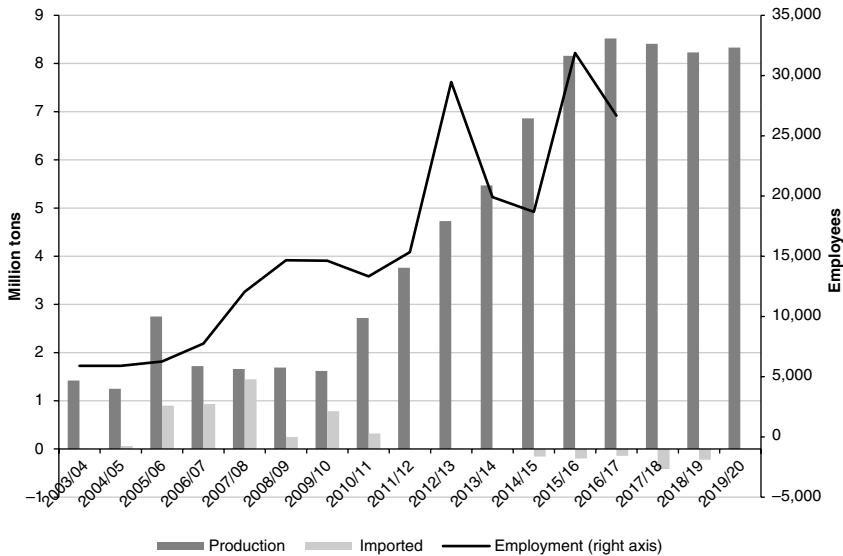


Figure 6.3 Cement production and employment

Source: author, based on data from Ministry of Trade and Industry, CSA Large and Medium Scale Manufacturing Survey.

and to enable other more labour-intensive activities, notably cement products and construction (Oqubay 2015). Cement production has economies of scale that require large-scale investment, and, with limited interest from the small and inexperienced domestic private sector, state and party investment was key. The two main domestic cement firms are Mugher, a long-running state-owned enterprise, and Messebo, established in the 1990s by the TPLF-affiliated EFFORT. Both Mugher and Messebo received state support in the form of land for factories and mines, cheap electricity, DBE loans and, in the case of Mugher, finance from the Industrial Development Fund (Oqubay 2015). Nonetheless, the surge of construction in the mid-2000s led to cement shortages and reliance on imports. Consequently, the sector was opened to foreign investment, attracting Sheik al-Amoudi's MIDROC, Ali Dangote – a Nigerian industrialist – and several Chinese companies. Increased production met domestic demand, eradicating imports and creating some 30,000 jobs (see Figure 6.3). By 2013, domestic firms – dominated by Mugher and Messebo – and foreign companies had an approximately equal share in the sector (Oqubay 2015). In many ways, therefore, cement qualifies as an industrial success story. However, there was a lack

of focus on learning and developing capabilities from the Ethiopian firms who depended on Chinese built turnkey plants (Oqubay 2015, p. 138).

Floriculture is another notable success. Flower production is almost exclusively for export, requiring entry into a buyer-driven value chain, with the main market for African producers – Europe – dominated by Dutch auction houses that set standards (Melese 2019). Floriculture therefore requires precision production processes, cold storage logistics and reliable, timely transportation. Following initial interest from Dutch investors attracted by the suitable climate, cheap land and labour, and relative proximity of Ethiopia to European markets, the government cleared logistical and bureaucratic hurdles, and provided financial support (Melese and Helmsing 2010, Oqubay 2015, p. 175). Sher Ethiopia, a subsidiary of the largest rose company in the world, also played a vital role, lowering technological barriers to entry for foreign and, particularly, domestic investors by providing turnkey projects and developing the floriculture value chain by importing inputs and providing cold storage and transport in Ethiopia and in the Netherlands (Melese 2019). Floriculture also stimulated additional activity. Notably, much of the value in the floriculture value chain is in air transport, a service provided exclusively by Ethiopian Airlines since 2007 when it upgraded its cargo and cold storage facilities (Melese 2019). Furthermore, floriculture spawned a packaging industry and horticultural investments utilising similar production processes (Melese and Helmsing 2010, Oqubay 2015).

As shown in Figure 6.4, flower exports grew rapidly up to 2011, while creating employment for some 40,000 people, primarily young women, largely within the vicinity of Addis Ababa (Melese 2019, p. 6). Despite this success, state attempts to promote domestic flower firms had mixed results. Domestic investors rushed to floriculture in the 2000s but faced major challenges in building the technical expertise and market knowledge to compete. Indeed, the domestic share of flower exports declined from 25 per cent in 2008 to just 13 per cent in 2012 (Oqubay 2015, p. 162). Successful domestic firms all hired foreign consultants or managers to build their expertise and included Ethiopian and diaspora private businesses; firms linked to the EPRDF endowments; and three MIDROC farms (Melese 2019, p. 103). As with cement, however, the sector did not progress to more technologically advanced activities that would capture more of the floriculture value chain within Ethiopia, such as research and development, and the production of inputs, with firms remaining dependent on imported inputs (Melese 2019, p. 92).

In comparison to cement and floriculture, early attempts to promote the leather, and textiles and apparel industries were more problematic. Global markets for apparel and leather products are organised into

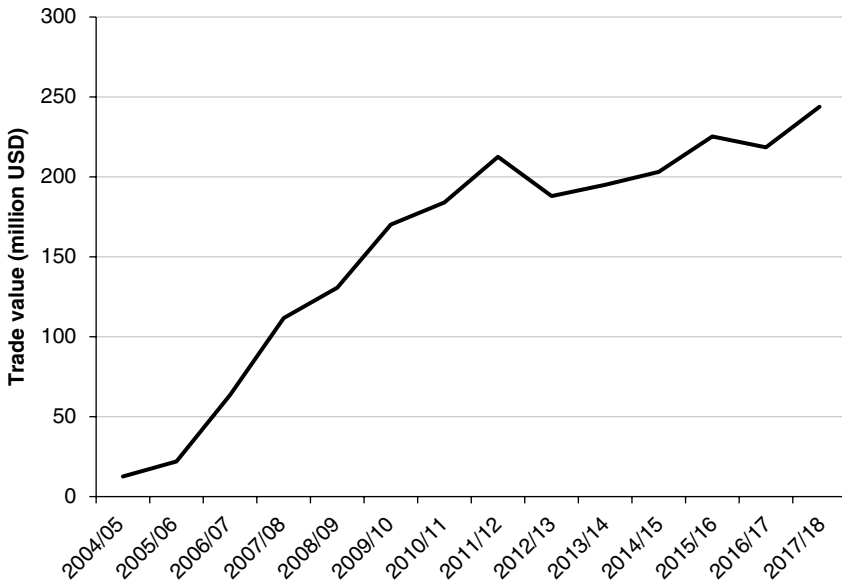


Figure 6.4 Flower exports from Ethiopia

Source: author, based on data from the Ministry of Industry and Ethiopian Horticulture Producer Exporters Association.

buyer-driven value chains in which global lead firms control high-value activities, such as design and branding, outsourcing low productivity manufacturing based on precise requirements in terms of quality, flexibility and delivery times. The entry of numerous developing country producers has resulted in fierce competition that drives down profit margins. Within the leather industry, tanning is a capital-intensive process creating few jobs, while the manufacture of leather products is labour intensive with potential for large-scale job creation (Brautigam et al. 2018). Likewise, textiles require more capital investment and expertise to meet global quality standards, while entry barriers for labour-intensive apparel production are lower, especially in Cut-Make-Trim operations where manufacturers assemble garments based on buyer's specifications and approved inputs. The next step in the apparel industry is to move to 'full package' production whereby producers are responsible for purchasing or producing textiles in house, as well as packaging the product for delivery (Whitfield et al. 2020).

Several leather and textile firms established in the Imperial era were nationalised under the Derg, producing for the domestic market with very limited capabilities. Nonetheless, Ethiopia has the potential to develop

major vertically integrated, export-oriented value chains in these sectors since the country has the largest livestock population in Africa and is suitable for large-scale cotton cultivation. The EPRDF privatised state enterprises inherited in 1991, favouring domestic investors, and encouraged investors to establish new firms (Oqubay 2015, Grumiller 2019, Whitfield et al. 2020). Protection of the domestic market provided relatively secure profits, while government tax and credit incentives sought to press firms to improve competitiveness and move into exports. These initial efforts had little success, however. In the leather sector, new investors included private firms and the EFFORT-owned Sheba Tannery and MIDROC's purchase of state-owned leather factories. The government provided financial incentives to encourage tanneries to produce finished leather to supply domestic manufacturers. However, these incentives had little impact given limited government monitoring and enforcement capacity (Oqubay 2015). The government's push for upgrading became more aggressive in 2008 when it introduced a 150 per cent export tax on raw hides and in 2011 when the tax was extended to semi-finished leather (Grumiller 2019, p. 14). In both cases, exports initially declined as firms struggled to upgrade (Brautigam et al. 2018) (see Figure 6.9). Leather production was also undermined by the low commercialisation of the livestock sector, low reproduction rates and poor health of animals and pests that reduced the supply and quality of skins.

Textiles and apparel present a similar picture. Fifteen firms entered the apparel sector by buying state firms or establishing new enterprises, including private sector actors, and EFFORT-owned Almeda Textile and Tiret-owned former state mills in Kombolcha and Bahir Dar (Staritz and Whitfield 2017). However, none of these firms had prior sectoral experience, all faced major problems with electricity supply and several went out of business.⁸ Those that survived produced for the protected domestic market with government incentives insufficient to engage in exports (Gebreeyesus and Demile 2017). International buyers looked at Ethiopia in the 2000s, attracted by political stability and preferential trade access to the US and Europe under the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) and Everything Under But Arms schemes. However, buyers were put off by low labour productivity and their preference for full package suppliers, rather than the Cut-Make-Trim operations that were the limit of Ethiopian firms (Staritz and Whitfield 2017). Moreover, the government's assumption that existing textile mills could produce for an export-oriented apparel sector proved incorrect, with the

⁸ Whitfield and Staritz (2021) and interview with ARP1, manager of a textile factory, Bahir Dar, 19 March 2010.

textiles produced of insufficient quality for global markets (Staritz and Whitfield 2017). While some domestic firms secured orders from global buyers, they struggled to meet quality standards and delivery deadlines (Whitfield et al. 2020). By 2010, exports and employment in the apparel and leather sectors remained minimal (see Figures 6.8 and 6.9, below), despite the hope that these sectors would provide large-scale employment.

Government efforts to create a large-scale sugar industry were far more problematic, however. The sugar industry dates back to the 1950s, with the original foreign firms nationalised by the Derg (Zewde 2008a). By the mid-2000s, sugar production met just 40 per cent of domestic demand (Gebresenbet and Kamski 2019). The government planned a major expansion to produce sugar, bio-ethanol and biomass electricity to substitute for imports and then move into exports, taking advantage of a preferential EU trade agreement (ESDA 2010).⁹

The expansion of existing factories and a new development at Tendaho in Afar was contracted to two Indian companies and financed by the Indian EximBank (Cheru 2016). Despite delays with these initial projects, the 2010 Growth and Transformation Plan (GTP1) massively expanded ambitions in an attempt to accelerate industrial development. Abay Tsehaye – a founding member of the TPLF and close confidant of Meles – was installed as director-general of the upgraded Ethiopian Sugar Corporation. The Corporation would oversee the construction of a further ten new sugar factories and 400,000 hectares of plantations. GTP1 set annual production targets of 2,250,000 tons of sugar, 304,000 cubic metres of ethanol and 607MW of power by 2015, which would turn a significant drain on foreign exchange into a major source of export earnings, while creating jobs for 200,000 people (MoFED 2010, p. 59).

These plans have, however, been beset with delays and massive cost overruns. MetEC was originally contracted to deliver all ten factories. It soon became clear, however, that the firm lacked the required expertise and capacity. Meanwhile, significant technical expertise in longstanding state sugar factories was marginalised by political leaders with little sectoral knowledge who were focused on delivering enormously ambitious national plans (Kamski 2016, Gebregziabher 2019, Gebresenbet and Kamski 2019). Moreover, the dominance of senior military leaders in MetEC and the close ties between MetEC leadership and the EPRDF meant that the ESC was unable to hold MetEC to account and, as the projects went wrong, nobody was willing or able to intervene (Gebresenbet and Kamski 2019). It would seem likely that these problems

⁹ Interview with EG33, Agricultural Projects Manager, ESDA, Addis Ababa, 29 April 2010.

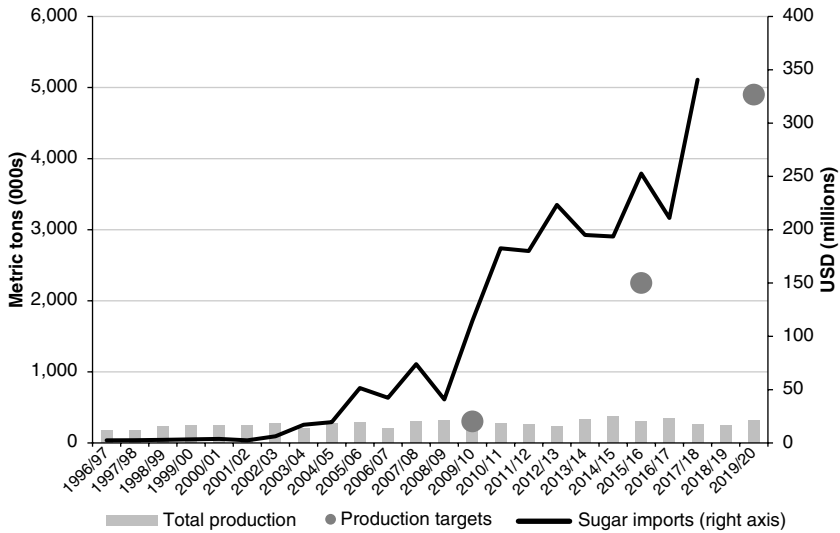


Figure 6.5 Sugar production and imports

Sources: author, based on data from the Ethiopian Sugar Corporation, UN COMTRADE, GTP1 and GTP2.

were exacerbated after Meles' death in 2012 with his successor as Prime Minister, Hailemariam Dessalegn, lacking Meles' power and authority. The result is that despite vast state investment – estimated at \$5.5 billion (Kamski 2019) – there has only been a modest increase in sugar production, while sugar imports grew rapidly to meet surging domestic demand, constituting a major drain on foreign exchange (Figure 6.5). Sugar industry employment was just a fraction of the government's target at around 10,000 by 2016/17.¹⁰ Five factories were subsequently taken away from MetEC and contracted to Chinese firms and the first two of these finally began production in 2017/18 (Tadesse 2018).

Alongside the attempt to foster medium and large-scale manufacturing firms, the government also placed strong emphasis on MSE development. Official figures show a rapid expansion of MSEs that created several million employment opportunities, although the accuracy of these figures is unknown (Figure 6.6). Unsurprisingly, given the political importance of MSEs, the programme initially focused on Addis Ababa, site of the main electoral protests in 2005, with 44 per cent of jobs created in the capital in 2007/08. Over time, however, the programme expanded, with Oromiya accounting for 55 per cent of jobs by 2014/15. MSEs comprised

¹⁰ CSA Large and Medium Scale Manufacturing and Electricity Industries Survey.

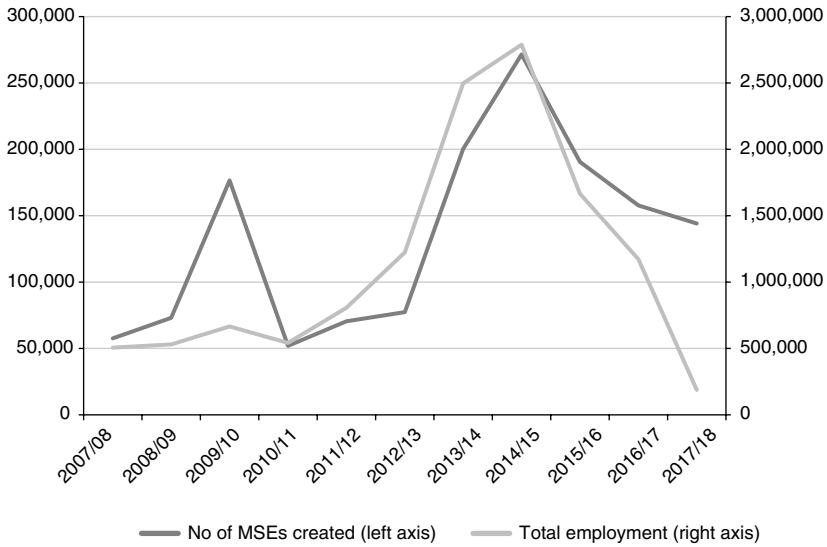


Figure 6.6 MSEs and employment creation

Source: author, based on National Bank of Ethiopia Annual Reports, various years.

a diverse range of manufacturing, construction, trade, mining and service activities, with manufacturing MSEs in 2013/14 dominated by grain mills (30 per cent) and food processing (22 per cent). Despite the small size of individual firms, MSEs constituted 85 per cent of manufacturing jobs in 2013/14, far more than larger firms.¹¹ MSEs were a major employer in the production of construction materials and construction and were therefore partly dependent on the success of large-scale cement producers. In particular, the Integrated Housing Development Programme, which provided low cost housing in Addis Ababa and other major cities (see [Chapter 7](#)) provided jobs for some 193,000 people through MSEs ([Oqubay 2015](#), p. 124). Similarly, the government identified cobblestone projects as a low cost, labour-intensive means of road improvement in towns and cities. One estimate is that 2,000 MSEs with 90,000 workers in 140 towns were contracted to carry out the quarrying, transport, laying and tool production required for cobblestone roads ([Broussar and Gebrekidan Tekleselassie 2012](#), p. 33).

While MSEs created modest income generation opportunities for relatively large numbers of people, they had major limitations. Numerous studies found that most MSEs are low productivity, low capital

¹¹ CSA Large and Medium Scale Manufacturing and Electricity Industries Survey.

enterprises that produce very few exports. Indeed, one study found that a worker in a micro enterprise with less than ten workers adds as much value in a day as a worker in a large enterprise with more than fifty workers does in an hour (Shiferaw and Söderbom 2019, p. 657). Moreover, many firms fail within a few years and there is a very low transition rate from micro to medium scale enterprises. Most MSEs begin as low productivity, low technology operations and remain that way, while the origins of large manufacturing firms are primarily in trading companies that diversify into manufacturing or party-state enterprises (Sutton and Kellow 2010). As such, MSEs were a major means of engaging young adults in work and tying them to the party-state which provided minimal forms of distribution in the form of credit and training programmes. However, as an industrialisation strategy, they were extremely limited (Oqubay 2019, Shiferaw and Söderbom 2019)

Overall, then, the EPRDF's initial efforts to create a domestic manufacturing class that could compete internationally and would create mass employment in export-oriented production failed. Both the state and the private sector lacked capacity and expertise in priority sectors. Indeed, given the severe lack of private sector experience, it is hardly surprising that firms struggled to meet expectations of a quick transition to global competitiveness. Despite investment in key state agencies, limited state capacity was also a recurrent problem, undermining attempts to design and enforce incentives for private firms (Oqubay 2015). Even in the state sugar sector, where there was already considerable sectoral knowledge, political leaders pressing for rapid development and over-ambitious targets marginalised existing expertise. The challenge of the lack of domestic expertise was exacerbated by the intense competition in global markets and exacting requirements for firms seeking to enter global value chains. Indeed, the only industrial successes in this period were in production for the domestic market using borrowed technology (cement) and where foreign investors brought expertise and market access to enable exports (floriculture). Domestic firms struggled to secure market access in global value chains and, when they were able to secure contracts, struggled to meet the requirements to compete internationally. The result is that many produced solely for protected domestic markets or opted for more profitable investments in real estate, construction and trade (Goodfellow 2017a, Whitfield and Staritz 2021).

*Domestic Capital and the Messy Business
of Primitive Accumulation*

Not only did this early industrial policy fail to achieve its objectives, but the government's use of state enterprises, party-owned conglomerates

and politically connected businesses to promote industrial investment has fuelled speculation and resentment about political corruption and ethnic favouritism. Primitive accumulation leading to the creation of a capitalist class is an 'ugly' process characterised by 'inherent unfairness' (Khan 2000, pp. 4, 14). Moreover, there is a very fine line – difficult to assess empirically – between the state providing necessary support to emerging firms essential to economic development and merely enabling corruption. Likewise in Ethiopia. For the government, the involvement and support of state and party enterprises was justified by the limitations and 'rent seeking' nature of the private sector. In contrast, for critics, EFFORT, MetEC, MIDROC and a range of Tigrayan-owned private companies, received preferential access to land, credit and state contracting, undermining the rest of the private sector, enriching key individuals and financing the EPRDF (Milkias 2003, Abegaz 2013, Gebregziabher and Hout 2018, Gebregziabher 2019).

Though a full analysis is not possible here, it is worth considering these competing claims in relation to the different types of firms. While the endowment firms, MetEC and MIDROC are often mentioned in research and popular commentary, there is actually a dearth of detailed research, at least partly due to the lack of transparency of the companies themselves. The little research that does exist presents a somewhat more mixed picture than these polarised assessments. Certainly some EFFORT firms achieved dominant and highly lucrative positions in particular sectors, likely based on their political connections (Weis 2015). Examples include TransEthiopia, which utilised vehicles donated to REST during the 1984/85 famine to establish a dominant position in the haulage sector after 1991, and Guna Trading, which used its influence to corner fertiliser imports (Sutton and Kellow 2010, Spielman et al. 2011, Vaughan and Gebremichael 2011).¹² Yet other EFFORT firms support the claim that party conglomerates were first movers, taking a long-run view by investing in sectors of economic importance but with very limited profit margins. Examples include Messebo Cement, which sustained heavy losses until a foreign management firm brought it back to profitability in the 2000s (Vaughan and Gebremichael 2011). Subsequently, the sector was opened to foreign investment, despite the competition this provided to Messebo, which retained a significant, but by no means dominant role in the sector. Likewise, Almeda Textile and Garmenting, and Sheba Tannery, like other private firms, struggled to achieve profitability in highly competitive sectors (Vaughan and Gebremichael 2011).

¹² Since 2005, the role of the endowment companies has been replaced by farmers' unions and cooperatives. See Chapter 5.

MetEC is a distinct case. The company was handed contracts for a series of high-profile projects, including sugar factories, the Yayu Fertiliser Complex and electro-mechanical works for the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD). As with the senior echelons of the military, MetEC's leadership was dominated by Tigrayans, resulting in the widespread perception that MetEC was a means of channelling rents to powerful and well connected military figures to secure their support (Gebregziabher 2019). To date, very little evidence has been presented to substantiate plausible corruption allegations. What is clear, however, is that MetEC failed miserably to deliver any of the projects for which it was contracted. These complex projects far exceeded the corporation's expertise, resulting in major delays, low-quality work and cost overruns (Gebregziabher 2019, Gebresenbet and Kamski 2019).

Beyond these party and military-owned firms, studies have highlighted how investments in sectors as diverse as salt in Afar, agricultural investments in Benishangul-Gumuz and Gambella, and apparel manufacturing have been dominated by individuals with ties to the ruling party and, in particular, ethnic Tigrayans (Feyissa 2011b, The Oakland Institute 2011, Moreda and Spoor 2015, Gebresenbet 2016, Whitfield and Staritz 2021). While some of these investments may have been lucrative, investors in textiles and apparel only invested under pressure from the EPRDF and many actually lost money (Whitfield and Staritz 2021). Though not Tigrayan, Al-Amoudi is also often held up as an example of a politically connected businessman, given his vocal support for the EPRDF (Gebregziabher and Hout 2018). Al-Amoudi was clearly a major beneficiary of the privatisation of state-owned enterprises in the 1990s, with one estimate that he acquired twenty firms constituting 80 per cent of the value (Weis 2015, p. 204).

It is not possible here to conclusively confirm or reject the claims made about corruption and favouritism in the literature. What is clear, however, is that the use of many politically connected domestic firms, alongside the poor performance of many industrial sectors, contributed to a growing cloud of suspicion and resentment about the EPRDF's intentions.

Accelerating Industrialisation through Global Value Chains

Slow industrial expansion in the 2000s meant that unemployment remained high and the government retained its concerns that a 'mass of unemployed population, especially when such incidence is high among the educated and the youth, becomes a potential source of political and

civil unrest' (MoLSA 2009, p. 13). By the late 2000s, Ethiopia also faced an increasingly acute foreign exchange shortage as a result of growing imports, and the failings of agricultural and industrial exports. In response, the government adapted its industrial strategy, particularly after 2012, prioritising the attraction of foreign investment in state-provided industrial parks to accelerate exports and employment creation.

As late as the 2010 GTP1, the main focus of government policy remained 'domestic industrial and private sector development' (MoFED 2010, p. 57), with foreign investment limited to joint ventures. However, the government's position had shifted by 2015, and GTP2 makes it clear that the government could not rely on domestic capitalists alone given the urgency of structural transformation,

As domestic investors have limited capacity to meet all the required investment in the next few years, a significant part of the investment will be covered by foreign direct investment (FDI) ... efforts will be made to attract FDI from every direction. (NPC 2016, p. 141)

The new strategy sought to solve the agrarian question of capital and finance industrialisation not through agrarian transformation and creation of an agrarian surplus – as in ADLI – but through the attraction of foreign capital. While ADLI was inspired by South Korea and Taiwan, the new strategy was closer to the pattern of industrialisation in China and Malaysia, where foreign firms were encouraged to re-locate into export processing zones. In the long run the government still aimed to use large-scale foreign investment to stimulate domestic manufacturers through joint ventures, sub-contracting and agglomeration effects. However, in the short to medium term, foreign investment would drive industrialisation and integration into global value chains, drawing on foreign firms' technological capabilities and knowledge of global markets.

The central focus of this strategy was the construction of industrial parks that would provide the facilities required by foreign firms. As such, the new strategy entailed a shift in the spatial distribution of industry. ADLI aimed at a broadly distributed, rural pattern of industrialisation – likely inspired by Taiwan. As such, the strategy placed huge demands on state infrastructural investment, requiring massive improvements in transport and electricity access across the country. In contrast, a key rationale of industrial parks is that the necessary infrastructure is concentrated in a handful of urban centres, reducing the burden on the state. Beyond the industrial parks themselves, a new Addis Ababa-Djibouti railway was completed in 2018, with planned links to Mekele and Hawassa (Terrefe 2018). Meanwhile, massive expansion of electricity generation capacity would serve the industrial parks, the electric rail network, and

domestic and export markets. In 2010, total installed capacity on the Ethiopian grid was just 2,000 MW, but this was to be augmented by the Gilgel Gibe III dam (1,870 MW), commissioned in 2016, the GERD (5,150 MW) launched in 2011 and Koysha (2,160 MW) commenced in 2016 (Lavers et al. 2021).

The change in industrial strategy can be attributed to two factors. First, a learning process within government and recognition of past failings. The government had repeatedly failed come anywhere close to its increasingly ambitious targets for structural transformation during PASDEP and GTP1. Moreover, attempts to create a domestic capitalist class had fallen flat. The second is related to the political changes taking place at the time. The 2012 death of Meles Zenawi – the main architect of the previous development strategy – accelerated generational change in the EPRDF. As discussed in Chapter 10, the result was a shift in ideological orientation and the loss of elite cohesion within the ruling party, resulting in a growing debate about the future development strategy, including foreign investment. Arkebe Oqubay, the main proponent of industrial parks, normally stays well clear of politics in his writing. However, even he acknowledged the ‘sharp differences [of opinion] with few individuals’ in federal and regional governments over the turn to foreign investment and industrial parks (Arkebe, cited in Mihretu and Llobet 2017, Oqubay and Kefale 2020).¹³

Industrial zones were noted as an option in the 2002 industrial strategy (MoI 2002b) and work began on the first industrial park built under the EPRDF, the Eastern Industrial Zone (EIZ) outside Addis Ababa, in 2007. The EIZ, built by a private Chinese firm was finally completed in 2012 and the first state-owned industrial park, Bole Lemi, built with World Bank support, opened in 2015/16. However, it was not until around 2013 that industrial parks became a central focus of government strategy. The industrial park strategy built on past experiences and a 2013 study by Arkebe of the factors shaping the success of industrial parks in China, Malaysia, Mauritius, Nigeria, South Korea, Singapore and Vietnam (Lin Yifu et al. 2019, Oqubay 2019). Industrial parks aimed to reduce start up time and investment costs for investors by providing state of the art facilities. The parks also provide simplified administrative services for customs and visas, as well as incentives such as tax holidays, exemption of import taxes and retention of foreign exchange earnings for investors engaged in export, creating employment and technology transfer (FDRE 2012, 2015). The government’s approach – unlike the

¹³ Among the main opponents appears to have been Bereket Simon, who later stated his opposition to the shift from rural-based industry to urban industrial parks (Youtube 2018, minute 40 onwards).

original EIZ – focused on clustering and agglomeration, with specialised parks focusing on a particular industry, mainly textiles and apparel, with a view to promoting linkages between firms and vertical integration of supply chains to capture value within Ethiopia. Moreover, and unlike Bole Lemi, which catered exclusively to foreign investors, the government intended to promote linkages between foreign and domestic firms within industrial parks, thereby enabling domestic firms to integrate into global value chains (Whitfield et al. 2020).

From 2014, the new Industrial Parks Development Corporation (IPDC) oversaw Chinese contractors building an initial eight industrial parks spread across Amhara, Oromiya, SNNPR and Tigray (see Table 6.1).¹⁴ This vast state investment was financed with a ten-year \$1 billion Eurobond issued in 2014 (Manyazewal 2019). These industrial parks were a central pillar of GTP2 and, by 2025, were expected to create two million jobs, raise manufacturing from 4 to 20 per cent of GDP and to increase the manufacturing export share to 40 per cent. The flagship Hawassa Industrial Park, which is the largest industrial park in Africa and recognised for its state-of-the-art facilities, was completed in 2016. While other parks have since been completed, there have been significant delays and problems with the water and electricity supplies in Kombolcha, Debre Birhan, Adama, Mekele and Dire Dawa that have discouraged would-be investors.¹⁵

The industrial park strategy intentionally spread new parks across ethnic regions in order to distribute the associated economic opportunities and job creation (Figure 6.7). Most investors favour Addis Ababa and central Oromiya, which has the best transport links to Djibouti, the most reliable electricity connections and access to a large, relatively well-trained labour force. Following Meles' death in 2012, regional administrations became increasingly assertive in negotiations with the federal government, and officials acknowledge that the political imperative of distributing employment opportunities between ethnic regions overwhelmed economic rationales. In the words of one senior official,

The first generation of parks was not so much based on feasibility but political considerations. Currently the political system cannot support decision making based on feasibility studies.¹⁶

¹⁴ In 2018, three additional parks were launched in Afar, Benishangul-Gumuz and Somali, while similar ideas underpin agro-industrial parks subsequently launched by regional governments.

¹⁵ Interview with respondent EG40, senior official in the Ethiopian Investment Commission, Addis Ababa, 5 June 2019.

¹⁶ Interview with respondent EG40, senior official in the Ethiopian Investment Commission, Addis Ababa, 5 June 2019.

Table 6.1 *Industrial parks in Ethiopia in 2018*

Name	Region	Operational	Specialisation	Ownership	Size (ha)	Sheds	Employment (July 2018)
Adama	Oromiya	2018	Mixed	IPDC	365.5	19	0
Addis Industrial Village	Addis Ababa	1980s	Apparel, textile and leather	IPDC	88	9	–
Bahir Dar	Amhara	2019	Apparel and textile	IPDC	100	8	–
Bole Lemi	Addis Ababa	2015	Apparel and textile	IPDC	327	20	14,786
Debre Birhan	Amhara	2019	Apparel, textile, agro-processing	IPDC	100	8	–
Dire Dawa	Dire Dawa	2019	Apparel and textile	IPDC	150	15	–
Eastern	Oromiya	2012	Mixed	Private (Qiyuan)	500	–	14,716
Hawassa	SNNPR	2016	Apparel and textile	IPDC	300	52	18,135
Jimma	Oromiya	2019	Apparel, textile, agro-processing	IPDC	75	8	–
Kilinto	Addis Ababa	–	Pharmaceuticals	IPDC	337	–	–
Kombolcha	Amhara	2017	Apparel and textile	IPDC	75	9	480
Lebu	Addis Ababa	2016	Leather and footwear	Private (Huajian)	138	9	4,762
Mekele	Tigray	2017	Apparel and textile	IPDC	75	15	676
Modjo	Oromiya	–	Leather and footwear	Private (George Shoes)	86	–	428
Velocity	Tigray	2018	Apparel and textile	Private (Vogue)	177	–	–
Total							53,983

Source: Ethiopian Investment Commission, Industrial Parks Development Corporation.

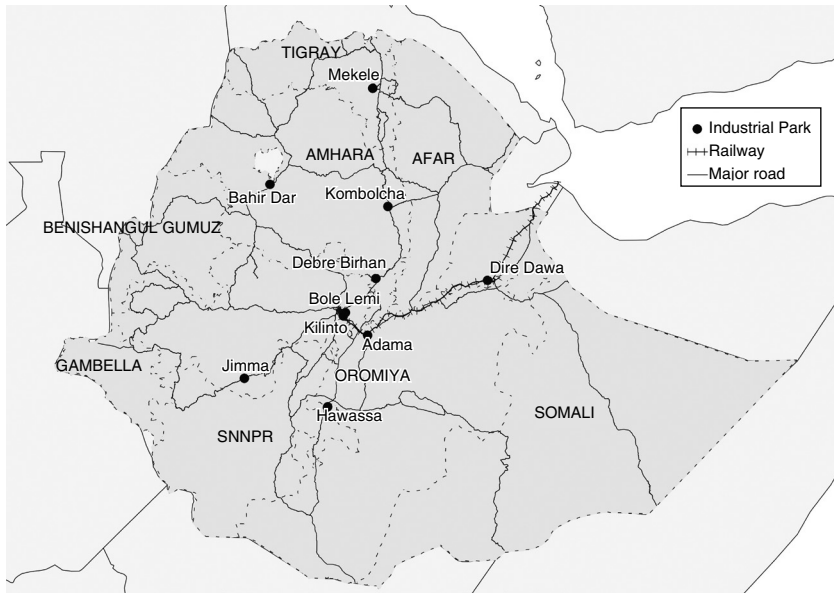


Figure 6.7 Map of Ethiopia's industrial parks

Source: author.

Likewise, Arkebe, one of the main architects of the programme has acknowledged that,

Location of industrial parks has been a major political factor as equitable distribution [across regions] was not necessarily the best in terms of productivity gains, development of production capabilities, or attracting investment. Interests and preferences at federal, regional state, and local government levels were not always in harmony. (Oqubay and Kefale 2020, p. 888, also Oqubay 2015, 2019)

Distributive politics have not just shaped decisions regarding the location of the parks, however. The recruitment of park workers has also been routed through state agencies in line with the government's strategy of coercive distribution. Regional leaders view jobs in industrial parks 'as benefits that they can distribute to their constituents' (Mains and Mulat 2021, p. 370). Consequently, recruitment is conducted within ethnically defined regions, with job quotas distributed between the regions' wereda and kebele (Fei and Liao 2020, Mains and Mulat 2021, Oya and Schaefer 2021). In the case of Adama Industrial Park, discussed in Chapter 7, both wereda and kebele in the vicinity of the park received a quota of jobs.¹⁷

¹⁷ Interview with OAW1, official in the Adama wereda investment office, Adama, 6 November 2018 and with OAK2, kebele chair, Denkore Denku kebele, 30 October 2018.

*Foreign Investment and the Distributive
Limitations of Manufacturing*

The central focus of the industrial park strategy is the apparel sector, with Bole Lemi, Hawassa and several other parks dedicated to apparel production. The government sought to attract global lead firms who would encourage their international suppliers to establish production, linking with domestic investment to develop vertically integrated production from cultivation of cotton fibres to the final apparel products (Staritz and Whitfield 2017, Hauge 2019). Indeed, the government actively marketed Ethiopia in countries where leading producers and buyers are based, ultimately drawing investment from India, Korea, Taiwan and Sri Lanka (Whitfield et al. 2020). The key step was the decision of American firm PVH (Phillips-Van Heusen), the second largest apparel firm in the world, to source from Ethiopia (Mihretu and Llobet 2017, Whitfield et al. 2020). PVH made Ethiopia a strategic priority for a number of reasons. First, the company was concerned about low labour and environmental standards in some of its Asian suppliers, while also keen to take advantage of cheap labour, electricity and the renewal of AGOA that enabled preferential access to the US market. However, the decisive factor favouring Ethiopia was the government's engagement and responsiveness, the potential for a vertically integrated supply chain and the political stability in the country prior to 2015 (Mihretu and Llobet 2017, Staritz and Whitfield 2017). PVH helped design Hawassa Industrial Park and by the end of 2017, nineteen foreign firms including one woven textile mill and two accessory firms had established production (Staritz and Whitfield 2017). The government took a similar approach in other parks, trying to secure an anchor firm to establish a production cluster. In Adama, Chinese firm Jiangsu Sunshine Group was seen as the anchor, while several H&M suppliers established operations in Mekele (Staritz and Whitfield 2017).

This influx of foreign investment led to an expansion of apparel exports and employment, even if this fell well short of government targets (Figure 6.8). Productivity was initially low. However, firms viewed this as a normal part of establishing production and expected to be internationally competitive within five years (Whitfield et al. 2020). In addition, Ethiopia's apparel exports were dominated by the most basic products such as cotton t-shirts made on a Cut-Make-Trim basis, with plans for a vertically integrated supply chain as yet unrealised. Recent research also shows little progress in the attempt to use foreign investment to stimulate domestic firms (Whitfield and Staritz 2021).

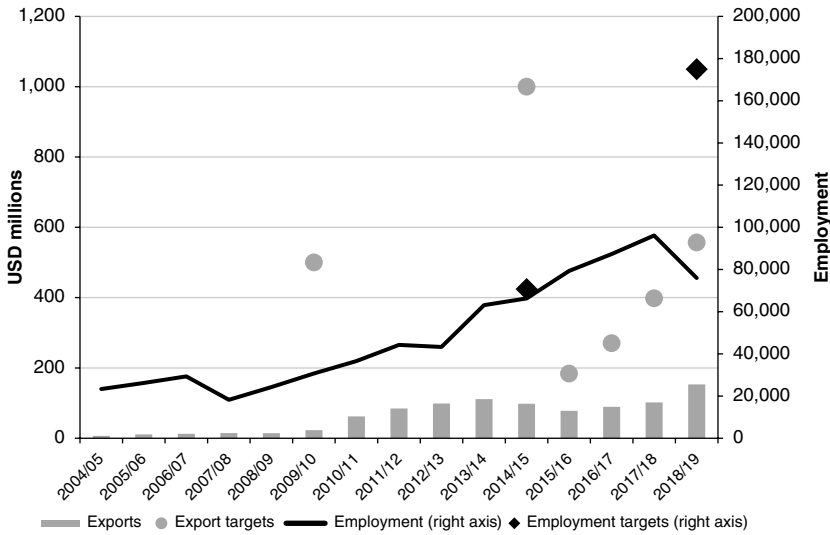


Figure 6.8 Textile and apparel exports and employment

Source: author, based on data from the Textile Industry Development Institute, PASDEP, GTP1 and GTP2.

The other main sector targeted by the industrial parks is leather, with government policy focused on moving up the value chain into production of finished leather and leather products. As with apparel, the government's strategy switched from domestic firms to promoting foreign investors in the hope that they would lead to technology and knowledge transfer, and linkages along the value chain (Brautigam et al. 2018, Grumiller 2019). Following the 2011 requirement to export only finished leather, the government opened tanneries to foreign investment, leading to the entry of several Chinese firms and by 2018 foreign firms dominated with half of the 19 tanneries and 73 per cent of exports (Grumiller 2019). A key moment in the manufacture of leather products was the decision of Chinese firm Huajian to begin production in the EIZ following a business promotion trip by Meles to China in 2011. As in apparel, cheap labour costs and preferential access to European and US markets were important factors. Huajian has subsequently expanded, building its own industrial park in Addis Ababa. Following Huajian, several other foreign producers have moved some of their operations from China, while three glove manufacturers also began operations (Brautigam et al. 2018, Grumiller 2019).

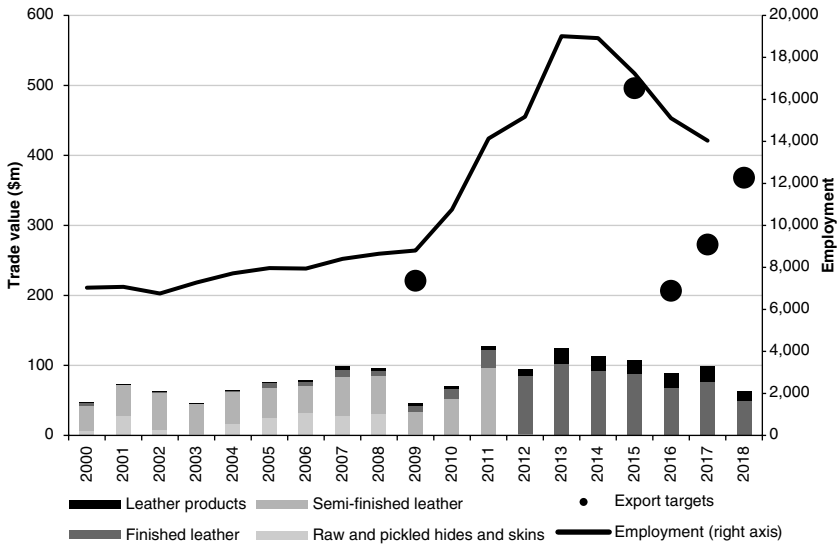


Figure 6.9 Leather and leather products exports and employment
 Source: author, based on data from UN COMTRADE, CSA Large and Medium Scale Manufacturing Survey, PASDEP, GTP1 and GTP2.

Figure 6.9 shows that there has been some success in terms of upgrading, with exports now exclusively consisting of finished leather and leather products, albeit exports fell well short of government targets. That said, however, most domestic firms have struggled and continue to produce only for the domestic market. Moreover, despite the potential for a vertically integrated supply chain from livestock to leather products, this has not yet been achieved. Most foreign tanneries were established to secure raw materials and export low-cost finished leather to buyers abroad, not to feed into the leather products sector (Grumiller 2019). Meanwhile, Huajian struggled to source more than 30 per cent of its leather domestically, relying on imports for the remainder (Bräutigam and Tang 2014).

The central objective of the industrial park strategy is to create two million jobs by 2025. Though at an early stage and with employment in the parks increasing rapidly, by mid-2018 the parks provided jobs for just 50,000 workers, predominately young women. Not only was job creation at this early stage modest in comparison to the enormous need for employment, but there were major challenges in relation to the low

pay and poor working conditions. The result is that the jobs created in the parks have often proved a source of frustration and resentment for workers, rather than a major distributive resource with which to secure acquiescence, as intended by the government. One recent study found that 77 per cent of industrial park workers left within a year (Blattman and Dercon 2018, p. 4). The result is that firms need to continuously train new workers to replace those that have left, undermining productivity (Hardy and Hauge 2019, Whitfield et al. 2020). In part problems can be attributed to the challenge – common to all past experiences of industrialisation – of workers adapting from rural livelihoods to the discipline and working hours of factory lines (Oya 2019, Fei and Liao 2020). Workers frequently complain about long hours, while firms express frustration at poor time keeping and indiscipline. Worker dissatisfaction may have been exacerbated by the tendency of state officials tasked with recruiting workers to over-promise regarding wages and benefits, resulting in workers beginning with unrealistic expectations (Mains and Mulat 2021).

Ultimately, however, labour challenges reflect a tension within the government's strategy. On the one hand, the government attracted foreign investors with promises of cheap labour, one of the few advantages that the country has given its low labour productivity. On the other hand, the industrial strategy is motivated by mass distributive pressures and the need to create mass employment as a distributive resource. While in the long-run high-productivity manufacturing could create large numbers of relatively well-paid jobs, in the short-run Ethiopia's only opening in global value chains is through low-productivity, low-wage activities. As such, while pursuing manufacturing as a distributive strategy, the government has, at the same time, taken measures to maintain low labour costs to attract global capital. Indeed, the government initially set wage rates too low in an attempt to attract investment, with the result that industrial park workers earned even less than self-employed workers in the informal sector (Blattman and Dercon 2018, Oya 2019). Moreover, the government failed to provide housing for large numbers of migrants coming to work in the parks, with the result that low-quality housing typically accounts for a large proportion of workers' wages (Oya 2019, Mains and Mulat 2021). In an attempt to maintain low labour costs, both the government and firms have resisted efforts to unionise, building on a long history of union suppression, and leading to a series of wildcat strikes that have further disrupted production (Admasie 2018, Hardy and Hauge 2019, Oya and Schaefer 2021). While the industrial parks have therefore achieved important successes

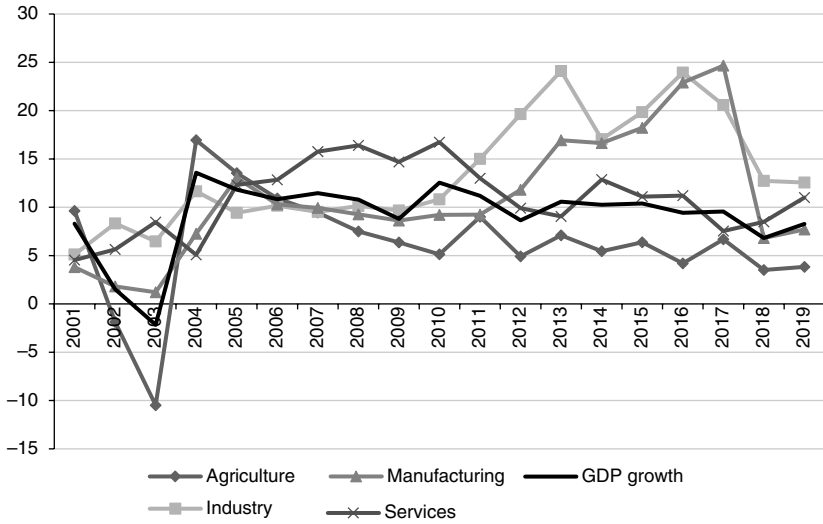


Figure 6.10 Economic growth by sector
Source: author, based on World Development Indicators.

in attracting lead firms, major challenges remain in establishing a manufacturing sector and mass employment.

Structural Transformation and Employment under the ‘Developmental State’

In many respects, the ‘developmental state’ delivered impressive results in economic growth, social indicators and expansion of infrastructure. Figure 6.10 shows a period of rapid growth across sectors since 2004. Growth was initially driven by agriculture, as the largest economic sector. However, over time agriculture’s contribution has declined in favour of the service sector and, from about 2013, a construction boom that drove a major expansion of industry. The main driver of Ethiopia’s economic growth was, therefore, massive public infrastructure investment with the state-dominated financial sector mobilised to fund state projects, and latterly a construction boom financed largely by foreign and diaspora investment (Moller 2017). Despite impressive overall growth rates, however, the government did not manage to achieve the key objective of its development and political strategy: the creation of a dynamic manufacturing sector that would drive economic growth and create mass employment. Manufacturing did grow rapidly after 2004 and particularly from 2013

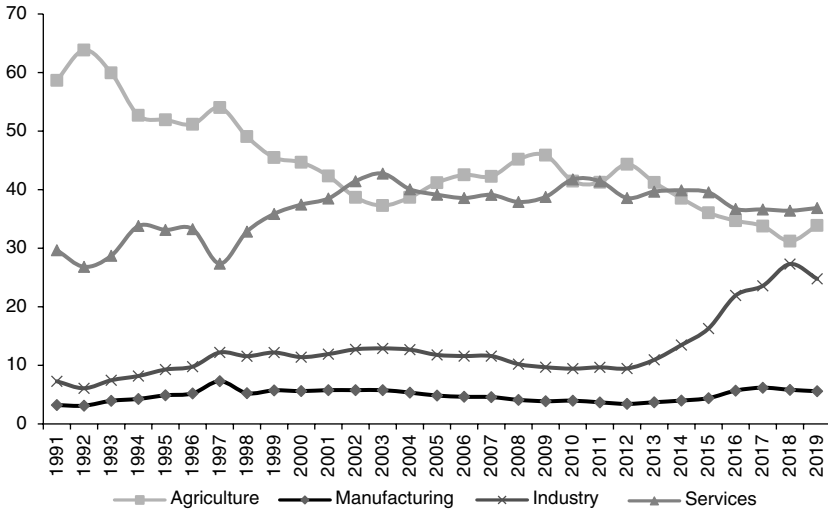


Figure 6.11 Value added as a percentage of GDP
 Source: author, based on World Development Indicators.

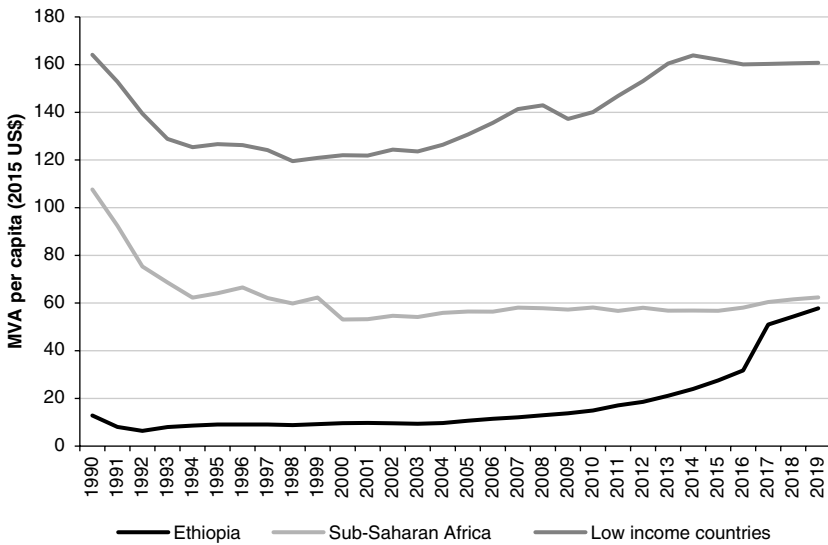


Figure 6.12 Manufacturing value added per capita
 Source: author, based on data from UNIDO.

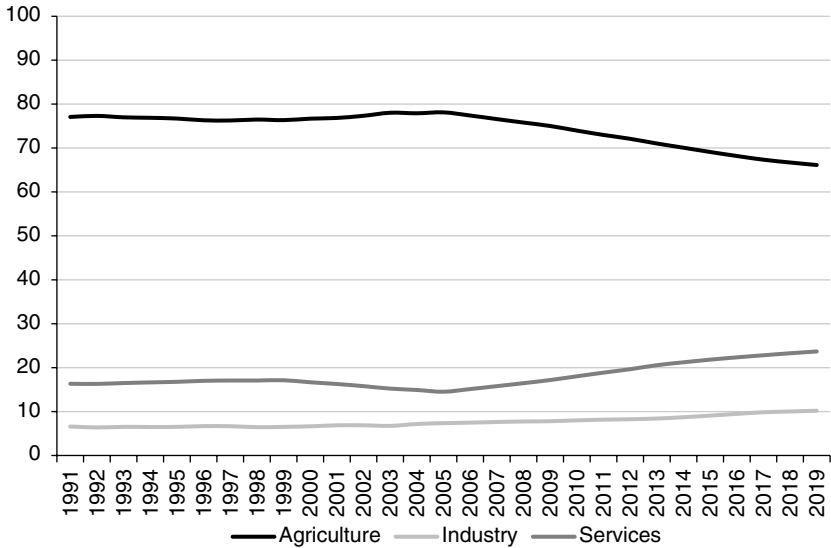


Figure 6.13 Share of employment by sector

Source: author, based on World Development Indicators.

with the creation of the industrial parks. However, this growth was from a tiny initial base, and manufacturing has yet to expand beyond 7 per cent of the economy (Figure 6.11). Figure 6.12 illustrates the challenge, with manufacturing value added per capita in Ethiopia – even after rapid growth since 2013 – still below the sub-Saharan African average and well below that for low-income countries globally.

The slow growth of manufacturing has translated into a slow shift in sectoral employment, with agriculture declining but retaining by far the largest share of employment (Figure 6.13).¹⁸ Moreover, it is the service sector rather than manufacturing that has provided most non-agricultural employment. This service sector primarily consists of low-productivity commerce (trade, hotels and restaurants), public sector employment and personal services rather than high-productivity services such as finance or ICT (Moller 2015, pp. 60–61). Meanwhile, the National Labour Force Survey actually shows a decline in the proportion of the workforce in manufacturing from 5 per cent in 2005 to 3 per cent in 2021.

¹⁸ Even this modest shift is exaggerated by a change in classification, with large numbers of women previously considered agricultural workers re-classified as being in ‘employment in private households’, primarily as domestic servants (Ronnäs and Sarkar 2019, pp. 41–42, Schmidt and Bekele Woldeyes 2019).

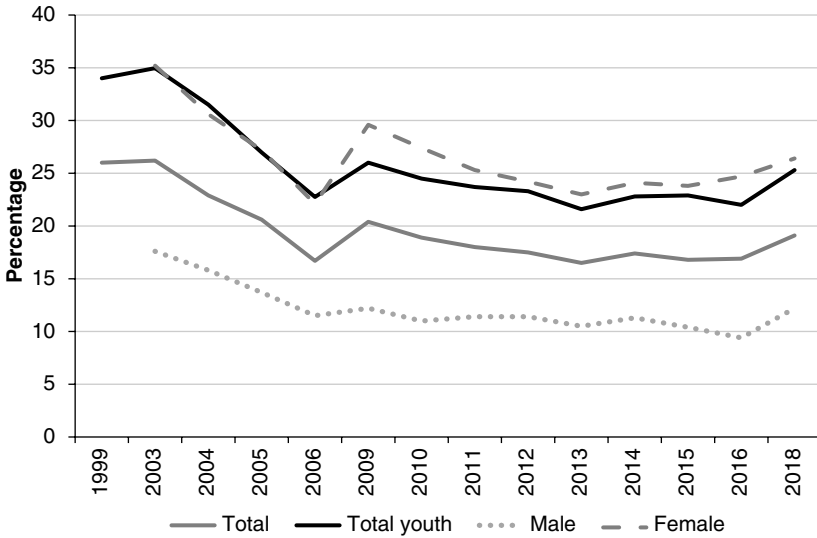


Figure 6.14 Unemployment rates

Source: author, based on Labour Force Surveys for 1999, 2005 and 2013 and the Urban Employment Unemployment Survey for other years.

The government considered manufacturing to be an essential part of the solution to growing distributive pressures by providing a source of mass employment. Clearly, this objective was unfulfilled. Just as the previous chapter highlighted a growing rural distributive crisis and a generational division in land access, data suggest a similar pattern regarding access to urban employment. Unemployment and underemployment rates have remained extremely high, while numbers have grown in absolute terms. Moreover, there is an important generational division, with young people – especially women – facing higher rates of unemployment, despite rising educational attainment that has led to growing expectations.

Open unemployment is primarily an urban phenomenon, with landlessness and underemployment more pressing concerns in rural areas.¹⁹ Figure 6.14 shows that the unemployment rate fell from a peak in the early 2000s and then from 2006 stagnated at around 16–17 per cent. Despite this stability in the unemployment rate, however, urban

¹⁹ The data presented here follow the CSA's definition whereby the unemployed comprise the economically active population aged 10 and over who have no work and are available for work. Labour Force Surveys in 2005 and 2013 reported negligible rural unemployment rates of around 2 per cent. However, the 2021 report has a much higher figure of 5.2 per cent.

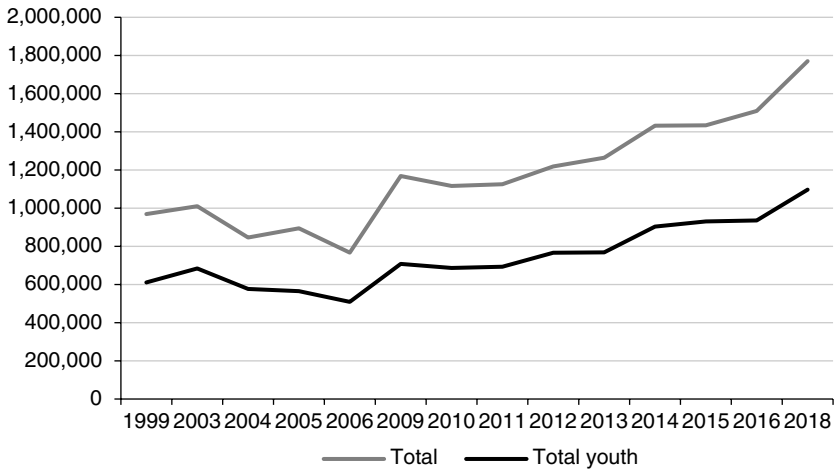


Figure 6.15 Number of unemployed persons

Source: author's calculations, based on Labour Force Surveys for 1999, 2005 and 2013 and the Urban Employment Unemployment Survey for other years.

population growth meant that the number of unemployed people in urban areas more than doubled from 2006 (Figure 6.15). Importantly, unemployment varies considerably by age. The youth unemployment rate, defined in Ethiopia as those aged 15–29, has been consistently higher than that of the general population and follows a similar pattern to the overall rate, first declining and then stagnating from 2006. As with overall unemployment, the total number of unemployed youths more than doubled since 2006. As such, while the reduction in unemployment rates in the early 2000s is often presented as something of a success, the reality is that the scale of the problem – in terms of the absolute number of unemployed individuals – actually increased substantially, despite the government's efforts to address what it felt was a major political threat.

Unemployment also varies by gender and educational attainment. Women face much higher unemployment rates than men and, on average, earn considerably less than men even within the same sector (Ronås and Sarkar 2019). While most manufacturing and floriculture firms recruit primarily among young women, this has been insufficient to compensate for enormous gender inequality in the labour market. In part, gender equality is related to lower levels of educational attainment that limits women's job prospects. Indeed, educational attainment is an

important factor shaping unemployment, with those holding university degrees having the lowest unemployment rates, just 7 per cent in 2016, compared to 23 per cent for those that completed secondary education. Indeed, unemployment rates for those who do not complete primary education, at 16 per cent, are actually lower than those who go on to complete secondary education. The result is that many who pursue education in the hope of economic advancement find themselves with few opportunities when they complete their studies.

Rapid economic growth resulted in an expansion of employment opportunities, with the total employed population nearly tripling in the two decades since 1999. The majority of this employment, however, is in low-productivity activities, including self-employment, MSEs and basic service sector roles. Moreover, employment creation has been insufficient to keep pace with the rapidly growing population, resulting in rising numbers of unemployed. Indeed, there is good evidence that these unemployment figures – alarming in their own right – actually underestimate the problem. First, some observers believe that some discouraged job seekers have dropped out of economic activity and so are excluded from unemployment figures (Ronnås and Sarkar 2019, p. 68). Second, there is evidence of what the World Bank describes as a ‘staggeringly high rate of underemployment’, with more than 40 per cent of those employed working less than 40 hours a week and wanting to work more (World Bank 2016, pp. 33–34).

While important, the presentation of labour market statistics is a rather dry way of exploring the challenges faced by those trying to navigate the labour market. Recent anthropological studies by Mains (2012) and Di Nunzio (2019) shed some light on the experiences faced by young men with limited opportunities in Jimma, Oromiya and inner city Addis Ababa, respectively. These books highlight the paradox of young men who are both ‘hopeless and possessing unprecedented aspirations’ (Mains 2012, p. 3) as a result of increased educational attainment, the despair of a labour market that provides few opportunities, and the difficulty of establish an independent household without employment. Leaving Ethiopia – through temporary or long-term migration to the Arabian peninsula, Europe or North America, depending on opportunities – is seen by many as the only solution (Kefale and Gebresenbet 2021).

Conclusion

For Meles and the EPRDF after 2001, the only possible solution to the distributive crisis they faced was rapid industrialisation and mass

employment creation which could be used to address growing urban unemployment, absorb rural surplus labour and to maintain the strategy of enmeshment that tied people to the ruling party. This mass distributive crisis was a central motivation for the large-scale state investment that drove rapid economic growth from 2004. Despite rapid growth, the government's efforts to build a dynamic manufacturing sector have been woefully insufficient to absorb a rapidly growing population. The inevitable result has been high rates of unemployment, underemployment and landlessness, and the concentration of the jobs that are available in low-wage, low-productivity activities. Moreover, just as with rural land access, there is a generational divide in un- and underemployment, with young adults particularly affected. While it is sometimes claimed that the demographic transition provides an opportunity for rapid economic growth, realisation of such a demographic dividend requires not only a supply of working age labour, but also large-scale job creation (Amsden 2010, Oya 2019). The reality is that there are insufficient jobs to meet demand from a rapidly growing young population brandishing increasingly impressive educational qualifications and rising expectations of future employment. While the EPRDF correctly identified population growth and unemployment as important sources of political instability, it was ultimately unable to address them.

The question that follows then is why – despite the political imperative of industrialisation – did the EPRDF fall short? It is easy to identify in the preceding analysis a number of failings of government policy, which resulted in under-performance of key sectors. While certain political leaders – including but not limited to Meles and Arkebe – spent long periods studying industrialisation in other countries and developing a strategy for Ethiopia, bureaucratic capacity and technical expertise remained limited in important ways. Industrial policy, involving sectoral coordination and the design and enforcement of incentives and disciplinary mechanisms for private firms all placed major burdens on limited state capacity, often to the detriment of economic performance. Moreover, under the EPRDF, development policy in general and industrial policy in particular have been politically driven in response to crisis, leading to overly ambitious and poorly thought-out initiatives that contributed to the spectacular failure of major projects.

That said, however, there are also important factors that were largely beyond the government's control. The first of these is the challenging starting point inherited by the EPRDF. On coming to power in the 1990s, educational attainment was minimal, the private sector almost non-existent and technical expertise in manufacturing extremely limited.

While the government sought to address these weaknesses, they are all challenges that can only be resolved through long-term change. At the same time, the EPRDF sought to industrialise and generate mass employment in a very specific context of late-late development. First, Ethiopia's delayed demographic transition translated into extremely rapid population growth and urbanisation, which afforded the government little margin for error in its attempt to promote structural transformation. Second, the structure of the contemporary global economy means that the challenge of industrialisation is much harder than it was for earlier industrialisers. In particular, advances in the technological frontier and narrowing of profit margins in the low-technology industries targeted by the government mean that domestic firms face enormous difficulties integrating into global value chains.

7 Urban Development and the Politics of Expropriation

The EPRDF initially aimed to delay urbanisation until ADLI had delivered on its promise of industrialisation as a means of preventing the political instability that it feared would accompany mass urban unemployment. As with the early industrialisers, urbanisation in Ethiopia would take place in parallel with industrialisation, with growing industrial employment absorbing surplus labour released by an increasingly high-productivity agricultural sector. Like in many other late-late developing countries, however, this was not what transpired. Instead, demographic growth resulted in urbanisation without industrialisation (Fox 2012, Gollin et al. 2016, Jedwab et al. 2017). Faced with a growing urban population and political opposition in urban areas, the EPRDF responded to the political challenges of the early 2000s by bringing urban areas to the centre of its development strategy. The ‘developmental state’ used its control of finance and land to centralise rent allocation, directing public and private investment to priority sectors, namely industry, construction and infrastructure, much of which was located in urban centres. This chapter therefore examines how the state’s efforts to accelerate structural transformation through urban development exacerbated the emerging distributive crisis resulting from the shortage of land and employment. The ultimate result was that urban expansion became a flashpoint for the underlying distributive failings of the development strategy.

Urban growth entails processes of: densification, whereby existing urban land is used more intensively, often through vertical expansion; and horizontal expansion into surrounding peri-urban areas (van Noorloos et al. 2019). This chapter focuses primarily on urban expansion into surrounding peri-urban and rural land. In cities and towns across Ethiopia, urban expansion has displaced rural landholders, exacerbating the demographic drivers of landlessness. Urban population growth and the state prioritisation of urban development place demands on the land delivery system. Land delivery comprises the ‘processes through which land becomes available in parcels suitably sized, priced and located for urban use’ for businesses and housing for those of varying

incomes (Rakodi 2006, p. 130). In other African countries, attempts at creating state-administered land delivery systems that regulate and formalise all transactions have been ‘universally unsuccessful’ due to the lack of state capacity and the prevalence of neo-customary land tenure and related authorities (Rakodi 2006, p. 129). Ethiopia is unusual in Africa in the dominance of state land ownership and the minimal role for neo-customary tenure. However, ethnic federalism presents an additional challenge to effective land administration. Ethiopia’s ethno-linguistic federalism associates particular ethnic groups with a defined territory and provides for the self-administration of these resources by ethnic groups. In doing so, federalism implies a hierarchy of rights between ethnic insiders and outsiders, and is in tension with the constitutional equality between all Ethiopian citizens (Eshete 2003, Lavers 2018). Nowhere is this more relevant than in the multi-ethnic cities in the centre and south of Ethiopia, most of which were established as part of the southward expansion at the turn of the twentieth century. Federalism has provoked contestation over the ‘ownership’ of these multiethnic cities, while urban development has often heightened competition over valuable resources.

The analysis that follows shows how urbanisation proceeded rapidly under the EPRDF, at first in spite of and subsequently in response to government policies. The result has been waves of displacement from inner city slums targeted for redevelopment (Weldeghebrael 2019) as well as a massive expansion of towns and cities into rural areas, displacing large numbers of rural landholders. In doing so, urban expansion further undermined what had previously been the government’s main distributive strategy – access to land. The government’s attempts to utilise state land ownership as a means of facilitating and controlling this process were highly problematic, with the land delivery system failing almost everyone involved. For rural landholders, urban expansion meant expropriation with minimal consultation or compensation, and visible injustice as new landholders took advantage of the economic opportunity provided by what was once their land. Yet, the land delivery system also failed to provide sufficient, affordable land for urban development. The result was strong supply and demand pressures for de facto land privatisation in peri-urban areas and the expansion of informal settlements outside formal urban expansion plans. State land ownership – supposedly a means of limiting rent seeking – became a key means of rent seeking, with state officials, brokers and speculators making enormous profits from the creation of value entailed in the conversion of rural to urban land. In the context of federalism, meanwhile, urban expansion in southern Ethiopia frequently entails the displacement of rural ethnic ‘insiders’

with multi-ethnic cities and inter-ethnic competition for numerical advantage in urban centres.

To develop these arguments, the chapter first sets urban development in historical context, briefly charting the origins of Ethiopia's towns and cities, and the changing place of urban areas in the EPRDF's development strategy. The analysis then focuses on the land tenure regime, highlighting the distinction between the urban and rural tenure and the challenges this presents to urban expansion. The challenge of urban expansion is examined through a case study of Adama – now the second largest city in Ethiopia by population and a key site of investment for the 'developmental state's' infrastructure projects. The analysis then broadens out to consider other Ethiopian cities and Addis Ababa in particular.

Urban Development and State Policy

Urbanisation in Ethiopia is primarily a phenomenon of the twentieth century onwards. Previously, in northern Ethiopia, the political capital was usually a mobile encampment that accompanied the Emperor as he travelled his territory, though important cities did emerge at Axum, Gondar, Harar and Lalibela, amongst others (Pankhurst 1982). Prior to the nineteenth century the largest towns probably had populations of no more than 10,000 (Donham 2002, p. 15). Subsequent urbanisation was constrained by both the land tenure regime under the Imperial, Derg and EPRDF regimes, all of which acted as a disincentive to migration, and the lack of economic dynamism in urban centres (Clapham 1988, Donham 2002, de Brauw and Mueller 2012).

Urban development in the twentieth century was intricately intertwined with the Imperial modernisation and state-building project. Addis Ababa was established in 1886 by Empress Taytu in an area previously known as Finfinne in Afaan Oromo and occupied by Tulama Oromo pastoralists (Zewde 2008b). Shortly afterwards Emperor Menelik moved his capital from Ankober to the strategically positioned Addis as he pursued the southward expansion of the empire. Addis was initially just another temporary capital, but was gradually consolidated as the permanent political capital based on the introduction of government and central bureaucracy, foreign diplomatic legations and the completion of the Addis Ababa-Djibouti railway in 1917 (Wolde Michael 1973, Zewde 1991). Many other towns in the south also began as military garrisons used to hold down recently conquered populations and territory (Wolde Michael 1973, Pankhurst 1985, Benti 2002, Donham 2002). Others were established along the new railway, at Bishoftu

(Debre Zeit), Modjo, Adama (Nazret) and Dire Dawa. The result was that most towns in the early twentieth century were situated in recently incorporated southern Ethiopia, rather than the historic north (Donham 2002), while the urban population was predominately from the north. Gradual urban expansion was arrested by the revolution. Rural land redistribution reduced urban growth rates, while the nationalisation of urban land, abolition of tenancy and confiscation of second homes, removed incentives for property investment and abolished property taxes, a lucrative source of revenues for urban development (Rahmato 1984, Clapham 1988).

Urban development received inconsistent attention under the EPRDF. The TPLF began as a rural insurrection and the Front avoided occupying urban centres until late in the war (Young 1997, Hammond 1999). While urbanisation and structural transformation were the EPRDF's ultimate objectives when it came to power, these were seen as long-term ambitions. Urban areas were considered a potential source of political instability, and urban migration discouraged until industrial expansion had created sufficient employment to absorb new migrants. By the end of the 1990s, urban centres, and particularly Addis Ababa, were in a poor state with a desperate need for investment in housing and infrastructure.

The evolution of the EPRDF's development strategy in the first half of the 2000s was partly a response to urban politics, while this change in strategy had vitally important implications for urban development. Simon (2011), Minister of Communication and a close advisor to the Prime Minister, highlighted protests in Addis Ababa in 2001 as a key wake-up call that alerted the leadership to urban areas,

we didn't start work on urban centres until late 2004. We were still treating the urban centres just like rural areas. EPRDF didn't have the necessary experience nor the legacy from previous eras on how to run urban centres ... when the urban centres were becoming massive centres of discontent and protest, EPRDF had to take notice. We changed the entire leadership of the urban centres and designed urban development plans. (Simon 2011)

The need for urban development was reinforced by subsequent Armageddons. The 2002/03 food crisis underscored the inability of agriculture to indefinitely absorb population growth, while the 2005 elections revealed the extent of opposition support in urban areas. From the mid-2000s many key 'developmental state' priorities focused on urban development, and the transformation of Addis Ababa and other urban centres was presented as a symbol of Ethiopia's 'Renaissance' (Weld-eghebrael 2022). Indeed, as discussed in Chapter 6, the industrial strategy came to focus on urban centres, supporting firms through priority

access to cheap land, electricity, transport infrastructure and industrial parks. Furthermore, the construction sector was given ‘top priority’ for its job creation potential and its contribution to other economic sectors (MoI 2002b, p. 20). Among the more high-profile construction priorities was the Integrated Housing Development Programme (IHDP) launched in Addis Ababa after Arkebe Oqubay was drafted in as Mayor of Addis Ababa following protests in 2001. The programme aimed to build 300,000 new housing units through the redevelopment of inner city slums and urban expansion (Oqubay 2005). The programme was then extended to fifty-six additional towns and cities in response to the 2005 election fallout (MUDCHo 2015, p. 100). Ostensibly aimed at low- and middle-income households, the IHDP was part of the EPRDF’s attempt to build a new middle class with ties to the incumbent that would expand the party’s political base (Planel and Bridonneau 2017), as well as a means of creating a savings culture in line with the government’s ‘developmental state’ model. Furthermore, while the government attempted to direct domestic and diaspora investors towards manufacturing, it was instead real estate that attracted most investors (Goodfellow 2017b). The result, therefore, was that government priorities for industry and construction reinforced demographic trends, resulting in great demand for urban land. While the government certainly retained past concerns about the threat posed by unmanaged urban migration, it increasingly sought to capitalise on the economic potential of urban development (Ethiopia’s New Climate Economy Partnership 2015).

Addis Ababa has long been the primate city in Ethiopia, at least ten times the population of the next largest (see Figure 7.1). However, the EPRDF made a concerted effort to direct urban growth to towns outside the capital to relieve pressure on Addis and to distribute economic activity across the country (Ethiopia’s New Climate Economy Partnership 2015). In addition to the IHDP, this was achieved through regional and wereda decentralisation, and the expansion of higher education, with thirty-three universities established across the country. In the absence of a national census since 2007, all population data should be treated with some caution. Nonetheless, it is clear that though Ethiopia is among the least urbanised countries in the world – estimated at 19 per cent in 2015 – the urban population is growing rapidly at about 3.5–4.3 per cent annually (Angel et al. 2013, p. 2, Adam 2014a, p. 1972) and likely to triple by 2040. Moreover, while Addis Ababa continues to expand, most urban population growth took place in small and medium towns and cities.

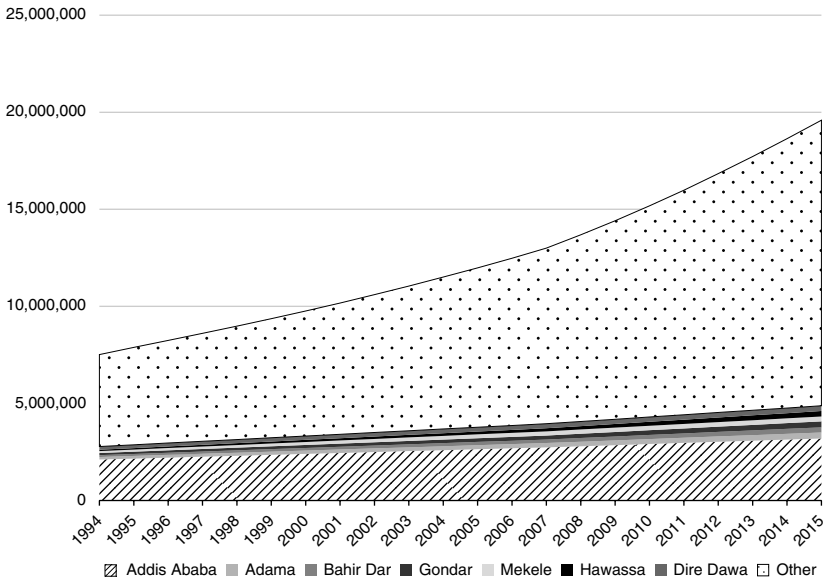


Figure 7.1 Urban population growth

Note: figures are available for individual cities for 1994, 2007 and 2015. Figures for other years are estimated based on these.

Source: author, based on CSA (1994, 2008), [Ethiopia's New Climate Economy Partnership \(2015\)](#), World Development Indicators.

Urban Expansion, Land Tenure and the Land Delivery System

Rapid urban expansion places a great burden on the land delivery system that provides required land, infrastructure and services. In Ethiopia, this land delivery system operated in the context of state land ownership and the state's attempts to use land tenure as a tool to allocate rents in line with its development objectives.

Land nationalisation under the Derg resulted in a lack of investment in housing, limited urban land supply and revenue shortages. On coming to power, the EPRDF sought to address these failings and established a very different urban land tenure regime system to that in rural areas. While rural tenure initially prioritised peasant protection and constrained market forces, from the beginning, urban tenure would employ 'free market principles' within the constraints of state ownership (FDRE 1993). The government established an urban leasehold system in 1993, apparently influenced by Chinese reforms (Goodfellow 2017a), that enabled

landholders to rent, sell and mortgage their leases and the property built on the land. While rural land administration is relatively decentralised to regional level, the federal government reserved the exclusive right to issue urban land proclamations (FDRE 1993, para. 16, 2011, para. 33).¹

While this system approximated an urban land market, it was a highly constrained one with the state retaining significant powers to use urban land as a development tool. First, the state controlled the land delivery process, identifying land for new urban development, clearing the land, providing basic infrastructure and then distributing it. Land could be distributed either through competitive tender or by state allotment for priority activities, such as housing, manufacturing, government buildings and social services. Furthermore, leaseholders were required to use the land for specified purposes and to develop it within a set timeframe, with the state retaining the power to expropriate the land of those that failed to meet these conditions.

Second, the state retained sweeping powers of expropriation of rural and urban land to promote ‘development activity’ wherever it is deemed to be in the ‘public interest’ (FDRE 2011, para. 26, see also 2005b). Indeed, these powers were enhanced in the 2002 proclamation to limit the ability of urban landholders to resist state expropriation (Kifelew 2009, Weldeghebrael 2019). A key requirement for the state to be able to use the land tenure system as a means of allocating ‘rents’ in line with its development objectives is that compensation paid for expropriated land is minimal, reducing the cost to the state and enabling the provision of low-cost land to preferred projects. The 2005 expropriation proclamation required the state to pay replacement costs for property constructed on land, and, for rural landholders, ten times farmers’ average annual income over the last five years (FDRE 2005b, para. 8).² Yet, this means that compensation was very low compared to the value of land once it is reclassified as urban or investment land, or compared to what would be required for individual farmers to either rent land elsewhere or to establish an alternative livelihood.³ Meanwhile, in the context of high

¹ Regions became more assertive since Meles’ death in 2012, demanding the power to set their own urban land policy. Thus far, the federal government has resisted, however (Interview with respondent EG36, Ministry of Urban Development, Addis Ababa, 3 October 2018).

² The compensation proclamation was revised in 2019, requiring consultation with landholders one year before expropriation and increasing compensation to fifteen times the highest annual income in the last three years (FDRE 2019, para. 13). Rural landholders and their adult children incorporated into expanding towns are to be given 500 m² for housing.

³ A recent study found that urban incorporation had a negative impact on most households due to low compensation and the lack of skills required to find work in the urban labour market (Mezgebo and Porter 2020).

inflation rates, compensation payments are quickly eroded. Situated between the rural land tenure system – where land formally has no value due to restrictions on sales – and the urban tenure system, urban expansion and the land delivery system were therefore means of creating value and massive rents through the re-zoning of peri-urban land. While ADLI earlier prioritised the protection of the peasantry, the ‘developmental’ state necessitated peasants’ low-cost expropriation as a tool of state-led development.

Urban expansion entails the extension of urban administrative boundaries, expropriation of rural landholders, preparation of the urban land and then its distribution. Cities have two boundaries: the administrative boundary demarcating territory that falls under the jurisdiction of the city administration; and the planning boundary that for most towns and cities covers the area to be integrated in the next 10 years, though for major cities this is 25 years. Within the urban administration, landholdings can either fall under the urban leasehold system or rural tenure, where land has been brought under the urban administration, but not yet expropriated and redeveloped (Kifelew 2009). While expansion of urban administrative boundaries may lead directly to expropriation of rural landholders, in some cases rural landholders remain in place for years until they are displaced. As such, peri-urban land falls in a ‘transitional zone’ between the two tenure systems, and distinct rural and urban land authorities (Adam 2014b, p. 90), whether cultivated rural land within the urban administrative boundary or within the planning boundary that is under threat of future incorporation.

The urban land delivery system proved deeply problematic and became a source of deep grievances amongst both urban and rural populations. Notably, the system failed to meet its central objective of providing a sufficient supply of affordable urban land. In part this is a financial problem. Urban land development requires upfront state investment to provide minimal compensation to expropriated rural landholders and, more significantly, services such as roads, water and electricity. This can cost up to 10–12 million *birr* per hectare.⁴ Although urban administrations are required to spend 90 per cent of land lease revenue on urban development (FDRE 2002b, para. 10.3), this revenue has proven insufficient. Auctions do result in land being leased at eye-catching rates. For example, in Addis land has been auctioned for as much as 307,000 *birr* per m² in 2014 (Goodfellow 2017a, p. 569) and in Bahir Dar for 80,000 *birr*

⁴ Interview with respondent EG36, Ministry of Urban Development, Addis Ababa, 3 October 2018.

per m².⁵ Nonetheless, most land is actually distributed through administrative allocation for priority projects at relatively low cost. According to one official in the Ministry of Urban Development, just 5–7 per cent of land is auctioned in most cities.⁶ This limits state income from land leases, while the government has failed to introduce a property tax that has provided important revenues in other ‘developmental states’ by capturing rising urban land values (Goodfellow 2017a). Not only do resource shortages impede urban land supplies, but limited land availability leads to very high prices for the little land that is auctioned, effectively excluding all but the most wealthy.

The shortage and high cost of urban land, along with the minimal compensation for expropriated rural landholders therefore provides the incentive for illegal land transactions and informal settlements, as well as great resentment by all involved. In many cases, farmers are well aware that it is only a matter of time until they are displaced with minimal compensation. Meanwhile, a range of urban residents seeking cheap housing and brokers seeking profits have been rushing to buy peri-urban land, establishing claims to that land within the urban jurisdiction after rezoning. The common way of doing this is to buy a farm and divide it into multiple plots, each with a small structure, which stand a better chance of being recognised by the urban authorities and allocated leasehold in the urban system.⁷ Consequently, rural landholders rush to sell so that they have money in hand before the government displaces them.

Inevitably, this process, and the enormous sums of money involved, leads to corruption as state officials seek to profit from the enormous rent creation. Land use planners commonly leak information to contacts who then have advanced information on expansion plans and designated future land use, and can buy out rural landholders.⁸ Furthermore, once people have bought land in peri-urban areas, their investment – based on illegal land transactions – is extremely vulnerable to state expropriation. Payments to officials can formalise land leases or at least ensure that the state does not intervene to expropriate. The challenge of administering urban expansion is further exacerbated by the division of land administration between separate urban and rural ministries and bureaux at

⁵ Interview with respondent EG36, Ministry of Urban Development, Addis Ababa, 3 October 2018.

⁶ Interview with respondent EG36, Ministry of Urban Development, Addis Ababa, 3 October 2018.

⁷ Interview with respondent EG36, Ministry of Urban Development, Addis Ababa, 3 October 2018.

⁸ Interview with respondent EG36, Ministry of Urban Development, Addis Ababa, 3 October 2018; SRG5, SNNPR Urban Land Administration Bureau; and ORG8, Oromiya Urban Land Administration office.

federal and regional levels.⁹ Respondents report that there is little communication between the federal Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Urban Development, and coordination problems are even more acute between the relevant regional bureaux.¹⁰

The 'Developmental State' and Urban Expansion in Adama

While Addis Ababa is the clear primate city, Adama is one of the secondary cities prioritised for development as a major political and economic centre. According to some estimates Adama was the second largest city in 2015 (MUDCHo 2015) and is among the fastest growing. The case of Adama therefore enables analysis of the dynamics of urban expansion, state 'developmentalism' and rural expropriation.

Adama was founded in 1916 along the Addis-Djibouti railway (Zewde 1991, Bulti and Sori 2017) and the city was boosted after the Second World War by construction of the nearby Koka Dam and Wenji-Shoa sugar estate (Zewde 2008a). The Derg's industrial push also focused on towns along the railway, including a Soviet-financed tractor assembly plant at Adama (Clapham 1988, p. 148). Under the EPRDF, the expansion of Adama has mirrored these earlier processes, with the city prioritised as an administrative and economic centre. Indeed, Adama is the site of several flagship projects and a symbol of Ethiopia's industrialisation drive. Greatly improved transport links through the Addis Ababa – Adama Expressway, completed in 2014, and the new Ethio-Djibouti railway, opened in 2018 (Terrefe 2022), provide access for the Adama Industrial Park focused on textiles and apparel, also opened in 2018. In addition, the Wenji-Shoa sugar factory was expanded in the late 2000s, adding some 9,000 hectares of plantation and a new factory (see Chapters 5–6). The IHDP was extended to Adama, with more than 3,000 units constructed by 2015 (MUDCHo 2015, p. 102). Nevertheless, this housing provision pales in comparison to population growth and the target of creating 60,000 jobs in the new industrial park. Yet the city currently has made 'no preparation for the housing need' that will come with the park.¹¹

Adama's population more than doubled between 1994 and 2015 and is predicted to increase fourfold by 2050 (Figure 7.2). The expansion

⁹ Oromiya had a brief attempt at integrating rural and urban land administrations in 2008–2010 and decided to re-integrate the two in late 2018.

¹⁰ Interview with respondent EG36, Ministry of Urban Development, Addis Ababa, 3 October 2018.

¹¹ Interview with respondent OAC1, Adama City Land Administration, 26 October 2018.

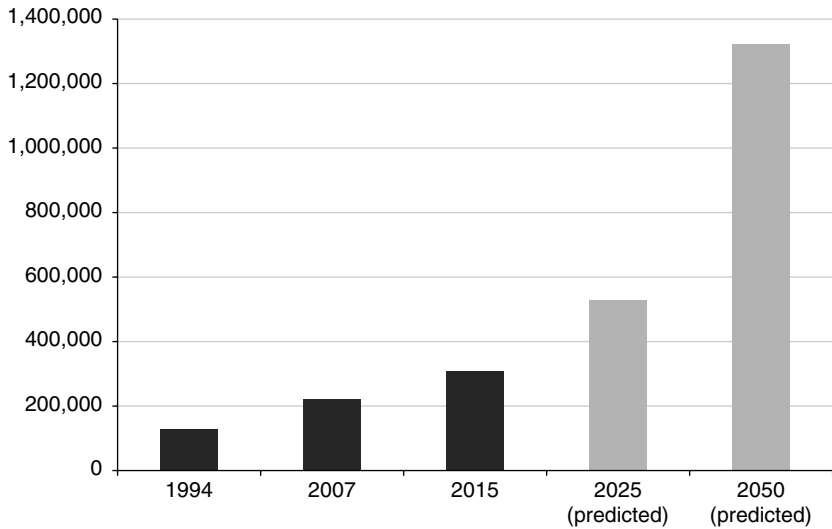


Figure 7.2 Past and predicted population growth in Adama City
Sources: author, based on (CSA 1994, 2008, Ethiopia's New Climate Economy Partnership 2015, p. 27).

of the built up area of the city has been even faster, more than quadrupling from 1,200 hectares in 1995 to 5,060 hectares by 2017 (Terfa et al. 2019, p. 8, see Figure 7.3). A further expansion to between 12,100 and 24,261 hectares has been predicted by 2040 (Angel et al. 2013, p. 3), with Adama expected to merge with Awash Melkasa to the south and Welenchiti to the East.¹²

Like many cities across southern Ethiopia, urbanisation in Adama is intertwined with the ethnic dynamics of state-building. From its foundation, Adama was settled by political and economic elites and migrant workers from northern Ethiopia, rather than the local Oromo (Ferdissa 2019). The city was given an Amharic name, Nazret, by Haile Selassie in 1944, and Amharic has always been the dominant language.¹³ Indeed, during the Imperial era, urban settlement was synonymous with use of Amharic and adoption of Orthodox Christianity (Donham 2002). By 1970, an estimated 68 per cent of Adama's population were Amhara and just 17 per cent Oromo (Ferdissa 2019, p. 341).

Ethnic federalism had an important effect on the city, as many others. According to the Oromiya constitution, proficiency in Afaan Oromo is

¹² Interview with respondent OAC2, former town planner, Adama, 12 November 2018, and OAC1, Adama City Land Administration, 26 October 2018.

¹³ The Amharic name for Nazareth in Israel.

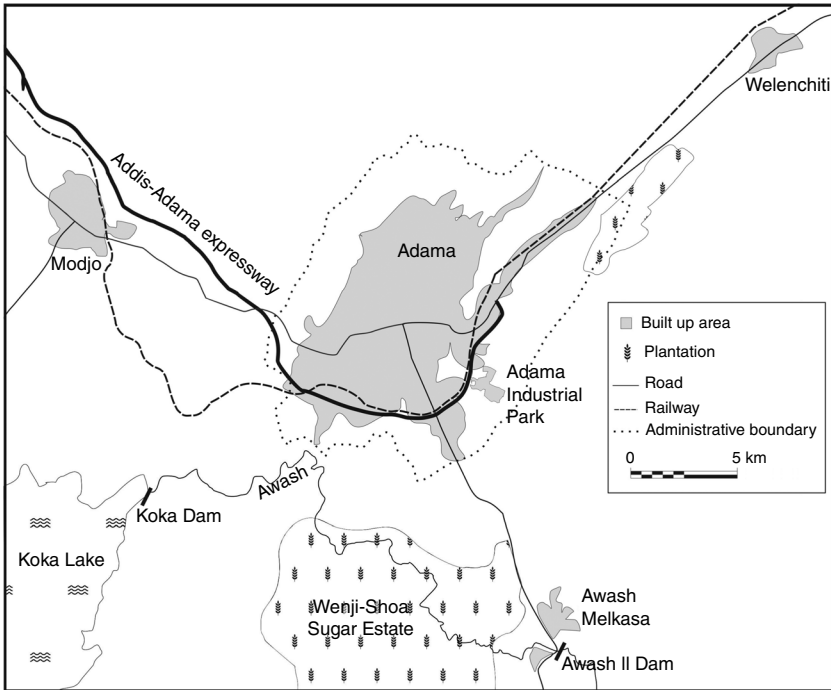


Figure 7.3 Adama and surrounding area
Source: author.

required of all regional office holders, a marked reversal from the previous dominance of Amharic. Moreover, the OPDO re-named several towns in Oromiya, replacing Amharic names with Afaan Oromo ones, including changing Nazret to Adama in 2000 (Woldemariam and Lanza 2014). At that time, Adama was briefly made the capital of Oromiya, ostensibly to better enable the development of Oromo culture. Though completely surrounded by Oromiya, Addis Ababa is a separate city administration with Oromiya retaining an undefined but constitutionally enshrined 'special interest' in the city (FDRE 1994, para. 49). However, the relocation of the capital was widely seen as an attempt to limit Oromo claims to Addis, resulting in protests led by the Mecha and Tulema Association across Oromiya in 2004. Moreover, the capital became an important campaign point for the opposition Oromiya National Congress in the 2005 elections (Benti 2002, Berhe 2020). The return of the regional government to Addis was announced after the 2005 elections as part of the EPRDF's attempts to win back popular support (Benti 2002, Vaughan 2011, Woldemariam and Lanza 2014, Berhe 2020). Since that

time Adama has served as a de facto second capital and capital of East Shewa Zone.

The city's expansion resulted in a change in ethnic composition. According to census results, the Amhara reduced from 68 per cent in 1970 to 35 per cent in 2007, while the Oromo proportion rose from 17 to 39 per cent (CSA 2008). This change has multiple causes, including the incorporation of Oromo rural landholders into the expanding urban jurisdiction and the recruitment of Afaan Oromo speaking officials to the regional administration. However, these numbers may be misleading. As many as 20 per cent of the Oromo population under the urban administration may be still residing in rural areas yet to be incorporated into the city proper (Ferdissa 2019). As such, Amharic remained the dominant language and there was an important inter-ethnic dynamic to urban expansion, whereby predominately Amharic speaking urban residents replace Afaan Oromo speaking rural residents. These changing inter-ethnic relations have not escaped tensions. Observers point to the destruction of the Amhara and Gurage-owned Ginb Gebeya business centre in May 2006 as the result of inter-ethnic politics and the political fallout of the 2005 elections (Kefale 2014, Ferdissa 2019).

Five rural kebele were re-zoned to the urban administration around 2007 and an updated masterplan in 2017/18 identified another eleven rural kebele for future expansion. However, coordination between rural and urban administrations has been problematic. Very often the town planners do not notify rural land administrations of the expansion plans.¹⁴ Meanwhile, the rural wereda at times wilfully ignores city expansion plans, for example, by allocating land for a private sugar plantation to the east of Adama, presenting a challenge to future expansion (see Figure 7.3).¹⁵

The former Dhabe Dhenkore Dhenku kebele lies at the forefront of this expansion. Situated in the southeast of Adama, the kebele has lost land to urban expansion, the Addis-Adama Expressway, the Addis-Djibouti railway and the Adama Industrial Park. A total of 1,300 people were displaced to make way for the 365.5 hectare industrial park.¹⁶ At the time of fieldwork in 2018, Dhabe had been fully incorporated into the urban administration, while the remaining Dhenkore Dhenku rural kebele is within the urban planning boundary and the planned 2,000 hectare expansion of the industrial park. As such, the kebele is situated within the transitional zone between urban and rural administrations, with rural

¹⁴ Interview with respondent OAC2, former town planner, Adama, 12 November 2018.

¹⁵ Interview with respondent OAC2, former town planner, Adama, 12 November 2018.

¹⁶ Interview with respondent OAC1, Adama City Land Administration, 26 October 2018.

landholders well aware that their land is targeted for future expansion, while many of those in Dhabe, under the urban administration, retain rural farmland.

The rationale for the selection of the industrial park site is clear – situated very close to the Adama railway station and the Expressway the site provides excellent transport links, Adama provides a ready source of labour, and the site presents the opportunity for expansion to the east.¹⁷ Indeed, the proximity of Dhenkore Dhenku to the rapidly growing city makes future displacement inevitable. However, the displaced farmers nonetheless resent that officials only approached them once the site had been selected to 'preach' about the benefits in terms of employment, electrification, roads, schools and urban modern life.¹⁸ In their view none of these benefits materialised.

Compensation and Expropriation

Displaced landholders are entitled to a plot of urban land to construct a new house – 500 m² plus an additional 200 m² for adult dependent children – and financial compensation for the loss of farmland. Dhabe Dhenkore Dhenku illustrates how compensation payments have increased over time as landholders have been displaced by a series of projects over a decade. When the Expressway construction began in 2010/11 landholders were paid 12 birr per m², which increased to 15.05 birr in 2012/13 for the railway construction. Most recently farmers were paid 53.45 birr per m² when they were displaced by industrial park. Despite this increase in compensation rates, both state officials and local residents uniformly considered payments to be far too low to compensate for displacement and loss of livelihood. As one landholder threatened by future expansion explained,

We farmers don't want to be urbanised because we lose our livelihoods and also we are not interested to receive small compensation and leave our land for the industry. The government should increase the compensation rate at least, we don't oppose development but we are worried about our family's destiny in the future.¹⁹

State officials acknowledged that compensation was insufficient and estimated that about 50 per cent of those displaced had quickly used

¹⁷ Interview with respondent OAC1, Adama City Land Administration, 26 October 2018.

¹⁸ Focus group discussion OAK4, with landholders displaced from the industrial park, 6 November 2018.

¹⁹ Focus Group Discussion OAK3 with landholders in Denkore Denku kebele, 6 November 2018.

up the money and were left with nothing.²⁰ Meanwhile local residents observed that,

The displaced finished the money and some are sitting idle, others are guards, and some even tried suicide by running to the trees with rope. It is difficult for a farmer to sit idle, because they have been working hard throughout their life.²¹

Displaced landholders and other local people were prioritised for job opportunities arising during the park's construction. However, once the park was completed, employment was limited to those that had completed grades 10–12, with jobs allocated through the state administration by quota: 15,000 for Adama town, 10,000 for Adama rural wereda and 5,000 for special consideration. At the time of fieldwork in 2018, the wereda had only been able to identify 6,000 graduates and was concerned about the prospect of missing out on 4,000 much-needed employment opportunities.²² Within Dhenkore Dhenku kebele there were about 50 unemployed and landless youths, though just two people – a brother and sister – had the required qualifications.²³ The federal Industrial Parks Development Corporation also established livelihood rehabilitation programmes for those displaced. These required displaced landholders to put some of their compensation in a bank account to start a cattle-fattening business, with twenty-six cooperatives established to support the project. However, farmers refused to leave their land without their full compensation and the project failed.²⁴

Informal Settlements and De Facto Privatisation

While compensation payments reached 53 birr per m², state respondents and local residents estimated that land could be sold in the illegal land market for anything from 400 birr up to 1,500 birr per m² for the best land located near new roads.²⁵ The reality of the 'developmental state's'

²⁰ Interview with respondent OAC1, Adama City Land Administration, 26 October 2018.

²¹ Focus Group Discussion OAK3 with landholders in Denkore Denku kebele, 6 November 2018.

²² Interview with respondent OAW1, Adama Wereda Investment Office, 6 November 2018.

²³ Interview with respondent OAK2, chairman of Denkore Denku kebele, 30 October 2018.

²⁴ Interview with respondent OAC1, Adama City Land Administration, 26 October 2018.

²⁵ Interview with respondent OAK2, chairman of Denkore Denku kebele, 30 October 2018; Focus group discussion OAK4, with landholders displaced from the industrial park, 6 November 2018, Focus group discussion OAK6, with landless youths in Denkore Denku, 2 November 2018; respondent OAC1, Adama City Land Administration, 26 October 2018; respondent OAC2, former town planner, Adama, 12 November 2018.

use of land to centralise rent allocation was that landholders were displaced at well below the going rate. The kebele chair rightly questioned, Is the government really poorer than individuals who can pay big money per square meter?²⁶

Farmers that sold land rather than waiting for compensation, according to the kebele chairman 'are now leading a luxurious life, but the rest who had collected compensation money are now poor and some are working as guards'.²⁷ Some farmers threatened with future expropriation noted similar examples,

Some farmers sold their land earlier and their life is totally incomparable with displaced farmers. Those who are able to sell ¼ hectare are richer today; some bought a house in Adama town, a few bought cars, others are engaged in [live-stock] fattening, and there are also others who opened restaurants. But the compensated farmers used the money to build a house and fence, and then the money is gone. Some even didn't finish their house properly.²⁸

Given these divergent experiences, it is hardly surprising that many rural landholders rushed to sell their land before it was expropriated with minimal compensation. At the same time, the urban land delivery system failed to develop sufficient serviced land to meet the growing demand of urban expansion. The result in peri-urban areas is a de facto private land market and informal settlements that ignore the city masterplan (Bulti and Sori 2017).

The city administration was well aware of illegal housing in the area surrounding Dhenkore Dhenku.²⁹ The rules state that any house built illegally after 2005 should be demolished while those built beforehand can be legalised.³⁰ Indeed, most state officials interviewed were adamant that illegal settlements would not be accepted,

There is no chance for legalising, it will be demolished. We don't give any compensation when demolished ... No one can legalise it, when the urban land administration wants the land for other purpose, it will be found occupied, so the land administration office will just demolish it.³¹

²⁶ Interview with respondent OAK2, chairman of Denkore Denku kebele, 30 October 2018.

²⁷ Interview with respondent OAK2, chairman of Denkore Denku kebele, 30 October 2018.

²⁸ Focus group discussion OAK4, with landholders displaced from the industrial park, 6 November 2018.

²⁹ Interview with respondent OAC1, Adama City Land Administration, 26 October 2018.

³⁰ Interview with respondent OAC1, Adama City Land Administration, 26 October 2018.

³¹ Interview with respondent OAC1, Adama City Land Administration, 26 October 2018.

Nonetheless, there are significant barriers to removing illegal buildings, from corruption of state officials to limited capacity and, ultimately, the political sensitivity of demolishing settlements. The Ethiopian Mapping Agency took aerial photos of Adama in 2010/11, which provide some basis for determining which houses are illegally constructed since that point.³² Yet, the permitted dwellings of rural landholders are interspersed with illegal constructions on plots that they have sold, with the result that there is no clear dividing line between formal and informal settlements, making it very hard for the urban administration to take action.³³

The land delivery system created enormous rents since it turned formally valueless rural land into marketable and often very valuable urban land. Inevitably, this rent creation attracted corruption, which itself became a major driver of the land market. Corruption affects both rural and urban land administrations. In rural areas, the administration gave, green lights for faster illegal constructions, when everyone understood that the area is about to be re-zoned and more interest develops in those areas to build houses.³⁴

But ultimately,

The corruption starts from our [urban] land administration office when some of the officers leak information about details of the master plan, where the roads will be, the residential, commercial areas etc. This helps the people to invest their money on a land, which is not falling in to roads or other public areas, which is corruption and informed decision for illegal house construction. Then the kebele officials who allow the construction to happen will also take bribes instead of stopping such attempts, so in every stage the chain of corruption keeps on.³⁵

This basic pattern is replicated across Ethiopia's towns and cities, as acknowledged by officials in the federal Ministry of Urban Development.³⁶ Indeed, the involvement of senior officials makes it very hard to take any action against illegal sales,

The big problem is with speculators working with government officials—the planners mostly. They know the land use arrangement of each parcel, then they go to landholders and get them to sell to the speculators. If officials are actors in this, then they don't want to be touched. We try to demolish informal structures but mostly it is impossible. If the family of a city administrator, a political

³² Interview with respondent OAC2, former town planner, Adama, 12 November 2018.

³³ Interview with respondent OAC2, former town planner, Adama, 12 November 2018.

³⁴ Interview with respondent OAC1, Adama City Land Administration, 26 October 2018.

³⁵ Interview with respondent OAC1, Adama City Land Administration, 26 October 2018.

³⁶ Interview with respondent EG36, Ministry of Urban Development, Addis Ababa, 3 October 2018.

appointee or a police chief is involved then you cannot touch them. Everyone knows the problem, but it is very hard to solve.³⁷

Moreover, there have been few routes open to displaced farmers or those threatened with expropriation to contest their eviction or the limited amount of compensation they receive. Where people have raised complaints, they were quickly labelled as ‘anti-development’ or members of the Oromiya Liberation Front,³⁸ a common means of delegitimizing their claims and forcing them to back down for fear of punishment (e.g. [Adugna 2018](#)).

Urban Expansion, Federalism and the Ethnic Ownership of Urban Centres

The dynamics highlighted in Adama play out in similar ways in cities across Ethiopia. The ‘developmental state’s’ investment in transport infrastructure and industrial parks, the decentralisation of politico-administrative office and the rural land crisis have all added to the demographic drivers of rapid urban growth across the country. Urban expansion combines formal processes of expropriating rural landholders with minimal compensation and informal land sales as brokers and speculators position themselves for the arrival of the city. Perhaps the main variation is between Amhara and Tigray – the historic core of Ethiopia, where urban development raises few questions of inter-ethnic relations – and the south – where the historical legacy of state formation is manifest in multi-ethnic cities, and expansion entails the renegotiation of inter-ethnic relations and, under federalism, the ethnic ‘ownership’ of towns and cities.³⁹

The population of Mekele, capital of Tigray and 96 per cent ethnic Tigrayan, increased more than three times over between 1984 and 2007 ([CSA 2008](#)), with the built up area of the city increasing sevenfold from 1984 to 2014 ([Fenta et al. 2017](#)). In 2010/11 alone, some 12,198 rural households were incorporated into the expanding city ([Hailom 2017](#)). One estimate for future expansion is that Mekele will increase to five times its 2010 surface area by 2040, reaching 30,000–40,000 hectares ([Angel et al. 2013](#), p. 3). Likewise in Bahir Dar, capital of Amhara region

³⁷ Interview with respondent EG36, Ministry of Urban Development, Addis Ababa, 3 October 2018.

³⁸ Focus group discussion OAK6, with landless youths in Denkore Denku, 2 November 2018.

³⁹ As discussed in [Chapter 10](#), competition over ethnic ownership of cities echoes [Boone’s \(2014\)](#) argument concerning how rural land tenure institutions shape inter-ethnic relations.

and with a population that is 96 per cent ethnic Amhara (CSA 2008), rapid recent expansion is expected to continue, with the city's built up area expected to reach four times its 2010 surface area by 2040 (Angel et al. 2013, p. 3). Achamyeleh Gashu Adam's research on Bahir Dar highlights many of the challenges that this entails. Brokers link informal settlers, priced out of the inner city by rising rental costs, to farmers under threat of expropriation, dividing land into plots and using local elders as witnesses for transactions (Adam 2014a, 2014b). The result is that as much as 30 per cent of the city's housing may be in informal settlements (Adam 2014b). While expropriation and displacement in Amhara and Tigray certainly results in grievances as rural landholders are cast aside, the limited ethnic diversity in these cities means that urban expansion does not exacerbate ethnic divisions.

Cities in Oromiya and other regions in southern Ethiopia face the same challenges, but in contexts in which urban expansion and population growth have sensitive inter-ethnic dimensions. Dire Dawa is one such city, located on the border of Oromiya and Somali regions and with a multi-ethnic population comprising large numbers of Oromo (33 per cent in 2007), Somali (23 per cent) and Amhara (29 per cent) (CSA 2008). Dire Dawa has grown rapidly, expanding more than fivefold in the EPRDF era (Makonnen and Mulugeta 2016). Though the city – historically Ethiopia's second largest based on its strategic position on the original railway – was first placed within Oromiya by the transitional charter, it was also claimed by Somali region as its capital. The potential for conflict over the status of the city led the federal government to intervene, placing it under separate administration in 1993 and Dire Dawa was finally made a federal charter city – outside the jurisdiction of either region – in 2004 (Kefale 2014, Midega 2017).

Hawassa in Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Region (SNNPR) raises similar issues. The city was founded through a land grant in the 1950s, resulting in a population dominated by Amhara, Tigrayan and Gurage officials, as well as migrants from southern ethnic groups who took lower status positions. However, very few people from the Sidama ethnic group, the dominant group in the surrounding countryside resided in the city. Under the EPRDF, Sidama was originally to be an independent region, but was subsequently integrated into SNNPR, as one of numerous ethnic groups considered too small to be viable as administrative entities on their own (Vaughan 2003). Rapid expansion of Hawassa – as capital of SNNPR – has been tied up with Sidama claims for statehood and enhancing control of the city. A demonstration in favour of Sidama statehood was violently suppressed by security forces in 2002 at the loss of at least twenty-five lives (Mains

and Kinfu 2016, p. 654).⁴⁰ The 2005 elections brought about a change in strategy with the EPRDF cultivating Sidama support through the installation of a Sidama, Shiferaw Shigute, as SNNPR president, and promoting Sidama ownership of the city, including by changing the official spelling from Awassa (Amharic) to Hawassa (the Sidama spelling). Infrastructure development and land distribution in the expanding city were deliberately intended to 'overwhelm' the multi-ethnic city with newly integrated Sidama residents (Mains and Kinfu 2016; Kinfu et al. 2019, p. 78). The result was that by 2007 the Sidama were the largest group (49 per cent) in the area administered by the city administration for the first time, albeit that they remained the minority in areas defined as urban (18 per cent, compared with 25 per cent Amhara) (CSA 2008). Urban expansion has continued apace, not least given that the city is the site of the first and largest industrial park. Research has also highlighted informal expansion that goes beyond land use plans (Gebeyehu 2015). Given the political sensitivities associated with urban expansion and resistance to attempts to demolish informal settlements, the state has pursued a policy of regularisation, with some 17,920 illegal settlers regularised in 2017/18 (Lamson-Hall et al. 2018, p. 5, Kinfu et al. 2019).

Addis Ababa combines all of these processes and the pressures faced by the secondary cities, but at greater intensity. The capital is unrivalled in terms of economic activity, while real estate has attracted global investment that heightens competition for land. Moreover, the federal status of the city intensifies the political dynamics surrounding its ethno-political 'ownership' and expansion. As with many cities in Oromiya, Addis Ababa has long been a multi-ethnic city, with Amharic the dominant language. By 2007, the census showed significant populations from most ethnic groups, but the largest were Amhara (47 per cent) and Oromo (20 per cent) (CSA 2008). The status of Addis Ababa has long been contested and the city's expansion into peri-urban areas and displacement of the rural Oromo population has become a symbolic appeal for Oromo nationalists (Benti 2002).

When federalism was established in the 1990s, Addis Ababa was delineated as a federal chartered city, completely surrounded by Oromiya. Nonetheless, the constitution acknowledged Oromiya's 'special interest' in the city regarding governance of natural resources and 'administrative matters' (FDRE 1994). Nonetheless, Oromiya's special interest has never been specified in any detail. Addis has grown rapidly in the

⁴⁰ Sidama finally achieved statehood in 2019 based on a referendum with Hawassa forming the regional capital of the new state.

EPRDF era, albeit at a slower rate than the secondary cities. Population grew from 1.4 million in 1984 to an estimated 3.3 million in 2010 (UN-Habitat 2017, p. 11) and is expected to reach 5.9 million by 2030 (Terfa et al. 2019, p. 3). As a result, the city has displaced most rural landholders that remained within the city limits and is rapidly reaching the administrative boundary established in the 1990s that covers 54,000 hectares, as well as sprawling out beyond into towns along the main roads (Figure 7.4).

As the EPRDF's focus turned to urban areas in the 2000s, the initial response to the dire shortage and state of housing, and the lack of high-end services for international visitors to Africa's 'diplomatic capital' was to announce the re-development of 2,000 hectares of inner city slums (Weldeghebrael 2019, 2022). These slums were replaced by five star

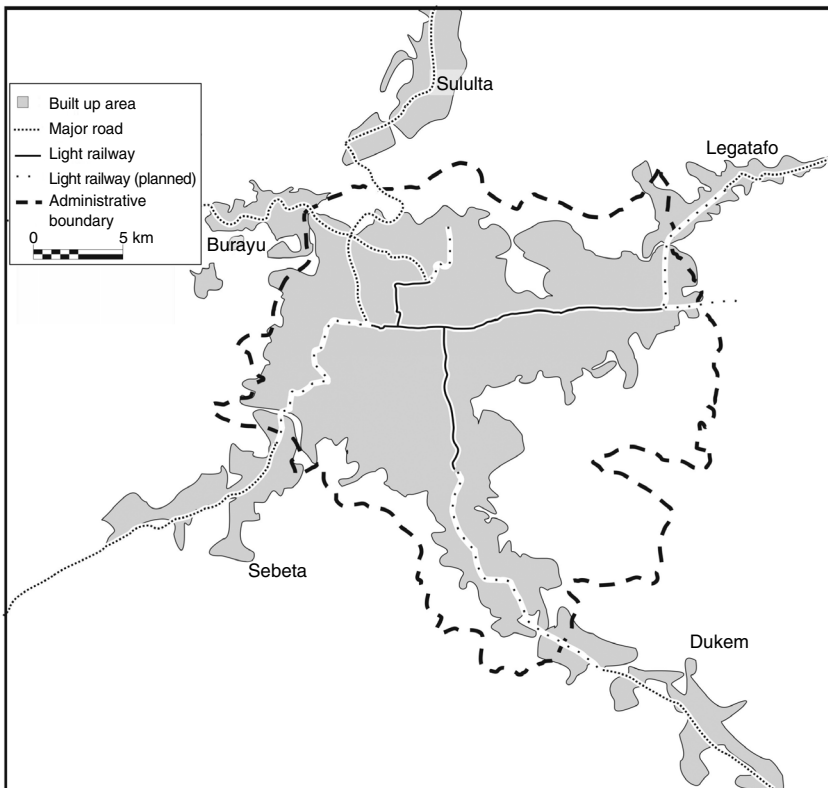


Figure 7.4 Addis Ababa and surrounding area
Source: author.

hotels, shopping centres and some condominium housing, though most of the new mass housing was constructed on the outskirts of the city, expropriating farmland in the process (Weldeghebrael 2019). The ruling party also used inner city redevelopment to clear the slums it had identified as opposition strongholds and post-election protests in 2005, with residents dispersed to multiple locations in the city's periphery (Di Nunzio 2014a, Weldeghebrael 2022). Inner city re-development offered only temporary respite, however, and the growth of Addis beyond its administrative boundaries is inevitable.

In 2009, the Oromiya government established the Special Zone Surrounding Addis Ababa in an attempt to coordinate its response to Addis' expansion (Ararssa 2015). Subsequently in 2012, the Addis Ababa administration started working on a Masterplan for the development of the city over 10 years. In 2013, the federal government asked this Masterplan office to expand its work to cover the broader metropolitan area, including the special zone in Oromiya, with only a handful of Oromo urban planners added to the original Addis Ababa team (Weldeghebrael 2014). The result was the *Addis Ababa and the Surrounding Oromia Special Zone Integrated Development Plan* covering an area extending 40–100 km from Addis over the next 25 years (2014–2038) (AASZDPPPO 2013, p. 15). Formally a joint project of the Addis Ababa City Administration and the Oromiya Regional Government, the plan highlighted the past communication failures between Addis Ababa and the Special Zone, leading to 'uncoordinated and haphazard projects implementation with unintended outcomes on both sides' (AASZDPPPO 2013, p. 8). The plan foresaw the creation of a 'permanent institution' comprising both administrations to oversee a 'common development program and projects' for Addis and the Special Zone (AASZDPPPO 2013, p. 63). Notably, this focused on the towns of Sululta, Legatafo, Gelan, Dukem, Sebeta and Burayu situated on the roads leading out of Addis. These towns would be connected by Light Rail and Bus Rapid Transit links (AASZDPPPO 2013, p. 34) and were targeted as industrial centres, including industry relocated from the centre of Addis Ababa and massive expansion of housing, enabling commuters to travel into the city (AASZDPPPO 2013, p. 28).

The masterplan was driven by EPRDF parties, and lacked meaningful participation or consultation until the draft document was presented to OPDO officials in 2014 (Weldeghebrael 2014). As discussed in detail in Chapter 10, the expansion plan immediately exposed divisions within the ruling party and sparked mass protests demanding its withdrawal. The plan itself was not released publicly, leading to a great deal of rumour and misinformation. One common popular concern was that

the plan would lead to the annexation of the area surrounding Addis into the Addis Ababa administration (e.g. [Ararssa 2015](#), [Allo 2018](#), p. 171). Though the plan is rather vague on details, it would not appear that expansion of the city's administrative boundaries was proposed. Rather, by facilitating economic and transport linkages between the surrounding towns and Addis Ababa, the plan does raise the issue of ethnicity and the likelihood that Oromo rural landholders would be displaced by the expansion of the multi-ethnic and Amharic-speaking city. Moreover, under article 47 of the constitution, a population can request a referendum on the creation of a new region or change to the boundaries of an existing one ([FDRE 1994](#)). It is certainly possible therefore that the expansion of non-Oromo population into Oromiya could, in time, lead to a referendum and change to regional boundaries. Either way, popular protests against the masterplan began in Oromiya in April 2014 and though initially suppressed, they returned with a vengeance in late 2015. Even the withdrawal of the masterplan in 2016 was not enough to appease protestors, as discussed in [Chapter 10](#).

The Addis Ababa City Administration subsequently formulated a 10-year Structure Plan, which, following the withdrawal of the Oromiya Regional Government, focused exclusively on the area within the city's administrative boundaries. Though the plan ignores the controversial issues tackled head on by its predecessor, these clearly have not gone away. Addis Ababa's population and the demand for land and housing continues to grow. The revised plan estimates that the city will require 1.2 million housing units in the next ten years to meet expected population growth, but that only half this amount can be accommodated within the city's limits ([AACPPO 2017](#), p. 111). Indeed, it is clear that significant growth will take place outside the city's current administrative boundaries, whether this is based on a state plan or otherwise.

Conclusion

The EPRDF came to prioritise urban development as a central pillar of its 'developmental state' strategy. In urban areas, as in rural ones, state land ownership, along with state control of the financial sector, was a key tool by which the state sought to centralise rent distribution and thereby direct economic activity to priority sectors. The combination of rapid population growth, state policy, rural land shortages and real estate investment drove a rapid expansion of urban administrations into rural areas across the country. While vital to the government's developmental push, this urban expansion presented a major challenge regarding the EPRDF's distributive strategy, which had previously relied on ensuring

rural land access. In addition to the rapid population growth that has eroded the right to rural land, discussed in [Chapter 5](#), state intervention to expropriate rural land users for urban expansion, infrastructure development and agricultural investment projects presents a particularly visible manifestation of the distributive changes involved in the Ethiopia's 'developmental state'

Yet, the attempt to use urban land allocation as a tool for the 'developmental state' has failed on all counts. Urban administrations have been unable to achieve their primary objective: to supply sufficient urban land to priority projects and thereby make land affordable and limit speculation. At the same time, the land delivery system exploits landholders in the urban periphery by displacing them with minimal compensation in the interests of 'development' projects from which they are excluded. Moreover, across southern Ethiopia, this urban expansion and exploitation exacerbates existing inter-ethnic tensions and promotes the politicisation of the ethnic 'ownership' of cities. The irony is that a land policy that was specifically justified as a means of centralising and controlling the allocation of rents has itself become a major source of rent seeking, speculation and corruption. Moreover, land in peri-urban areas has become de facto privatised with landholders selling land en masse before they are expropriated by the state, and brokers and speculators profiting through corrupt linkages with state officials. Urban expansion has created massive resentment amongst those displaced and those that fear impoverishment as a result of future expropriation, as brokers, investors and state officials profit at their expense.

Urban expansion and the displacement of smallholders in surrounding rural areas are, to some degree, an inevitable part of economic development and structural transformation. Just as in every other country in the world, urbanisation in Ethiopia is a traumatic process involving displacement, economic insecurity and the breaking of social ties. Where Ethiopia is notable is in the extent to which the state attempted to control this process, through expropriation and compensation of rural landholders, and the reallocation of land to alternate uses, rather than relying on market forces. In doing so, the ultimate aim of the 'developmental state' was to transform the Ethiopian economy through industrialisation and employment creation. The slow pace of industrial job creation and resulting high rates of unemployment exacerbated this distributive challenge, while the centrality of the party-state to the distribution of land, employment and other resources meant that it became a central focus for popular frustrations.

8 Distributive Crises and Access to Social Protection

Agricultural Development-Led Industrialisation was a strategy for broad-based growth that was expected to raise agricultural productivity, address food insecurity and drive the transition to an urban industrial economy. As such, this broad-based growth would obviate the need for specific programmes to address poverty and food insecurity. ADLI's limitations in practice and the increasingly acute shortage of land and employment, however, constituted a growing distributive crisis during the 2000s. This chapter focuses specifically on the government's use of social protection to respond to this emerging political threat.

Social protection has long been recognised as a means of reducing poverty, inequality and insecurity, but also as a fundamentally political tool which governments have used to maintain political order in the face of inequality and injustice (Seekings and Natrass 2005, Ravallion 2015, Saad-Filho 2015). Increasingly, social protection in developing countries has come to be associated with the global spread of cash transfers that de-link support from prior financial contributions and tend to be targeted to the poorest in society. In Africa, donor-promoted cash transfer schemes have secured greatest government support where population pressure has undermined land access and the ability of government to rely on 'agrarian welfare regimes' (Seekings 2012), and where distributive crises present a political threat to incumbents (Lavers and Hickey 2021).

The analysis that follows shows that the Ethiopian government did indeed respond to distributive crises with an expansion of social protection, drawing on significant donor support to do so. However, resource constraints and the government's ideological resistance to state hand-outs meant that this response was highly ambiguous. A consistent theme of party policy since the civil war has been its attempt to utilise social spending as a productive investment in economic development, while also limiting coverage to as small a section of the population as possible to avoid damaging work incentives. The result was that the government saw social protection as little more than a sticking plaster, temporarily supporting the most vulnerable while buying time for implementation of

the national development strategy. Consequently, social protection did little to address the growing distributive problems highlighted in previous chapters.

The chapter begins by analysing how distributive crises and EPRDF ideology have shaped social protection in urban and rural areas. The remainder of the chapter then examines the main social protection programme, the rural Productive Safety Net Programme and how it has been shaped by the government's dual objectives: to expand provision in response to distributive crises, while limiting and ultimately eradicating the programme in line with ideological commitments and resource shortages. To do so, this analysis focuses on the geographical distribution of the programme, attempts to promote graduation from support and the relationship between the PSNP and the humanitarian system.

Distributive Crises and Productivist Ideology in Social Protection

The only formal social protection programme when the EPRDF assumed office in 1991 was the public sector pension scheme established under Haile Selassie. In terms of the number of people covered, however, the humanitarian emergency system put in place during the 1984/85 famine was at least as significant and provided support for several million people each year (see [Figure 5.1](#)). This emergency system had gradually been institutionalised into annual needs assessments and appeals for support from international donors. Meanwhile, much of the aid received was distributed through the World Food Programme (WFP) and a range of non-governmental organisations.

Not only was state social protection extremely limited, but the EPRDF was also resistant to expansion and desperate to eliminate the emergency food system. As outlined in the foreign policy written by Meles Zenawi, annual appeals for food aid were a particular source of shame,

We cannot even feed ourselves and have to beg annually for food aid. Nothing has as much humiliating effect on the pride of a nation as having to beg ... We deserve no peace of mind until and unless we decisively deal with the source of our disgrace and shame. ([MoI 2002a](#), pp. 10–11)

During the civil war, the TPLF placed a strong emphasis on self-reliance, partly borne of necessity given resource shortages, but also related to core ideological commitments (see [Chapter 3](#)). As such, services such as healthcare and food aid were made conditional on contributions of labour or other resources ([Adhanom et al. 1996](#), [Barnabas and Zwi 1997](#)). This approach was taken forward by the EPRDF government in a context in

which state resources were extremely limited. The government adopted a ‘productivist’ approach, which sought to utilise social spending as a productive investment, while also mobilising additional resources in the form of labour and financial contributions.¹

ADLI was explicitly framed as a strategy to promote self-reliance at the individual and national level, with land access and rising agricultural productivity expected to improve the livelihoods of *all* peasants and thereby resolve the problem of food insecurity once and for all (FDRE 2002c, MoFED 2003).² The 1996 Developmental Social Welfare Policy is illustrative of the EPRDF’s approach to social protection, both in its developmental framing and the emphasis on community mobilisation, with people expected to contribute labour while the state was limited to supporting local initiatives (MoLSA 1996).³ While the government accepted that food aid would be required for the time being, it nonetheless sought to ensure that ‘no free distribution of aid be allowed to able-bodied affected population’ (TGE 1993, p. 3). The vast majority of those receiving emergency assistance were required to participate in employment generation schemes, while ‘gratuitous’ relief, free of work requirements, was reserved for a minority that was unable to work.⁴ For Addisu Legesse, subsequently deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Agriculture, a major concern was that people were becoming dependent on support and therefore had to be pushed into productive activity,

We met some people on our visits who were born eating drought food, they grow up eating drought food, they grow old eating drought food. They have been receiving aid for 30 years. But these people have land, they are very dependent and it takes a long time to change this. One of the main challenges is the dependency syndrome ... We always ask people to do something for the money. Otherwise it is just a salary, money to eat.⁵

While several donors became frustrated with the emergency system during the 1990s, reform efforts gained little traction with the government, which was intent on eliminating the system entirely through ADLI’s

¹ Though not discussed here, this productivist ideology was a key justification for the creation of a private sector pension scheme, and formal and informal sector health insurance schemes (Lavers 2019b, 2021).

² The desire to end the emergency system led to the government’s premature claim of self-sufficiency in food production in 1997, only to face major production shocks and food shortages in the following years (Africa Confidential 1998).

³ According to one well-placed respondent, the term *developmental* was inserted at Meles’ insistence (interview with ED10, senior donor official, by Skype, 2 July 2015).

⁴ State capacity to organise public works remained limited in the 1990s and much food aid remained unconditional.

⁵ Interview with Addisu Legesse, EG2, Addis Ababa, 7 October 2015.

successful realisation. Indeed, the 2002 national development strategy made it quite clear that the government's intention was to address poverty and food insecurity through broad-based economic development, not a targeted programme,

pro-poor growth outcome for Ethiopia would not be achieved through a collection of ad hoc and targeted programs of the 'safety net' variety. A pro-poor outcome results from a pro-poor strategy. (MoFED 2002, p. 28)

As such, the government's focus remained supporting peasant production and a resettlement programme to relieve pressure on land in densely populated highlands by relocating people to the more sparsely populated lowlands (FDRE 2002c). This focus on broad-based growth and the distribution of opportunity through access to land and employment was only altered in moments of distributive crisis that presented a clear political threat. This was the case with the 2002/03 food crisis, the 2005 electoral crisis and subsequent periods of high inflation. In each case, the government adapted its strategy, adopting limited forms of social protection that built on the government's longstanding ideological commitments and supplemented the main focus on broad-based development.

The first example is the 2002/03 food crisis in which some 14 million people required emergency assistance (see Figure 5.1). This crisis led the government to re-assess its agricultural development strategy, but also forced it to confront the limitations of the emergency system. The ultimate result was the adoption of the Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP) in 2005. The PSNP provides regular food and cash transfers for approximately 8 million people, mostly through public works, but with unconditional 'direct support' for those that are unable to work. The PSNP distinguishes between 'chronic' and 'transitory' food insecurity, both of which had previously been covered by the emergency system. The PSNP was intended to meet the needs of the chronically food insecure – those who, regardless of the agricultural season, are unable to meet their household food requirements – by providing regular and predictable medium-term support. Meanwhile, a scaled back emergency system would provide annual support to the transitory food insecure – those who are able to make ends meet in a normal year, but are affected by annual production shocks. This distinction – plausible in theory, but blurred in practice – has been the basis of both geographical and household targeting in the PSNP. The PSNP covers only chronically food insecure *wereda*, namely those which have received emergency assistance for the previous three years. Meanwhile, the PSNP targets chronically food insecure households, those having faced food shortages of at least three months every year for three years. Furthermore, there is

a preference for vulnerable groups, such as female-headed households, those with chronic illness, the elderly caring for orphans, and poor pregnant and lactating women (MoA 2014, pp. 3–7). Young landless and unemployed adults are therefore largely excluded.

While Ethiopia's foreign donors funded much of the PSNP and were intimately involved in the design process, it would be a mistake to view the PSNP as a donor-driven programme. Donors promoted certain key design features – such as cash transfers and the move away from annual appeals towards medium-term support. However, the government also exerted its influence, ensuring that the PSNP addressed the EPRDF's distributive and political challenges and in such a way as to complement existing ideological commitments. The government's efforts to shape the programme were achieved by selectively aligning with donor interests and playing donors off against each other where there was resistance.⁶

The PSNP was seen within government as a temporary response to the distributive crisis in rural areas, with the PSNP used to supplement existing distribution through land and agricultural inputs, buying time for the government to implement its development strategy. In the words of one of the main government members of the design team, the PSNP's purpose was 'to ameliorate and to keep things calm as this policy direction [agricultural productivity] is being implemented'.⁷ Addisu Legesse, who as Minister of Agriculture oversaw programme design, expected the programme to last no more than five years.⁸ Moreover, by supplementing land distribution in rural areas, the PSNP would limit urban migration and the growing challenge of urban unemployment. Indeed, for one regional government official, 'the highest role of the PSNP is to protect migration from rural to urban areas'.⁹ The government therefore sought both to respond to the distributive crisis and maintain political order, but also to limit support only to those who are most in need and who, in time, could be pressed to achieve self-sufficiency. In doing so, this objective certainly resonated with the donor focus on the reduction of extreme poverty as part of the Millennium Development Goals, albeit for somewhat distinct reasons. The result was the design of a programme that was targeted geographically and at household level.

⁶ Lavers (2019a) provides a detailed analysis of the decision-making process.

⁷ Interview with EG4, a senior official in the Food Security Directorate, Ministry of Agriculture, Addis Ababa, 7 October 2015.

⁸ Interview with Addisu Legesse, EG2, former deputy Prime Minister, Addis Ababa, 7 October 2015.

⁹ Interview TRG1, senior food security official, Tigray regional government, Mekele, 25 April 2018.

Meanwhile, the government's longstanding commitment to self-reliance and its desire to phase out the programme within five years also shaped the programme's 'productive' focus.¹⁰ First, and in line with the government's past approach to food aid, most participants were required to engage in public works in exchange for support. In this, the government found allies in key donors such as the World Bank, WFP and USAID, which was sufficient to overcome concerns from other donors. As Meles argued at the time, the PSNP's work requirements were seen as a vital means of addressing 'dependency',

The safety-net programme is a means of providing assistance—food aid—on the basis of a very different philosophy, which is that those who can work for it should work for it so that over time they do not have to depend on food aid and aid dependency has been a problem in Ethiopia after 20 years of food aid. (Meles, cited in BBC [News 2005](#))

Moreover, the programme aimed to build community infrastructure, including terracing, irrigation systems and roads that would contribute to economic development, with the government designing 'the project to mobilise the labour of the peasant to achieve these goals'.¹¹ Investment in community infrastructure was to be complemented by credit provision, enabling participants to invest in improved agricultural production and off-farm activities with a view to 'graduating' from the PSNP within five years. Finally, where households lacked the resources – particularly land – required to graduate, the resettlement programme would relocate households to lowland areas where the government considered land to be plentiful. In doing so, the PSNP and Food Security Programme extended the government's strategy of coercive distribution, with access to land, credit and now social transfers routed through the party-state. Indeed, officials were clear that one of the PSNP's objectives was to bring the uncoordinated activities of NGOs providing emergency assistance into one consolidated programme, with distribution placed under government control.¹²

Very similar dynamics drove social protection in urban areas, with the government expanding provision through party-state structures in response to distributive crises, while seeking to limit spending and coverage, and utilise spending for productive purposes. As discussed in [Chapter 6](#), one of the main responses to the 2005 election upheaval – attributed by the

¹⁰ Arguably, the *Developmental Safety Net Programme* would be a more accurate translation of the Amharic term *limat*.

¹¹ Interview with Addisu Legesse, EG2, former deputy Prime Minister, Addis Ababa, 7 October 2015.

¹² Interview EG4, a senior official in the Food Security Directorate, Ministry of Agriculture, Addis Ababa, 7 October 2015.

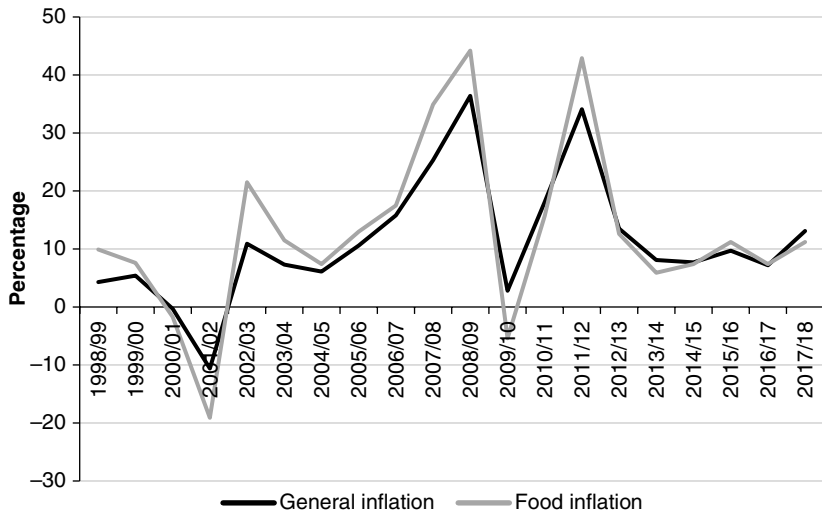


Figure 8.1 Inflation rates (CPI growth rate)

Source: author, based on National Bank of Ethiopia annual reports, various years.

ruling party to urban unemployment – was the creation of Micro and Small Enterprise programmes to incorporate young adults through provision of credit and training. Urban social protection was also expanded when high inflation and particularly food inflation threatened to erode urban living standards in 2008 (Figure 8.1). Inflation was driven by the government’s expansion of the money supply in order to provide credit for state investment, and rising global commodity prices for food, oil and fertiliser (Admassie 2014). In response, the state Ethiopian Grain Trade Enterprise began importing grain, which was distributed at subsidised prices through new Urban Consumer Cooperatives (UCC) based on ration cards (discussed in Chapter 9). Subsidies were initially introduced in Addis Ababa – the main political threat in 2005 – but subsequently extended to other regional cities after another inflation peak in 2011. Over time, subsidies for wheat, energy and fuel came to account for 20 per cent of government social protection spending (World Bank 2015b, p. 6).

The political threat posed by inflation and unemployment were also key factors leading to the creation of an Urban Productive Safety Net Programme (UPSNP) in 2016. The idea of an urban programme along the lines of the rural PSNP had been discussed between the government and the World Bank since 2008, when the government originally introduced food subsidies. However, it was not until 2014 that

both government and the World Bank committed funding.¹³ For the World Bank and the Ministry of Urban Development, if not necessarily the government as a whole, a major motivation for the UPSNP was to replace the food subsidy programme, which was seen as a major drain on resources, with targeted support.¹⁴

The government's main motivation for the UPSNP was to respond to the growing crisis of rural landlessness, urban migration and unemployment. As one former government official, now working for a donor agency, emphasised,

there is a huge explosion of youngsters with no options in rural areas. There is no more land to distribute, they either depend on the meagre resources of their family or they migrate—hundreds of thousands of youngsters. That is why the UPSNP was borne. Otherwise it might lead to political instability which the government is keeping an eye on.¹⁵

The UPSNP is closely based on its rural equivalent, providing targeted support to the urban destitute, primarily through public works though with unconditional support for those unable to work. Like the rural PSNP, the programme is strongly focused on graduation, targeting 80 per cent graduation within three years.¹⁶ While young, able-bodied adults are expected to engage in the MSE programme, the UPSNP acknowledges that many of the poorest people are not able to take on credit to set up their own business. Instead, the UPSNP provides three years training and a livelihood grant to enable establishment of their own business with a view to engaging with the MSE programme subsequently.¹⁷ As with all other support, the UPSNP is routed through party-state structures.

The UPSNP began rolling out in 2016 and made the first payments to some 190,000 participants in 2017. By 2018, the programme covered nearly 450,000 people, of which 70 per cent were in Addis and the remainder in eleven cities spread across the ethnic regions ([World Bank 2018a](#)). Though the UPSNP was initially modest in comparison with the rapidly growing urban population, the Ministry of Urban Development developed plans for a major expansion to be funded by the removal

¹³ Interviews ED17, donor official, Addis Ababa, 5 October 2015; and ED20, senior donor official, by Skype, 24 November 2015.

¹⁴ Interviews EG9, senior official, Ministry of Urban Development and Housing, Addis Ababa, 29 January 2016; and ED20, senior donor official, by Skype, 24 November 2015.

¹⁵ Interview ED26, former government official, current donor official, Addis Ababa, 26 January 2016.

¹⁶ Interview EG9, senior official, Ministry of Urban Development and Housing, Addis Ababa, 29 January 2016.

¹⁷ Interviews EG9, senior official, Ministry of Urban Development and Housing, Addis Ababa, 29 January 2016; and ED17, donor official, Addis Ababa, 5 October 2015.

of subsidies. The Ministry aimed to expand the UPSNP to 4.7 million people, covering all of those below the urban poverty line in nearly a thousand towns and cities with a population greater than 2,000.¹⁸ The proposal was explicitly framed as a means of addressing urban poverty, but also limiting migration to major cities,

The aim is to minimise migration to the big cities, and so the plan is to expand to more small cities with social problems. It [migration] would be a disaster and would bring social and political unrest.¹⁹

The result then is that the government had a rather ambiguous approach to social protection. On the one hand, growing distributive crises in rural and urban areas resulting from the shortage of access to land and employment were seen as major political threats that warranted a distributive response, leading to the expansion of social protection. As shown in [Chapter 9](#), these distributive resources were channelled through party-state structures with a view to strengthening the party's political control. On the other hand, however, resource constraints and deep-rooted ideological aversion to handouts led the government to limit support and to use spending to promote productive activity and self-sufficiency. These somewhat contradictory priorities are a key dynamic shaping the distribution of social protection that is the focus of the rest of the chapter. Given that the rural PSNP is by far the largest and long-running programme, this analysis focuses on the evolution and implementation of that programme.

Geographical Targeting of the PSNP

The PSNP was launched in 2005 and initially covered some 4.5 million people in chronically food insecure wereda in the four main highland regions – Amhara, Oromiya, SNNPR and Tigray. The programme initially excluded Afar and Somali regions, due to limited state capacity and the prevalence of pastoralist livelihoods, which were thought to be a problematic fit for a programme designed for highland peasants. Nonetheless, donor enthusiasm about early implementation and major problems with food insecurity in these regions led to phased expansion from 2006/07.²⁰ Other than this expansion into Afar and Somali, the PSNP wereda have been remarkably consistent since 2005, focusing on

¹⁸ Interview EG9, senior official, Ministry of Urban Development and Housing, Addis Ababa, 29 January 2016.

¹⁹ Interview EG9, senior official, Ministry of Urban Development and Housing, Addis Ababa, 29 January 2016.

²⁰ Interviews ED19, senior donor official, Addis Ababa, 22 November 2009; and ED26, former government official, current donor official, Addis Ababa, 26 January 2016.

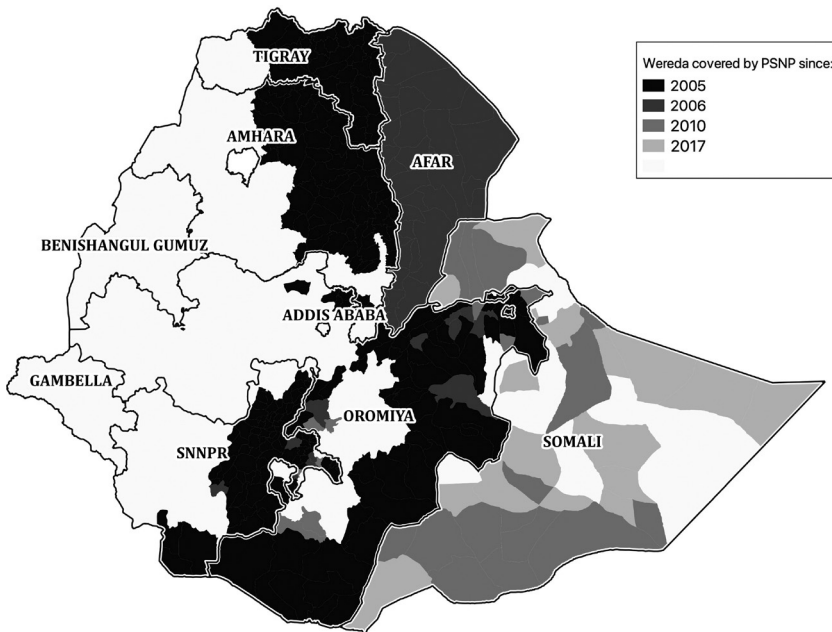


Figure 8.2 Geographical coverage of the PSNP

Source: author.

the eastern half of the country, despite growing evidence of widespread poverty and food insecurity in other parts of the country (Figure 8.2). Though the number of wereda covered has increased over time, this is primarily due to the division of existing wereda.

This geographical distribution is the legacy of past food crises, the emergency system that evolved to address them and the government's ultimate aim of eliminating the programme altogether. The PSNP not only draws heavily on the ideas that shaped the food aid distribution system during the 1980s and 1990s, but also the administrative machinery used to deliver emergency support. During the 1990s, several studies asked whether food aid was being directed to the right areas of the country and the right people within them. The answer, particularly regarding geographical targeting, was that there was little to no relationship between wereda food insecurity and food aid distribution (Clay et al. 1999). Certain areas – Tigray and North Wello in Amhara – received far more food aid than justified by present needs or household income, while most other areas received less (Clay et al. 1999, Jayne et al. 2000). This imbalance was largely attributed to 'inertia' in the system. Tigray

and North Wello were the areas most affected by the 1984/85 famine and they received a disproportionate share of food aid ever since. The authors hypothesise that,

... years of food aid reflect the progressive build-up of 'institutional capacity' in the food aid delivery system over time. By this we mean the investments made by government agencies and NGOs in such things as personnel, contacts and knowledge of the area, offices, trucks, and institutional reputation. All of these investments create a compelling reason to continue the flow of food aid to the same areas it has always gone ... current inflexibilities in the system are a major cause of food aid mistargeting in Ethiopia. (Clay et al. 1999, pp. 405–406)

The prioritisation of Tigray inevitably also raises the question as to whether the TPLF's dominance in the government throughout the 1990s shaped the distribution of food aid. Clay et al. (1999, p. 406), for example, find that 'only about half of Tigray's success in attracting food aid can be accounted for by such built up capacity and infrastructure', leading them to speculate that 'regional biases may also be the result of political influences and other pressures on the food aid delivery system'. While certainly plausible, there are good reasons for caution, however. As Jayne et al. (2000) find, the strongest determinant of food aid distribution in the mid-1990s was actually the Relief and Rehabilitation Commission's needs assessment during the 1984/85 famine. Not only does this highlight the importance of 'inertia' in the system, but it also raises significant doubts about any TPLF influence. In the mid-1980s, the Derg was in power and was fighting the TPLF – then a regional insurgency in Tigray. Far from favouring Tigray, the Derg used food as a weapon of war – destroying crops and denying food aid to the Tigrayan peasantry to undermine TPLF support (De Waal 1997). On coming to power, the EPRDF maintained an existing imbalance in food aid distribution, rather than diverting additional flows to Tigray. Furthermore, as discussed in the [previous section](#), a central focus for the party from its days as a rural insurrection was to limit dependence on external support in a push to achieve food security and development. The EPRDF's ideological influence in this regard has always been stronger in Tigray than anywhere else. The diversion of large amounts of food aid to Tigray – presumably the implication being that it was used to favour ethnic Tigrayans and build support for the TPLF – is completely at odds with this ideological commitment to self-reliance.

Regardless of the reasons for the apparent imbalance in food aid distribution in the late 1990s, the key point is that the PSNP relied 'entirely on past food aid assessments to gauge the extent and distribution of chronic food insecurity' (Sharp 2004, p. 6). Any wereda that had received food aid for the previous three years in 2004 was classified as chronically food insecure and included in the PSNP, while the rest were limited to the

scaled back emergency system.²¹ Effectively this decision hard-wired the existing geographical distribution of food aid – and any inequalities that this entailed – into the PSNP, as outlined by a consultant involved in the design process,

The safety net design effectively freezes both the overall level and the regional distribution of transfers, based on previous food need assessments. Compared to the annual emergency system, the safety net will have much less flexibility to adjust geographical targeting from year to year according to changing needs. (Sharp 2004, p. 5)

Decision making regarding wereda classification and the allocations of PSNP quotas to wereda were highly centralised within the federal government, with little to no involvement of either donors or regional governments. Indeed, this was an explicit decision intended to forestall any debate and bargaining with regional administrations. According to the federal head of food security,

we wouldn't open up such a discussion [with regions]. If you open that discussion they may increase their demands for their own interest. We have to identify the number based on resources and the [emergency] data for past years.²²

The fixed classification of chronically food insecure wereda did latterly lead to growing concerns among donors that many of the poorest households may live outside the PSNP wereda identified in 2005.²³ The result was a series of donor-commissioned studies from 2013 onwards that examined the needs outside PSNP wereda. One study, focusing on vulnerability to absolute poverty, rather than chronic food insecurity specifically, underscored the extent to which the PSNP's geographical distribution excluded large numbers in need,

although 14.8 million individuals who are vulnerable to absolute poverty live in PSNP woredas, 12.2 million individuals that are vulnerable to poverty live outside of woredas where PSNP programs are run. This means that even if the PSNP was perfectly targeted to all of the vulnerable households in the woredas in which it is run, 45 percent of the vulnerable households in Ethiopia would be without a safety net. (Vargas Hill and Porter 2013, p. 22)

The government contested these findings, leading to long discussions with donors about the PSNP's geographical distribution. The

²¹ Interview EG3, senior official, Food Security Directorate, Ministry of Agriculture, Addis Ababa, 8 June 2018.

²² Interview EG3, senior official, Food Security Directorate, Ministry of Agriculture, Addis Ababa, 7 June 2019.

²³ Interview ED18, senior donor official, by Skype, 22 September 2015.

government's central objective, as discussed previously, was to eliminate food insecurity and therefore the PSNP. Indeed, progress towards this target was increasingly seen as a bellwether for the EPRDF's developmental project. Consequently, any suggestion that the PSNP was significantly under-sized and that a major expansion was warranted was met with a frosty reception. Instead, the government stuck with its longstanding view that food insecurity was primarily related to rainfall patterns, justifying the focus on the eastern half of the country and avoiding more problematic questions about the PSNP's coverage. In the words of a senior official in the Ministry of Agriculture's Food Security Directorate, the 'principle [of the PSNP] is vulnerability to drought. We do not cover moisture sufficient areas'.²⁴ The result is that many of the poorest people were excluded on rather arbitrary historical grounds, with many instead receiving ad hoc emergency assistance.

The Push for Graduation as a Sign of Progress

The government's focus on eliminating the PSNP had important implications not just for geographic distribution between wereda, but also within them. From its inception, the PSNP was expected to promote graduation of participants out of the programme and into self-sufficiency. Progress with graduation, however, was limited in the early phases. The government did start graduating households from 2007/08, but just 500,000 individuals out of a programme reaching more than 7.5 million had graduated by 2010. The PSNP proved an important means of preventing drought from translating into famine in 2008–2010 and the reality was that neither government nor donors had much option other than to extend the programme for another five years. However, the government's willingness to extend the programme did not amount to a change in its ideological commitment to self-reliance, the productive contribution of the programme or graduation from state support. If anything, developmental successes over the previous five years – with double-digit economic growth and rising agricultural productivity – only reinforced the government's commitment.

The new national development strategy, the 2010 GTP1 reflected this step change in ambition, setting a range of enormously challenging

²⁴ Interview EG3, senior official, Food Security Directorate, Ministry of Agriculture, Addis Ababa, 7 June 2019. The new phase of the programme in 2015 did propose adapting the criterion for inclusion, with any wereda that had received food aid in three of the last five years classified as chronically food insecure, with a target of increasing the number of wereda covered from 318 to 418 (MoA 2014). Resource constraints, however, meant that there was no significant move to expand the wereda covered by the programme.

targets across sectors. With respect to agriculture and food security, Prime Minister Meles, on presenting the strategy to an EPRDF meeting proclaimed that,

We have devised a plan which will enable us to produce surplus and be able to feed ourselves by 2015 without the need for food aid. (Lefort 2015, p. 372)

In doing so, the government reiterated its commitment to reducing the size of the PSNP,

the current scale of food security programming was never intended to be sustained in the long-run. On the contrary, the objective is to re-orient and reduce the size of initiatives such as the PSNP as quickly as circumstances allow. (MoARD 2010a, p. 30)

Reduced PSNP spending was, in turn, hoped to free up significant resources that could be redirected from 'areas of lower agricultural potential' covered by the PSNP towards 'high-potential rainfed areas and irrigation development, in order to accelerate productivity growth, agricultural led industrialisation and long-term food security' (MoARD 2010a, p. 13).²⁵ The result was that the government used annual PSNP graduation rates as one of the performance indicators for its agricultural development strategy (MoARD 2010a, p. 21), with the GTP1 aiming to reduce PSNP coverage from 8 million to just 1.3 million by 2015 (MoFED 2010). In effect this meant the graduation of all able-bodied participants, leaving just the elderly and those with disabilities receiving direct support.

Though donors were always sceptical about the feasibility of this target, they also became interested in graduation at this time, considering 50 per cent to be more realistic.²⁶ The donors had always refused to get involved in the government's resettlement programme that proved to be as problematic as many had initially feared (Hammond 2008). Moreover, in the early phases they declined to engage with the government's attempts to improve agricultural livelihoods through revolving credit known as the 'Other Food Security Programmes', instead focusing support on the PSNP itself. Growing donor interest in graduation, however, resulted in financial support for a re-design of these supplementary programmes, which were separated into the Household Asset Building Programme (HABP) and Complementary Community Investments (CCI). Donors provided technical assistance to HABP, which aimed to establish revolving credit funds to enable PSNP participants to borrow money and invest in increased

²⁵ This proposal was probably unrealistic given that the PSNP was largely donor-funded and it is unlikely that donors would have transferred funding from the PSNP to agriculture.

²⁶ Interview ED19, senior donor official, Addis Ababa, 14 May 2010.

production. In contrast, donors remained reticent about the CCI, which provided capital investment in infrastructure, particular irrigation schemes and water infrastructure.²⁷ The design process also resulted in a concerted attempt to define graduation based on a distinction between graduation from the PSNP itself based on attainment of ‘food sufficiency’ – where a household is able to ‘meet its food needs for all 12 months and is able to withstand modest shocks’ – and the higher bar of graduation into food security and out of the broader Food Security Programme, including HABP (MoARD 2010b, p. 21). To operationalise these somewhat imprecise categories, graduation was to be assessed based on the asset ownership of PSNP participants, comparing levels of landholdings, livestock and education with regionally defined graduation thresholds.

The government maintained its focus on graduation after Meles Zenawi passed away in August 2012 and was replaced by Hailemariam Dessalegn. Moreover, the new Prime Minister announced in 2014 – at the annual celebration of the EPRDF’s removal of the Derg from office – that Ethiopia had achieved national self-sufficiency, a longstanding objective that Meles had repeatedly promised,

In a country that produced 50 million quintals of major cereal crops in 1991, Ethiopia’s agriculture has today managed to produce 250 million quintals, because of productivity growths, which within two decades have enabled us to become food self-sufficient at the national level. (Gebremedhin 2014)

It is far from clear quite what this announcement was based on. While 2014 was a comparatively good year for agricultural production, Ethiopia nonetheless appealed for emergency food aid to feed some 2.7 million people beyond those covered by the PSNP. Moreover, Hailemariam acknowledged that household self-sufficiency remained a work in progress. What it does signify though was an attempt by a new Prime Minister, with limited authority, seeking to maintain a narrative of progress with respect to food insecurity and to deliver on the promises and plans laid out by his predecessor. This likely added to the pressure for a similar demonstration of progress from the PSNP itself.

The federal graduation target in the GTP was cascaded down through the tiers of state administration at the regional, wereda and kebele levels, with officials’ performance in relation to these and other targets assessed through *gim gema*. The result was a major wave of graduation, with some 10 per cent of PSNP participants graduating each year in 2010–2014 (Figure 8.3), resulting in a sharp reduction in programme coverage (Figure 8.4). While the target of reducing the PSNP to 1.3 million by 2015

²⁷ Interview ED16, senior donor official, Addis Ababa, 6 October 2015.

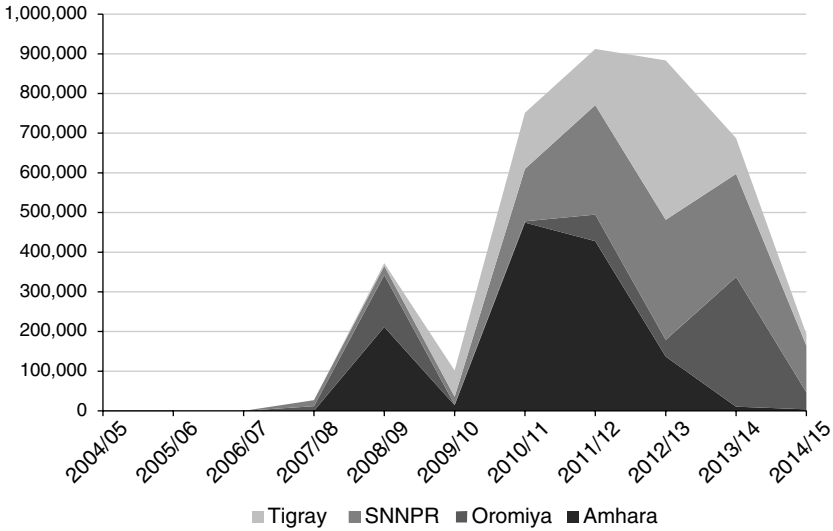


Figure 8.3 Graduation from the PSNP by region
 Source: author, based on DFID staff calculations. For legibility the least populous regions (Dire Dawa and Harari) are omitted.

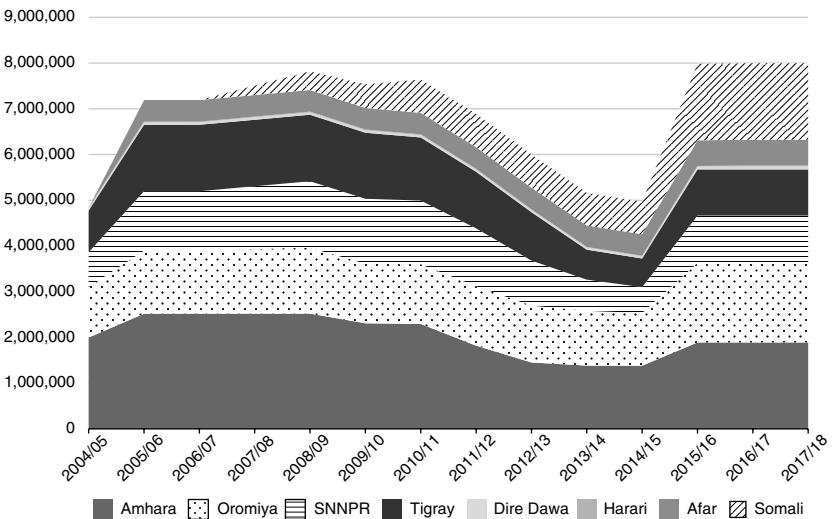


Figure 8.4 PSNP caseload by region
 Source: author, based on DFID staff calculations.

was not met, somewhere in the region of 3.5 million people were removed from the programme, reducing enrolment to less than 5 million, with many state officials of the genuine belief that the PSNP would come to an end.²⁸

The federal government's pressure for graduation had quite different impacts between regions. A major drought and food crisis in 2009/10 across the Horn of Africa meant that there was little attempt at graduation that year. However, graduation resumed in earnest from 2010/11, with large numbers graduating in Amhara, SNNPR and Tigray. Numerous respondents across the tiers of state administration were clear that this was a top-down process driven by performance targets, rather than a meaningful reflection of improvement in household food security.²⁹ As one local government official in Tigray put it,

Whether participants reach the minimum requirements for graduation or not, it is a must to graduate from the programme in its fifth year, since that is the end of the programme.³⁰

There was initially comparatively little progress in Oromiya before graduation increased substantially in 2013/14. During this period, the Oromiya regional government was under pressure from the federal government to make progress, with an Oromiya government official admitting that, 'We frequently get questions from the federal level – "where is your progress on graduation?"'³¹ Indeed, this resulted in some competition between regions, with the Oromiya government embarrassed to fall behind the rest,

Amhara and Tigray were frequently graduating people in PSNP3. We were ashamed because we were not graduating people.³²

The regional government had no input into the distribution of PSNP places within their region, rather officials in the federal government 'decide and send us numbers, wereda by wereda'.³³ Nonetheless, the regional administrations were held responsible for graduation targets and the performance of lower-level officials. The result is that lower-level officials were forced to make arbitrary selections to remove people from the programme. As one wereda agricultural officer described,

²⁸ Figures from donor and government sources do not add up exactly. The head of the food security directorate insisted that the PSNP caseload was reduced to 4.4 million by 2015 (Interview EG3, Addis Ababa, 5 October 2015). Yet, this would have required graduation of some 700,000 individuals in 2014/15, rather than the reported figure of 200,000.

²⁹ Interview TRG1, senior food security official, Tigray regional government, Mekele, 25 April 2018.

³⁰ Interview TAW3, administrator, Ahferom wereda, Ahferom, 22 March 2018.

³¹ Interview ORG1, senior food security official, Addis Ababa, 11 June 2018.

³² Interview ORG1, senior food security official, Addis Ababa, 11 June 2018.

³³ Interview ORG1, senior food security official, Addis Ababa, 11 June 2018.

We have graduated 60 per cent of the beneficiaries by 2006 [Ethiopian Calendar, 2014] because the government and higher officials of the programme forced us. The plan was set by them and we were supposed to implement it ... [so] we just selected 60 per cent of our beneficiaries without considering their status ... most of the graduates were not self-sufficient.³⁴

Indeed, these targets were passed on to kebele officials who were expected to implement them,

Every year we are asked to make targets of graduation. Even though we know that people are less likely to improve and graduate out of the support we give the wereda agriculture bureau a certain number because it is must to make targets.³⁵

The fact that much of this graduation was a mere administrative fiction to justify a political narrative was well known. Indeed, it was readily admitted by one senior official in the Ministry of Agriculture's Food Security Directorate, who underscored the tension between the imperative of developmental progress and the reality of vast unmet needs,

Most of the time the donors and beneficiaries complain about untimely graduation, that they are in a poverty trap but they are forced to graduate. But the daily calorific intake cannot be solely provided by the PSNP. We only give half of the requirement—15kg [of cereals or the monetary equivalent] per person. If we included anyone without the full calorific intake it would be 30 million people on the programme. We need to be realistic. So people may graduate before fulfilling this requirement and so the donor complaint is right, but we have to pursue a developmental agenda.³⁶

Here the tension between the programme's protective rationale and its developmental pretensions is laid bare. The necessity of demonstrating progress with graduation and a somewhat arbitrary target in the national development strategy overrode any concern with the protective role of the programme.

In contrast to the pressure for graduation in the highlands, there was no attempt to promote graduation in Afar or Somali. Indeed, the key mechanisms underpinning the PSNP's graduation model have been absent in these regions due to concerns about the implementation capacity of the regional states and the programme's suitability to pastoralist contexts. Initially the PSNP only provided direct support

³⁴ Interview OMW4, agriculture bureau, Merti wereda, Merti, May 2018. Similar reports were provided by OMW3, deputy administrator, Merti wereda, Merti, May 2018.

³⁵ Interview OMK1, Development Agent, Shamo Gado kebele, 26 June 2018. The decision-making process by which individuals were selected for removal is discussed in [Lavers \(2022\)](#).

³⁶ Interview with EG4, a senior official in the Food Security Directorate, Ministry of Agriculture, Addis Ababa, 7 October 2015.

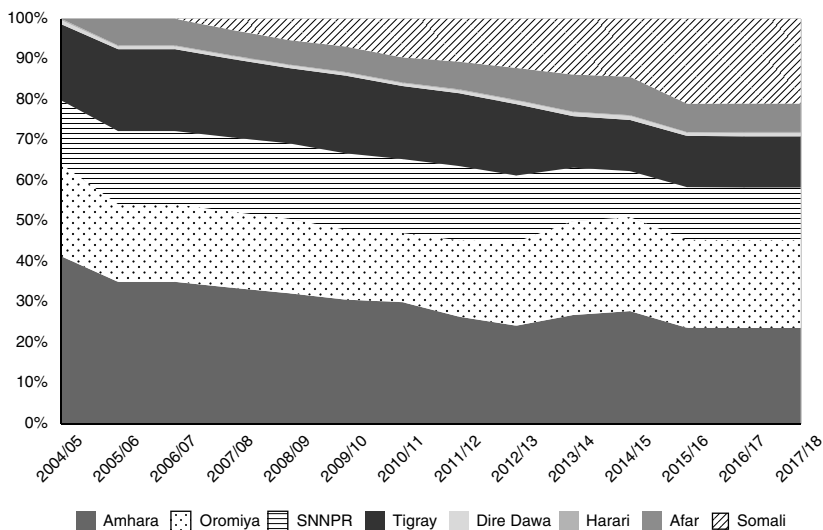


Figure 8.5 PSNP distribution by region
Source: author, based on DFID staff calculations.

in Afar and Somali, with no public works requirement or community infrastructure development until 2010. Moreover, there are no livelihood programmes in either Afar or Somali, unlike the other regions. Nonetheless, the government has not accepted the PSNP as a permanent mechanism of support in these regions either. Instead, the long-standing belief within the state, under the EPRDF and past regimes, is that pastoralism is inherently backward and unsustainable. From this perspective, the only feasible option for future development is that those engaged in mobile livelihoods begin practicing settled agriculture, bringing them into line with highland areas (MoFA 2008). Rather than adapting the PSNP to the needs of pastoralist livelihoods, the approach has been to await the implementation of villagisation that places pastoralists in planned settlements.

The result of this divergent pattern of graduation has been to change the PSNP's regional distribution. In 2005, Amhara was home to by far the largest number of PSNP participants with some 2.5 million, more than 40 per cent of the programme, while Oromiya, SNNPR and Tigray each received support for 1.3–1.4 million or 15–20 per cent (Figure 8.5). Over time, the main change has been the PSNP's expansion in Afar and Somali. This shift has entailed a reduction for the four highland regions as a proportion of the total, but also in absolute terms thanks to large-scale graduation in 2010–2015. A distinct pattern also

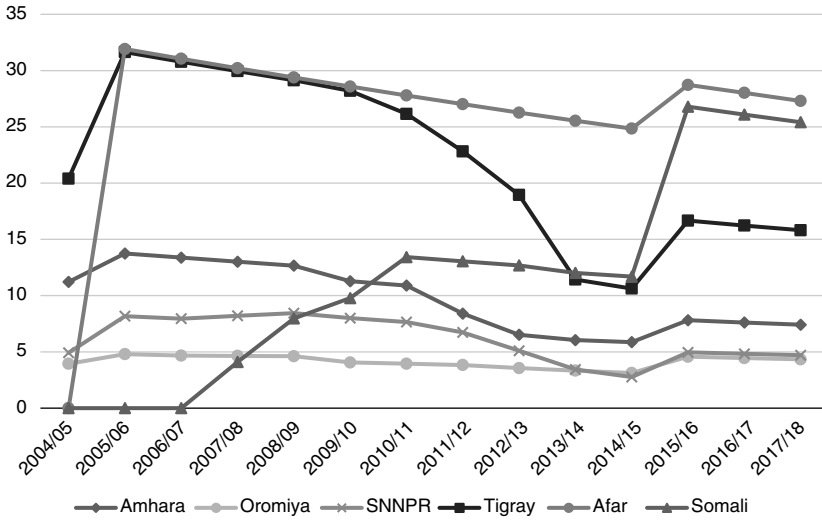


Figure 8.6 PSNP coverage as a percentage of the regional population
 Source: author, based on DFID staff calculations and World Development Indicators. For legibility the least populous regions (Dire Dawa and Harari) are omitted.

emerges when PSNP coverage is viewed as a proportion of the regional population (Figure 8.6). Initially, Tigray received the highest level of support as a proportion of its population, with more than 30 per cent covered. This changed markedly from 2010 with a sharp decline due to large-scale graduation. Amhara, Oromiya and SNNPR exhibit similar, though less pronounced declines. In contrast the proportion covered in Afar and Somali has massively increased.

The result is that any bias towards Tigray and parts of Amhara has been significantly eroded through graduation.³⁷ A recent World Bank report that assessed the regional distribution of the PSNP concluded that SNNPR – whose quota was significantly reduced through graduation – is the most under-represented region, accounting for 40 per cent of those living in chronic poverty but just 13 per cent of the PSNP case load (World Bank 2020, p. 25). Amhara is also slightly under-represented, while all other regions receive a greater share of the PSNP than poverty rates warrant.

³⁷ Again, these graduation targets were set and implemented when the TPLF remained dominant in the EPRDF, raising doubts as to the TPLF’s role in diverting PSNP resources.

Developmental Progress and the Persistence of Food Insecurity

The PSNP was intended to end the ‘humiliation’ of annual emergency appeals by establishing a medium-term mechanism for supporting food insecure households while raising agricultural productivity to enable mass graduation. Indeed, political leaders repeatedly claimed that Ethiopia was on the brink of reaching national self-sufficiency and even, under Hailemariam, that it had achieved it. The reality is that Ethiopia has yet to come close to achieving these goals.

Despite reduced PSNP coverage by 2015, the government was forced to accept that food insecurity had not disappeared and that the programme could not end. There was little alternative but for the government and donors to agree a new five-year phase. Indeed, no sooner had the government staged the graduation of several million PSNP recipients in the lead-up to 2015 than Ethiopia faced another major food crisis in 2015–2016 as a result of an extreme El Niño that disrupted rainfall. The result is a growing acceptance in government that the food insecurity problem is not going away anytime soon and that the elimination of the PSNP is simply infeasible for the foreseeable future. The new phase of the programme from 2015 expanded to cover roughly 8 million people, with a contingency fund to cover an additional 2 million people based on annual needs. Moreover, the government, which had previously limited its financial contribution to paying the salaries for the officials that administer the programme, relented to donor pressure and agreed to take on a progressively larger responsibility for financing the PSNP in the following years. Donor officials involved in the negotiation of the new phase argued that the government had itself recognised the failings of its graduation efforts and was increasingly open to incorporating social protection into its ‘developmental state’ model,

... there was an increasing recognition that this [graduation and the elimination of the PSNP] was pie in the sky. There is now a recognition in parts of the government that the developmental state requires social protection.³⁸

The change in approach from a short-term safety net to a long-term mechanism for supporting the poorest 8 million or so people in the country might have been expected to end the emphasis on graduation. This was not the case, however, and a strong commitment to graduation remained, largely as a result of the ideological aversion to ‘dependency’ and the concern that donor funding was unreliable and therefore there

³⁸ Interview ED18, senior donor official, by Skype, 22 September 2015.

needed to be a plan in place to wind down the programme, if necessary.³⁹ As such, GTP2 stated the target of graduating 5,001,116 individuals by 2020 (NPC 2016, p. 126). Rather than focusing on graduation as a means of eradicating the programme, according to the head of food security, ‘when some people graduate, other vulnerable people replace them’, maintaining a consistent caseload of approximately 8 million people.⁴⁰ As such, the majority of participants should strive to graduate and, as they do so, they will be replaced by other individuals in need. In effect, such an approach acknowledges the insufficiency of PSNP coverage compared to poverty levels, with a plentiful supply of new eligible participants available to replace any that graduate.

The PSNP is based on a dubious distinction between chronic and transitory food insecurity that divides the PSNP and its chronically food insecure caseload from emergency assistance for those facing transitory food insecurity. As shown in previous sections, however, this conceptual distinction breaks down in practice with geographical targeting arbitrarily dividing the country into PSNP wereda and those limited to emergency assistance, regardless of need, while forced graduation routinely removed chronically food insecure households from the PSNP, with many subsequently receiving emergency assistance instead.⁴¹ Figure 8.7 provides further evidence. If emergency assistance really was addressing transitory food insecurity, then in some years of adequate and timely rainfall, the annual emergency appeals should fall to, or very close to, zero. The graph shows, however, that emergency appeals have never come close to zero throughout the PSNP period. Combining the caseloads of PSNP and humanitarian support and disaggregating these figures by region is also illustrative (Figure 8.8). The total number of people supported is on a clear upward trajectory in every single region, while the caseload as a proportion of the regional population is on an upward trajectory in every region except Amhara and Tigray, where, thanks to large-scale graduation, the trend is flat (Figure 8.9).⁴²

The PSNP itself was prompted by the severity of the 2002/03 food crisis in which food aid was sought for 14 million people. Yet what was

³⁹ Interview EG3, senior official, Food Security Directorate, Ministry of Agriculture, Addis Ababa, 6 June 2018.

⁴⁰ Interview EG3, senior official, Food Security Directorate, Ministry of Agriculture, Addis Ababa, 7 June 2019.

⁴¹ Interview TAK4, Development Agent, Ende Mariam kebele, 21 March 2018, 12 June 2018; THW2, Food security coordinator, Hintalo Wajirat wereda, 4 May 2018; THK3, Development agents, Tsehafti kebele, 26 April 2018, 15 June 2018; and THZ2, Female Community Food Security Taskforce member, Tsehafti kebele, 28 April 2018.

⁴² Large-scale displacement in Oromiya resulting from clashes along the Somali regional border might account for approximately 2 million people in 2017–2018.

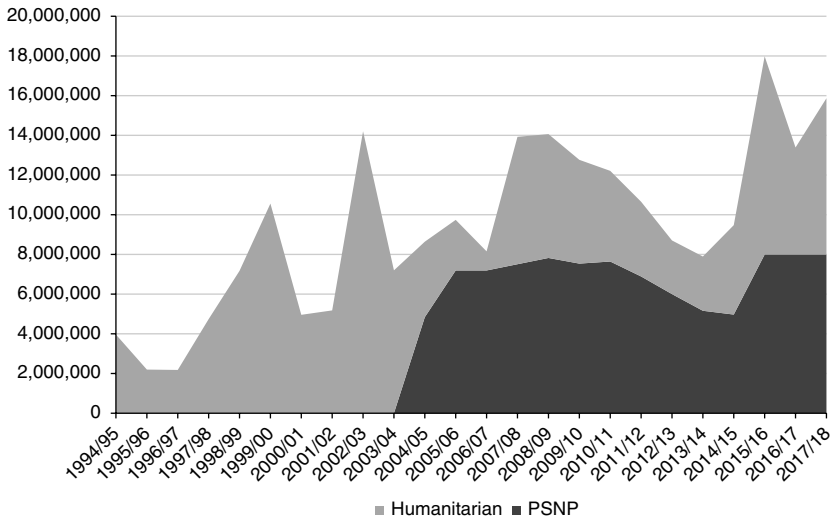


Figure 8.7 Food insecurity over time
 Source: author, based on DFID staff calculations and Humanitarian Requirements Documents, various years.

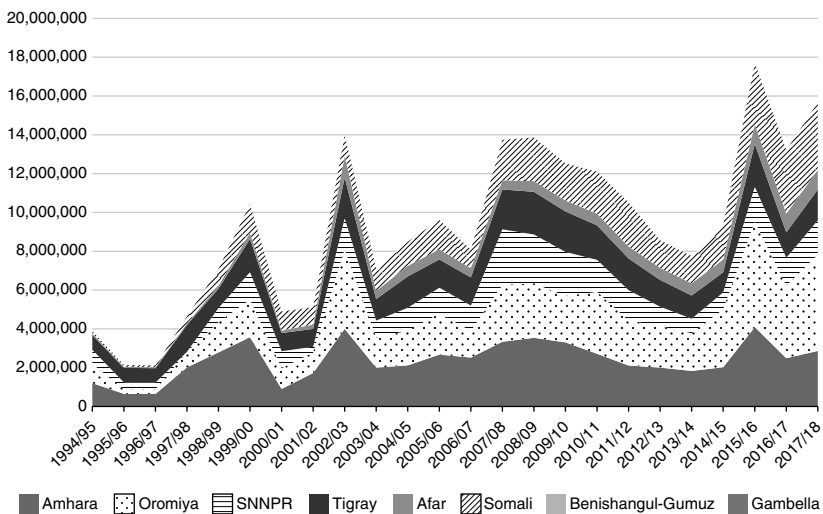


Figure 8.8 Combined PSNP and humanitarian caseloads by region
 Source: author, based on DFID staff calculations and Humanitarian Requirements Documents, various years. For legibility the least populous regions (Dire Dawa and Harari) are omitted.

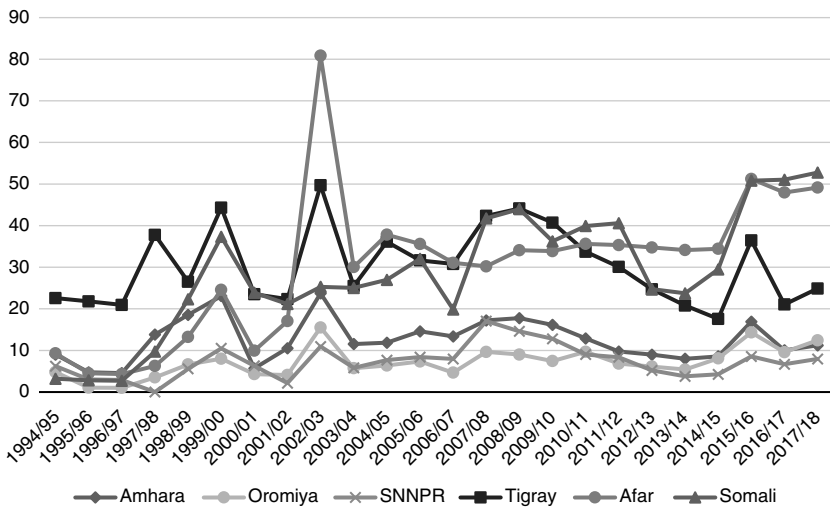


Figure 8.9 Combined PSNP and humanitarian caseloads as a proportion of regional population

Notes: regional populations are approximated by applying the region's proportion of the national population at the time of the 2007 census to population totals for subsequent years. For legibility the least populous regions (Benishangul-Gumuz, Dire Dawa, Gambella and Harari) are omitted.

Source: author, based on DFID staff calculations, Humanitarian Requirements Documents, various years, and [CSA \(2008\)](#).

considered an exceptional event at the time was matched or surpassed by the combined PSNP and humanitarian caseload in 2007/08, 2008/09 and every year since 2015/16. The PSNP clearly plays an important role in delivering support and responding to crises, but the problem of food insecurity at national and household level is not going away anytime soon. Moreover, it has become increasingly clear that the emergency system does not just address transitory food insecurity, but also compensates for the limited size of the PSNP. In certain respects, the situation is therefore not so dissimilar to that prior to the adoption of the PSNP, with the humanitarian system used to address a structural problem to which it is poorly suited. Ultimately, this was the result of the restrictive geographical focus of the PSNP, which excluded significant numbers, and the limited quotas provided to PSNP wereda, leading to a shortage of PSNP places. Government officials increasingly acknowledged the reality that the PSNP was significantly smaller than the number in need, with a more realistic figure considered to be 10–12 million by one estimate

or as much as 30 million people according to another.⁴³ Yet such an expansion would have contradicted the narrative of developmental progress and efforts to eliminate the ‘national humiliation’ of food insecurity. Moreover, there were simply insufficient resources between donor and government contributions to expand the PSNP, much less to nearly quadruple the programme’s coverage.

Conclusion

As outlined in previous chapters, alongside rapid economic development Ethiopia faced a growing distributive crisis from the early 2000s, with acute shortages of access to rural land and urban employment. This distributive crisis, which manifest in widespread food shortages in 2002/03, urban protests in 2001 and 2005, and food inflation in 2008 and 2011, was the principal driver of social protection expansion. However, the government’s approach to social protection was highly ambiguous due to resource shortages and the government’s ideological commitment to self-reliance and resistance to ‘dependency’. The result was that the government expanded provision to mitigate politically problematic distributive issues, while limiting support and attempting to eliminate programmes as quickly as possible.

The government’s approach to social protection is also consistent with the argument that an important driver of state-led development is elite perceptions of the threat posed by mass distributive pressures amidst resource constraints. As argued in [Chapters 4–6](#), mass distributive pressures were an important motivation for government attempts to promote broad-based development in the form of access to land, rising agricultural productivity and access to employment. The government prioritised distribution in the form of land, agricultural inputs and jobs due to their perceived compatibility with economic growth. In contrast, the government lacked the resources required to address the growing distributive crisis through social spending alone and was concerned that social protection might undermine work incentives and thereby the government’s developmental push. The distributive limitations of land and employment eventually led the government to expand social protection temporarily, but this was insufficient for politicians to question the core idea that broad-based economic growth was the only long-run solution to the distributive crisis.

⁴³ Interviews EG3, senior official, Food Security Directorate, Ministry of Agriculture, Addis Ababa, 7 June 2019 and EG4, a senior official in the Food Security Directorate, Ministry of Agriculture, Addis Ababa, 7 October 2015.

As such, the government's social protection response was ambiguous and insufficient to address the growing problem. In particular, the government intentionally excluded large numbers of poor and vulnerable people through geographical targeting and the push for graduation. Meanwhile, the launch of an urban PSNP was both late and insufficient to address the growing distributive problems. Both the rural and urban programmes prioritised the destitute, largely excluding landless and unemployed young adults who were instead expected to seek employment – for which demand was extremely limited – or to take out loans to establish MSEs.

9 Enmeshment and the Limits of State Infrastructural Power

The analysis now switches from the successes and failures of the government's developmental and distributive strategy to the mechanisms through which the EPRDF sought to secure mass acquiescence and thereby consolidate its rule. The EPRDF utilised a combination of the three powers highlighted in [Chapter 2](#): symbolic power to legitimate the regime; distributive power to enmesh the masses; and coercive power to force would be opposition into submission. A key requirement of all three powers in building and maintaining state control is the state's ability to reach individuals and households across its territory, what [Mann \(1984, 1986\)](#) calls infrastructural power. This applies equally to the infrastructure required to promote state-sanctioned ideology and symbols ([Mann 1986](#)); the administrative structures required to distribute resources and cultivate dependence ([Albertus et al. 2018](#)); and the ability to deploy coercion whether low-visibility and low-intensity measures such as surveillance and harassment or high visibility violence ([Levitsky and Way 2010](#)).

While the EPRDF undoubtedly employed symbolic and coercive powers, a central concern for the political elite throughout was its distributive strategy for securing and maintaining popular compliance. As such, these distributive powers and the ways they were deployed to secure state control are a central focus of this chapter. For this purpose, the analysis draws on the concept of 'coercive distribution' whereby authoritarian regimes enmesh broad sections of the population in ties of dependence through large-scale distribution ([Albertus et al. 2018](#)). Coercive distribution routes 'citizen's survival strategies through the regime – rather than around it', creating 'more individualized rather than collective relations with the state' ([Albertus et al. 2018](#), p. 17). The threat of withdrawal of those resources coerces the masses into compliance. Such a strategy requires the state to gain control over, or at least mediate access to, resources of sufficient importance to individual livelihoods that their withdrawal constitutes a major threat. Equally, the state must develop sufficient infrastructural power to reach individuals and households across its territory.

As discussed in [Chapter 4](#), the EPRDF undertook a massive expansion of the reach of the party-state, particularly since 2005. This included strengthening the kebele administration through new state employees: managers, development agents, schoolteachers and health extension workers, all of whom were invariably also party members. However, the party-state also reached beyond the kebele with the creation of sub-kebele structures to mobilise the entire population. Kebele were first divided into several *gott* (or *kushet* in Tigray), with the population of each *gott* further sub-divided into government teams of 50 households and development teams of 10–15 households, beginning in Amhara and Tigray in 2003 and then Oromiya and SNNPR by 2005 ([Vaughan and Tronvoll 2003](#), [Aalen and Tronvoll 2009](#), [Rahmato 2009](#), [Vaughan 2011](#)). According to a senior official in the Ministry of Capacity Building that oversaw these structures, the EPRDF's post-2005 election review highlighted sub-kebele structures as a source of considerable resentment and the decision was made to scale them back.¹ Nonetheless, a renewed effort to expand sub-kebele administration was launched in 2010/11 based on Meles' insistence that 'tight control' was required to mobilise the population to deliver the 'developmental state' agenda.² Rural kebele were restructured into 3–4 zones (or *kushet* in Tigray) with these further sub-divided into male, female and youth development teams comprising 25–30 households with each development team leader also leader of a 1-to-5 network. In addition, the party structure was overhauled and expanded after 2005, with the creation of local party cells and affiliated women's and youth leagues. The party-state apparatus also included technically autonomous but heavily party-influenced structures such as microfinance institutions and cooperatives. In principle, this party-state machinery provided the infrastructural power required to reach every household and individual across the country. As Prime Minister Meles once argued,

Unlike all previous governments our writ runs in every village. That has never happened in the history of Ethiopia. The state was distant, irrelevant ... Now we have a formally structured state, there is a school in every village and clinics in every village, roads, infrastructure. (Meles, cited in [Dowden 2012](#))

This party-state infrastructure was used to pursue an inseparable combination of the government's developmental ambitions and maintenance of political order. As such, while these structures were used to mobilise

¹ Interview respondent EG47, former senior official in the Ministry of Capacity Building, Addis Ababa, 18 February 2020.

² Interview respondent EG47, former senior official in the Ministry of Capacity Building, Addis Ababa, 18 February 2020.

the population to raise agricultural productivity, improve health and sanitation, send children to school and construct community infrastructure, they were also used to indoctrinate, cultivate dependence and intimidate.

The main source of symbolic power underpinning the TPLF's struggle in Tigray and the early years of the EPRDF was ethno-nationalism and the need for ethnic self-determination to right the wrongs of Ethiopian state-building. Over the years, this emphasis shifted with the 'developmental state's' pursuit of an Ethiopian national Renaissance promoted as an alternate source of symbolic power. Shortly before his death, Meles wrote of the need to make national development a 'hegemonic project in the Gramscian sense' with the ultimate objective that the people 'voluntarily adhere to its objectives and principles' (Zenawi 2012, p. 167). The party-state infrastructure was seen as the means of realising this hegemony.

More central to the task of maintaining control has been a strategy of coercive distribution backed up by the threat of outright coercion. As argued in Chapter 3, coercive distribution had its roots in the land reforms and 'encadrement' carried out by the Derg and TPLF in the 1970s and 1980s (Clapham 2002). Land reform undercut the economic and political base of the nobility and established direct ties of dependence between the state and individual landholders. Land access remains the basis of livelihoods for a significant proportion of the population. However, the importance of land as a distributive tool has been eroded by population growth, urban expansion and the 'developmental state's' use of land as a means of centralising rent allocation. The result is that new forms of distribution were required to provide upkeep and maintain this strategy of enmeshment. This chapter shows that a combination of state, party and affiliated organisations monopolised control over the distribution of almost every resource required for the livelihoods of the rural population: land; agricultural extension and microcredit; off-farm employment opportunities; social protection and emergency assistance; healthcare; and education. Moreover, a key means of placing the party-state at 'the center of citizens' "strategies of survival" (Albertus et al. 2018, p. 14) was the development teams and 1-to-5 networks. Research on Ethiopian politics and development has often acknowledged these structures. However, with few exceptions (Emmenegger et al. 2011), they have been subject to little in the way of empirical research. Moreover, while their role in coercion and indoctrination is often highlighted, the importance of development teams to resource distribution has not been discussed.

All states combine an image that they project to the world of a coherent whole and the inevitably more messy reality of their actual functioning (Migdal 2001). The image of the development team structure approaches

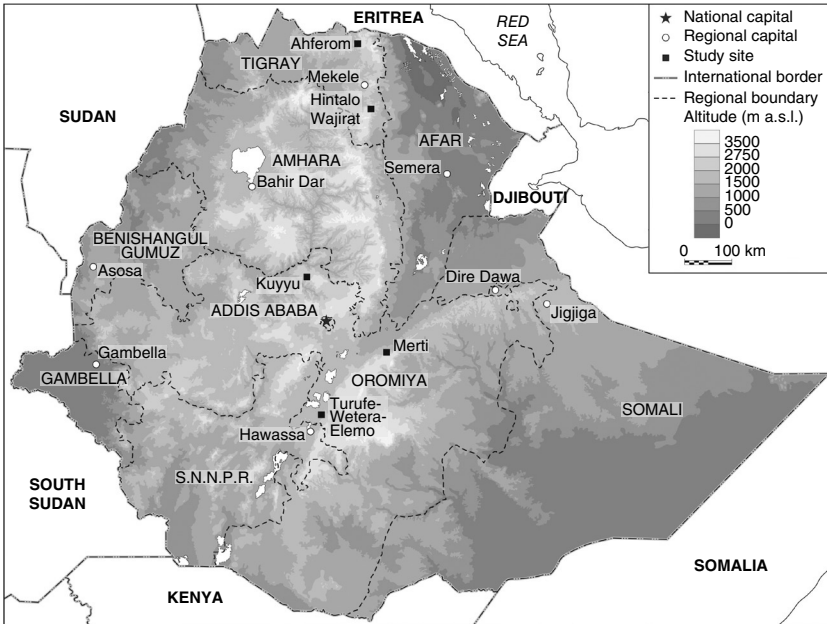


Figure 9.1 Map of the research sites

Source: author.

totalitarian control whereby the centre can monitor and shape individual behaviour across the national territory through a combination of symbolic, distributive and coercive power. The reality is that these structures varied significantly across the country and over time. The remainder of the chapter focuses on case studies of five rural communities in Tigray and Oromiya (see [Figure 9.1](#)). Within the highland core of Ethiopian society, the regions represent two extremes. Tigray is where the EPRDF's hegemonic development project came closest to realisation, with the TPLF drawing on significant reserves of symbolic power accrued during the struggle. As such, the discussion begins with two sites in Tigray, which highlight the strength of the party-state infrastructure, which was used to channel the symbolic, distributive and coercive power of the party-state. In contrast, Oromiya is the highland region where EPRDF control was most contested, with the illegitimate OPDO lacking the symbolic power of the TPLF in Tigray. The first case study focuses on a site in West Arssi Zone conducted in 2005–2010 where initial attempts to establish a development team structure prior to the 2005 elections fell flat and the party-state resorted to co-optation of neo-customary

organisations to consolidate control. Another two case studies then chart the re-establishment of development teams from 2011 in sites in North Shewa and Arssi. Finally, the chapter draws on the existing literature to highlight a similar strategy of coercive distribution in urban areas.

Overall, the cases underscore that the government's hold on Oromiya was always more fragile than that in Tigray. This is because the symbolic appeals of federalism, self-determination and developmentalism rang hollow given the OPDO's illegitimacy and since the party-state was unable to build infrastructural power comparable to that in Tigray. Moreover, and vitally for the argument of this book, the party-state was increasingly limited in its ability to enmesh younger generations of Ethiopians – in Tigray as well as Oromiya – in ties of dependence due to the growing shortage of distributive resources required for their livelihoods: land, employment and social protection.

Organise, Distribute and Control in Rural Tigray

Fieldwork was conducted in the first half of 2018 in two research sites: Endemariam *tabiya* in Ahferom wereda, and Tsehafti *tabiya* in Hintalo Wajirat wereda.³ Both are rural, agricultural areas focused on grain cultivation. Both sites, like the majority of Tigray, were classified as food insecure and included in the PSNP, as well as regularly receiving emergency assistance, the amount of which depended on annual assessments.

The structure of *tabiya* and sub-*tabiya* organisation in the two sites was very similar. The *tabiya* cabinet was the main administrative body, comprising the *tabiya* chair and deputy, the local party leader, heads of the women's and youth leagues, the headteacher of the school and one development agent and health extension worker. This cabinet reported to the elected *tabiya* council. All officials, including the council members, cabinet and employees were TPLF party members.⁴ Indeed, party and state responsibilities were completely fused, with state structures tasked with party political activities, while party structures, including the women's and youth leagues, were responsible for monitoring and evaluating the performance of state officials, as well as the organisation of sub-kebele structures.⁵

³ The *tabiya* in Tigray is the equivalent of kebele in other parts of the country.

⁴ Interviews with respondent TAK4, Development Agents, Endemariam, March and June 2018; THK3 development agents, Tsehafti, April and June 2018; and THK4, health extension workers, Tsehafti, May and June 2018.

⁵ Interviews with respondents TAK6, Propaganda officer, Endemariam, June 2018; TAK7, Women's League Leader, Endemariam, June 2018; THK3, development agents, Tsehafti, April and June 2018; THK5, Women's League Leader, Tsehafti, April 2018; THK6, Youth League Leader, Tsehafti, June 2018.

Both *tabiya* were sub-divided into four *kushet* with a politically appointed leader and an administrative committee mirroring the *tabiya* cabinet. The *kushet* leadership was, in turn, responsible for organising its population into development teams for men, women and youth. Each development team was responsible for up to thirty households and had five leaders, with differing responsibilities: chair, vice chair; secretary, good governance and public relations.⁶ Invariably, each development team included at least one member of the *tabiya* militia, while the vice-chair had particular responsibilities for peace and security, providing a link to the militia. Each development team leader was the leader of a 1-to-5 network, responsible for five households. These leaders were also model farmers or from model households, as well as being members of the parallel party cell structure and, in the case of women and youth, also members of the party-affiliated leagues.⁷ Figure 9.2 provides an approximate representation of these interlocking structures.

Respondents reported that attendance at development team and 1-to-5 meetings was mandatory and that repeated failure to attend would result in deductions being made from the PSNP and emergency assistance for those receiving support, or fines for those did not.⁸ Like the TPLF more broadly, the development teams followed the principle of democratic centralism, whereby new initiatives were debated, but once consensus was achieved ‘by argument or by voting’, all were expected to adhere to the plans.⁹ Failure to do so would result in being ‘outcast and criticised’ through *gim gema*.¹⁰ In the words of one team member,

There is no punishment. However, you will be considered as deviant if you do not accept what the majority agreed. So, anyway participation in network teams and accepting decisions is mandatory.¹¹

Just as the *tabiya* was assessed based on annual and five-year plans derived from the national development plans, target setting and evaluation were also cascaded down to the *kushet*, development teams, 1-to-5s and individuals. *Gim gema* was used to evaluate leaders at all levels, and

⁶ Interviews with respondents TAK2, *tabiya* chair and manager, Endemariam, March and June 2018; THK1, *tabiya* chair and manager, Tsehafti, May and June 2018.

⁷ Interviews with respondents TAK1, Propaganda Officer, Endemariam, March 2018; TAK4, Development Agents, Tsehafti, March and June 2018; TAK5, Health Extension Workers, Endemariam, March and June 2018; THK1, *tabiya* chair and manager, Tsehafti, May and June 2018; THK4, health extension workers, Tsehafti, May and June 2018; THK5, Women’s League Leader, Tsehafti, April 2018.

⁸ Focus groups TAF5 with female PSNP recipients, Endemariam, March 2018; THF1 with male PSNP participants, Tsehafti, April 2018.

⁹ Interview with TAI1, male farmers, Endemariam, June 2018.

¹⁰ Interview with TAI1, male farmers, Endemariam, June 2018.

¹¹ Interview with TAI3, male farmer, Endemariam, June 2018.

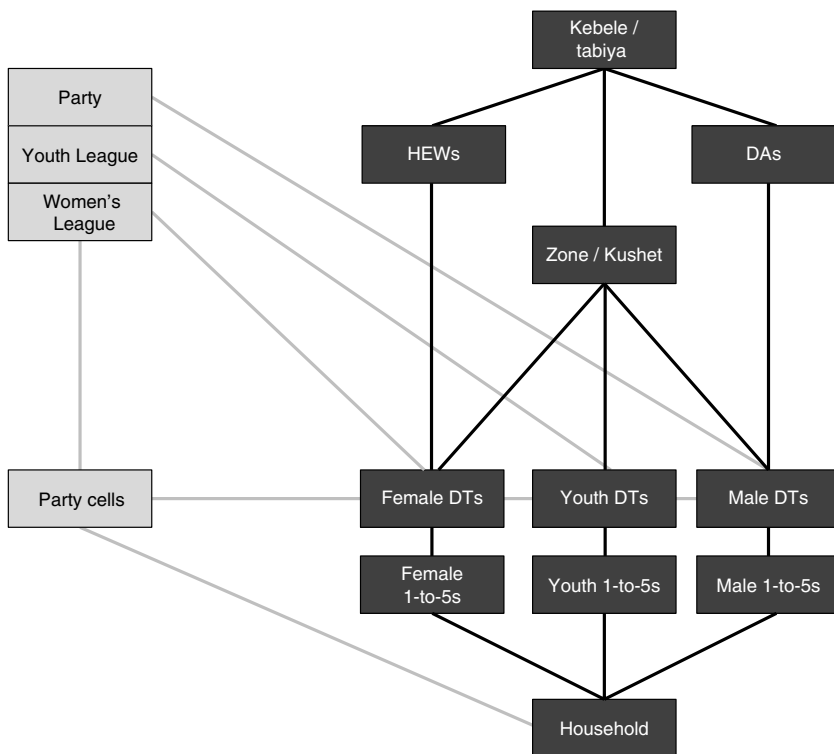


Figure 9.2 The sub-kebele party-state infrastructure
Source: author's interpretation.

individuals and households were categorised as models, half-models and non-models, depending on their adherence to government initiatives in agriculture, health, education and political participation.¹² The category of champion farmers was reserved for the very best farmers achieving success in agricultural commercialisation. As such, this structure provided clear direction to individuals and households as to the behaviour expected by the party-state.

While these structures were active during field research in early 2018, their functioning varied. Women's development teams, established later than the male equivalents, were widely considered less effective. This was largely attributed to the fact that they had focused on the same sixteen health extension packages since their inception, and members were tired

¹² Interview with respondent TAK2, tabiya chair and manager, Endemariam, March and June 2018; THK1, tabiya chair and manager, Tsehafti, May and June 2018.

of discussing the same issues.¹³ Furthermore, women in male-headed households tended to participate less given the difficulty of combining this unpaid work with household responsibilities.¹⁴ Importantly, even in Tigray, the youth development teams had never worked effectively. Due to the lack of land and employment opportunities, many young people resorted to migration, commonly to Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates to work as domestic workers (for women) or labourers (for men), or to Humera in western Tigray seeking work in commercial agriculture.¹⁵ This out-migration meant that youth team leadership and membership was constantly changing, while the lack of distributive resources limited the party-state's control over the youth population.

The development team structure was central to all government activity. According to local leaders, development teams were the 'main route' for disseminating developmental and party-political messages to the population, particularly through regular discussion of the party newspaper, *Weyn*, in 1-to-5 networks.¹⁶ Physical infrastructure was limited in both sites, as in much of rural Tigray, with limited mobile phone coverage and no internal roads. As such, passing messages through development teams was the main means by which the tabiya communicated with the population.¹⁷ While it is impossible to know to what degree these discussions succeeded in achieving the 'hegemony' of the party's developmental ideology, the development team structure certainly provided the infrastructure for disseminating party propaganda.

Another important role of these structures was surveillance and information gathering. Respondents frequently highlighted this role with respect to development activity, with development teams used, for example, to identify pregnant women early on to ensure that they receive antenatal care, reporting so-called 'harmful traditional practices' such as

¹³ Interview with respondent TAK5, Health Extension Workers, Endemariam, March and June 2018; TAK7, Women's League Leader, Endemariam, June 2018; TAF6, female development team members, Endemariam, March 2018; THF7 and THF8, female development team members, Tsehafti, April 2018. The health extension packages cover topics such as family planning, nutrition, vaccination, first aid and latrines.

¹⁴ Interview with THZ5, female Development Team Leaders, Tsehafti, April 2018.

¹⁵ Interviews with TAK2, kebele chair and manager, Endemariam, March and June 2018; TAK4, Development Agents, Tsehafti, March and June 2018; THK1, tabiya chair and manager, Tsehafti, May and June 2018; THK6, Youth League Leader, Tsehafti, June 2018.

¹⁶ Interviews with TAK1, Propaganda Officer, Endemariam, March 2018; THK1, tabiya chair and manager, Tsehafti, May and June 2018; THK2, Public and Government Relations Officer, Tsehafti, April 2018; THZ1, Kushet Leader, Tsehafti, April 2018; THZ5, female Development Team Leaders, Tsehafti, April 2018.

¹⁷ Interview with TAK2, kebele chair and manager, Endemariam, March and June 2018; THK1, tabiya chair and manager, Tsehafti, May and June 2018; THK4, health extension workers, Tsehafti, May and June 2018.

female genital mutilation and early marriage, and ensuring school attendance.¹⁸ There was no evidence of any opposition political activity in either site, though the development team structure clearly had the potential to be used for political surveillance also.

Perhaps the key role of the development teams, however, was as the focal point for state distribution. The vast majority of the resources provided by the party-state, affiliated organisations and independent organisations was mediated by the development teams and other party-state structures. Development teams played a direct role in distributing the PSNP, emergency relief, exemptions from health insurance contributions and even NGO support, which went exclusively to those on local government lists.¹⁹ Development teams and 1-to-5s regularly prepared a wealth ranking of their households, which was submitted to the kushet and tabiya whenever there were resources to be distributed. This function was not limited to these two case studies, but was acknowledged by regional government respondents,

There is a system, people are organised into 25–30 members, male and female, not only for the PSNP but for any development activity ... These are in every wereda, every kushet, both women and men.²⁰

To take the PSNP and emergency assistance as an example, distribution was the responsibility of the kushet Community Food Security Taskforce, with one leader from each development team in the kushet, and women's and youth league representatives automatically included as community representatives responsible for providing information on their members.²¹ Moreover, there was an explicit attempt by the

¹⁸ Interviews with TAZ2, female Development Team Leaders, Endemariam, March 2018; THK4, health extension workers, Tsehafti, May and June 2018.

¹⁹ Interviews with TAK4, Development Agents, Tsehafti, March and June 2018; TAZ2, female Development Team Leaders, Endemariam, March 2018; TAZ3, male Community Food Security Taskforce member, Endemariam, March 2018; TAZ4, female Community Food Security Taskforce member, Endemariam, March and June 2018; THK1, tabiya chair and manager, Tsehafti, May and June 2018; THZ2, female Community Food Security Taskforce member, Tsehafti, April 2018; THZ7, Kushet leader, Tsehafti, July 2018; THZ11, female Development Team Leaders, Tsehafti, June 2018; THZ5, female Development Team leaders, Tsehafti, April 2018. In Tigray, depending on the wereda, the PSNP is distributed either by the state or by the Relief Society of Tigray (REST). Though technically an NGO, REST was established by the TPLF and maintains close ties with the Front.

²⁰ Interview with TRG1, Food Security Team Leader, Tigray Regional Government, Mekele, April 2018.

²¹ Interviews with TAK2, kebele chair and manager, Endemariam, March and June 2018; TAK4, Development Agents, Tsehafti, March and June 2018; TAZ3, male Community Food Security Taskforce member, Endemariam, March 2018; TAZ4, female Community Food Security Taskforce member, Endemariam, March and June 2018; THZ2, female Community Food Security Taskforce member, Tsehafti, April 2018.

taskforce to spread support widely to ensure that as broad a section of the population as possible received some form of support. This was achieved in two ways. First, by watering down the PSNP, undermining the programme's narrow targeting criteria and instead providing a smaller amount of support to more households. Second, by ensuring that no household received more than one form of support. While the poorest household could in theory qualify for the PSNP, emergency assistance and health insurance exemptions, for example, in practice no household received more than one of these.²²

The development teams also mediated access to other resources distributed by party-state organisations. For example, agricultural inputs such as seeds and fertiliser were provided through development agents and cooperatives, with preferential access for model farmers who had demonstrated their willingness to adhere to government initiatives.²³ In addition, credit from the party-affiliated Dedebit microfinance organisation – vital for accessing agricultural inputs and starting an off-farm business – usually required the support of development team leaders who vouched for an individual's creditworthiness.²⁴ Party structures were also involved in the distribution of other resources, with the youth league taking a central role in organising credit and training opportunities for young people through youth development teams to establish off-farm businesses and negotiating with the *tabiya* to distribute communal land to be used in groups through youth development teams.²⁵ Furthermore, party and league officials were responsible for overseeing the work of the land administration committee conducting land registration, which was, at the time of research, moving from first to second stage certification.²⁶

From the perspective of an individual household therefore, continued access to all the key resources required to survive in the short term and to prosper in the longer term were routed through party-state structures and affiliated organisations. This dominance of the party-state in resource distribution was previously noted by Sarah Vaughan and Mesfin Gebremichael,

²² Interviews with TAK4, Development Agents, Tsehafti, March and June 2018; TAZ1, Kushet Chair, Endemariam, June 2018; TAZ5, male Development Team leader, Endemariam, June 2018; THK1, *tabiya* chair and manager, Tsehafti, May and June 2018.

²³ Interview with TH13, male farmer, Tsehafti, July 2018.

²⁴ Focus group TAF1, with male residents, Endemariam, June 2018.

²⁵ Interview with THK6, Youth League Leader, Tsehafti, June 2018.

²⁶ Interview with TAF1, with male residents, Endemariam, June 2018. First stage certification involves the identification of the plot holder and neighbouring landholders. Second stage involves GPS mapping of plot boundaries.

Fertiliser in Tigray, for instance, was for some time imported and distributed by Guna, transported by TransEthiopia, on roads constructed by Sur, under an extension programme organised by REST, on credit provided by the Dedebit Savings and Credit Institution (DESCI), through Farmers' Associations and Co-operatives, with a payment guarantee from REST and/or the regional government. (Vaughan and Gebremichael 2011, p. 47)²⁷

Their description, however, omits what remains the most significant form of distribution, namely access to state-owned land. In the two sites, 80 per cent of households in Endemariam and 89 per cent in Tsehafti had some farmland.²⁸ Furthermore, the social transfers and emergency assistance that enable the most vulnerable people to survive from year-to-year was directly distributed by the local party-state. In Endemariam, 32 per cent of households receive either the PSNP or emergency assistance, while that figure rises to 36 per cent in Tsehafti. Other than household labour and livestock, almost every resource that households required to survive depended on party-state distribution. As community residents themselves underscored, there is 'no option except expecting this support'.²⁹ Moreover, any resistance to the party-state or even failure to demonstrate support by adhering to the latest party-state initiative risked the possibility of withdrawal of vital resources.

The TPLF probably retained some legitimacy amongst the Tigrayan population from the struggle and for the improvements in service delivery whilst in power. Moreover, as inter-communal violence erupted across Ethiopia from 2015 (see Chapter 10), many Tigrayans targeted in other parts of the country returned to Tigray. Respondents were very aware of this, and many saw the TPLF as their best source of protection. However, it is impossible to disentangle this support for the TPLF from the material dependence on the party-state. The situation in Tigray closely approximates Albertus et al.'s (2018) definition of coercive distribution, with strong party-state infrastructural power underpinning broad distribution of resources that enmeshes a large swathe of the population in relations of dependence. These intertwined symbolic and distributive relations are evident in a common message from community residents that the party and the Tigrayan population are mutually dependent, just as they were from the beginning of the armed struggle in the 1970s,

²⁷ Guna Trading, TransEthiopia and Sur Construction are all part of the TPLF-owned EFFORT conglomerate.

²⁸ Interviews with TAK2, chair and manager, Endemariam, March and June 2018; THK1, tabiya chair and manager, Tsehafti, May and June 2018. These figures mask the challenge of land shortages since many young people migrate out of the tabiya or remain within their parents' household.

²⁹ Focus group with TAF6, female residents, Endemariam, March 2018.

The government and people are equal, they go hand to hand, the government supports its people so that we can support back, in order the citizens do what the government says and it governs its citizens smoothly.³⁰

The government and people should have to support each other. The government supporting us as we in turn support our party every time.³¹

Seeking Control through Distribution and Co-optation in Oromiya

The focus now shifts to Oromiya, where the OPDO attempted to build a similar party-state infrastructure to that in Tigray and to use this to channel state power. The OPDO was less successful than its Tigrayan counterpart, however.³² This first Oromiya case study examines an early attempt to expand the party-state and to co-opt non-state actors, based on fieldwork conducted in 2005–2006 and 2009–2010.³³ Turufe-Wetera-Elemo kebele is located in West Arssi Zone, on the outskirts of Kuyera town near Shashemene. The kebele underwent villagisation and agricultural collectivisation in the 1980s and the main settlement of Turufe retained the grid layout of a planned settlement. The kebele was a relatively wealthy, surplus producing area. The main basis of the economy was cereal production, principally wheat and maize, with some livestock. Young people with limited land access sought day labour in Kuyera and Shashemene, and some young women had started working in new flower farms near Batu (Ziway).

The kebele and sub-kebele administration exemplified the expansion of the local state after 2001. The elected and unpaid chair, deputy chair and kebele militia were bolstered by development agents in 2003, a kebele manager in 2006/07 and health extension workers in 2007/08. In addition to the farmers' association, of which all landholders were members, women's and youth associations were created in 2004. However, these were not very active due to limited participation. Following the 2005 elections and in an attempt to strengthen the local party, women's

³⁰ Focus group with TAF6, female residents, Endemariam, March 2018.

³¹ Focus group with TAF5, female PSNP recipients, Endemariam, March 2018.

³² The situation is very different in the lowland periphery. Research on Afar, not presented here, shows that although the government sought to establish development teams and party structures, these efforts amounted to very little. The party-state lacked the requisite infrastructural power to organise society in this way and was instead dependent on the co-optation of clan structures to govern (Lavers et al. 2020).

³³ The first phase of fieldwork (2005–2006) was conducted as part of the Wellbeing and Illbeing Dynamics in Ethiopia research programme, on which the author spent several years working. Most relevant data are archived at: <https://ethiopiawide.net/database/>

and youth leagues were organised consisting of the most committed members of these associations.

The government extended the party-state to the sub-kebele level in 2004, in line with the rest of Oromiya. The kebele was divided into six *gott* comprising approximately 300 people each, and the population of each *gott* was allocated to development teams (*garee*) of 30 members and cells (*were*) of 10 members. The main participants in these structures were the household heads – predominately men, but some women – and each *gott*, *garee* and *were* had a leadership committee of chairman, secretary and treasurer. According to kebele officials at the time, these structures were intended to mobilise the population for unpaid public works: to construct and maintain roads, to collaborate in farm work and to involve ‘idle’ youth in development projects. The development teams monitored participation in regular ‘voluntary’ public works: ‘They control every member if they attended in the development work or not. They register absentees and pass to the higher hierarchy.’³⁴

At this time, there does not appear to have been any attempt to use these structures as mechanisms of resource distribution. Moreover, the attempt to use these structures for collective farm work was widely resisted and failed, in all likelihood based on the negative memories of the collective agriculture imposed in the Derg era. In the words of one respondent,

The *kebele* heads informed the people through their *gott* and *garee* heads that this arrangement will help for faster harvest and help the people to save the money they are going to pay if they employ labourers. But every farmer refused to involve himself in the programme and continued harvesting by themselves.³⁵

Introduced in the run up to the 2005 elections, the development teams were also used by the OPDO for campaigning. According to community respondents,

The *garee* and *were* heads also worked as mobilisers. They were ordered to warn each member under their *garee* or *were* to elect the bee.³⁶

In the 2005 elections, the opposition Oromo National Congress was also campaigning in the area, using school and university students from nearby towns to bring messages to the community.³⁷ The ONC used the *gott* and *garee* as a campaigning point. As one *gott* leader acknowledged,

³⁴ Focus group OTM31, Turufe Kechema, January 2010.

³⁵ Focus group OTM31, Turufe Kechema, January 2010.

³⁶ Focus group OTM31, Turufe Kechema, January 2010. A bee is the widely recognised symbol of the EPRDF signifying the values of mass mobilisation and collective action.

³⁷ Official results show the OPDO won the election locally, though many people believe that the ONC actually received most votes.

The resistance to *garee* and *gott* increased when the farmers heard the comments by opposition parties in the competition for the election. They say the *garee* and *were* are like chains tying the farmer up.³⁸

Indeed, many respondents reported their dislike for what some focus group respondents considered to be a ‘control mechanism’.³⁹ The decision was made nationally to retire these structures in the aftermath of the elections and this also took place in Turufe,⁴⁰

After the election, there is a plan to end the *garee*, *gott* system. The people have hatred, especially after the election. Thus we are waiting for a new system to be implemented.⁴¹

Given the limited legitimacy and infrastructural power of the party-state in Turufe and across much of Oromiya, there was also a concerted attempt to extend party-state influence over what are formally non-state actors. The OPDO sought to ‘revitalise the *Gadaa* system’ – the customary system of social and political organisation in Oromo society – from around the mid-2000s.⁴² The *gadaa* prescribes political and military roles for men of different age groups, with the *Aba Gadaa* serving as political leader. While the *gadaa* ceased to function in most of Oromiya during the Imperial and Derg eras, the regional government sought to revive a version of the system as a means of enhancing the legitimacy of state interventions and, in doing so, supplementing the limited symbolic power of the regional party. In the words of a respondent from the regional Bureau of Culture and Tourism, responsible for overseeing the *gadaa*,

When the regional government works through the *gadaa* it is more successful than through the local government.⁴³

By doing so, the regional government enlisted a structure with some claim to ‘customary’ legitimacy and further limited potential for any autonomous organisation outside party-state control.⁴⁴ The ‘revitalised’ *gadaa* system was organised in line with the state administration, with offices at zone, wereda and kebele, and supported the implementation

³⁸ Interview with respondent OTM7, a gott leader, Turufe Kechemma, 2005.

³⁹ Focus group OTM31, Turufe Kechemma, January 2010.

⁴⁰ Interview respondent EG47, former senior official in the Ministry of Capacity Building, Addis Ababa, February 2020. This aligns with other research in another part of Oromiya in the same period (Emmenegger et al. 2011).

⁴¹ Interview with respondent OTM7, a gott leader, Turufe Kechemma, 2005.

⁴² Interview with ORG5, senior official in the Oromiya Bureau of Culture and Tourism, Addis Ababa, February 2010.

⁴³ Interview with ORG5, senior official in the Oromiya Bureau of Culture and Tourism, Addis Ababa, February 2010.

⁴⁴ Bassi (2010) writing about the Borana Oromo and Haggmann (2005) on the Somali, report similar attempts to co-opt ‘customary’ organisations to enhance the legitimacy and control of the party-state.

of government policy, including with respect to what the government describes as ‘harmful traditional practices’ and land rights.⁴⁵ According to the regional government, the *Aba Gadaa* and community elders,

work closely with the local governments and they also cooperate with us at the regional level ... the *Aba Gadaa* strongly support the government’s policies.⁴⁶

The extension of infrastructural power through the expansion of local party-state structures and the co-optation of non-state organisations served to enhance state control over the distribution of the main agricultural livelihood resources. While land had not been redistributed in Turufe under the EPRDF, the state certainly remained highly visible in land administration and landholders were acutely aware of the limits of their land rights and ultimately their dependence on the state.⁴⁷ During the mid-2000s, wereda were tasked with carrying out first stage land registration. Registration began at the end of 2004 and was carried out by a kebele Land Administration Committee under the supervision of the wereda Agriculture Desk. The process was facilitated by the kebele militia, responsible for announcing the area to be measured that day and bringing the relevant landholders to observe the process.

The party-state’s influence over the *Aba Gadaa* and elders also enhanced state control over land. Across Oromiya and other regions, elders were expected to make the first attempt at dispute resolution, including with respect to land, before cases were brought to the court system. As such, elders played a key role in land administration. In Turufe, Imperial land grants and then socialist land reform were imposed on top of existing clan-based land tenure arrangements, whereby the clan was the ultimate owner of land and land rights were passed down through the male line. Importantly, this clan-based tenure system retained symbolic and practical relevance, and elders used clan rules to mediate disputes. Not only did the local tenure system present significant challenges regarding the land rights of women and minority ethnic groups (Lavers 2017, 2018), but an independent *Aba Gadaa* would represent an alternate source of authority and control over a key material resource. The co-optation of the *gadaa* system thereby

⁴⁵ The government sought to eliminate practices such as bridewealth; widow inheritance, where a widow is expected to marry a brother of her deceased husband; female genital mutilation; and early marriage.

⁴⁶ Interview with ORG5, senior official in the Oromiya Bureau of Culture and Tourism, Addis Ababa, February 2010.

⁴⁷ Chinigò’s (2015) research in an area not far from Turufe argues that landholders were directly threatened with the loss of their land if they did not comply with government demands. There was no evidence of such explicit threats in Turufe.

ensured that the *Aba Gadaa* aligned with the party-state and that the state retained control over land administration.

The party-state also took a central role in land distribution for group agricultural projects for landless youth as part of a national initiative. In Turufe, two landless youth associations were established in 2008–2009. These associations were allocated land for agro-forestry, with members tasked with guarding the trees to stop illegal firewood collection. In three years, members expected to be able to cut and sell the trees and use the money to set up another group activity on the land.⁴⁸ Vitality, participation in the association was announced through and required membership of the *kebele* youth association. Consequently, any young person wanting to benefit from one of the few available economic opportunities would have to join an organisation associated with the ruling party. Indeed, the *kebele* told young people that membership of the youth association was a way to access such opportunities for employment and training. According to the head of the farmers' association,

There are certain opportunities of being employed and one criteria of selection is being a member of either the women's association or the youth association. So, those members of the government association benefit and the family also benefit.⁴⁹

Indeed, the *kebele* started issuing identity cards for the unemployed to facilitate priority access to employment outside the *kebele*. As one female youth association member described,

the members can get a supportive letter from the *kebele*, which can facilitate them to be employed in government offices ... Having the card would be a good opportunity to give priority to get employment.⁵⁰

The party-state and affiliated organisations also mediated access to agricultural inputs such as improved seeds, fertiliser and pesticide. Several improved seed varieties were available at the time. This included one released in 2007/08 for wheat – the main local crop – that farmers estimated produced double the yield of existing seeds. A new breed of cows was also introduced around the same time with greater milk production. Since 2007, such improved agricultural inputs were distributed through agricultural cooperatives. Though technically autonomous, the cooperatives were formed by the *wereda* administration and were located in the *wereda* compound. As one cooperative leader acknowledged, the

⁴⁸ Interview OTM9, Secretary Turufe Landless Association, January 2010.

⁴⁹ Interview respondent OTM32, Farmers' Association leader, Turufe Kechema, January 2010.

⁵⁰ Interview respondent OTM33, Female Youth Association member, Turufe Kechema, January 2010.

cooperative is 'independent of the [wereda] agricultural office, but they have a relationship'.⁵¹ Given the shortage of improved seeds at the time, access to improved inputs was restricted. Only cooperative members with at least one hectare of their own land and verified as being free of debt by the kebele administration were able to access improved seeds.⁵² Moreover, the development agents had been asked by the wereda 'to recruit strong farmers to be given the seeds' and to be made into model farmers.⁵³ However, one relatively wealthy farmer was convinced that he was refused improved seeds as a result of his limited involvement in the kebele,

The seeds are not given for all the people. They only give seeds for those that are active in meetings. Everything is internal and secretive.⁵⁴

Clearly then, the party-state's attempt to extend its control did not go without resistance from the local community, and the initial attempt to organise the population into development teams was a failure. Nonetheless, the party-state consolidated control over the distribution of virtually all key resources required for people's livelihoods through direct control of land administration, indirect influence over notionally autonomous actors such as the Aba Gadaa and cooperatives, and responsibility for selecting who should receive improved agricultural inputs and off-farm employment opportunities. As such, the party-state certainly loomed large in individual livelihoods, with the result that failure to acquiesce to government demands brought the risk of withdrawal of these resources.

Controlling Distribution and the Limits to Infrastructural Power in Oromiya

The EPRDF re-established its dominance following the 2005 elections. In Oromiya, as elsewhere, this included a renewed development team and party league structure, along the lines of those in Tigray. The OPDO had considerable success in this respect, albeit that the party's limited legitimacy forced it to rely heavily on distributive and coercive powers, rather than its symbolic power. The final two case studies examine the expansion and limitations of party-state infrastructural

⁵¹ Interview with OTK8, Farmers Cooperative Committee member, January 2010.

⁵² Interview with OTW3, head of Agricultural Office, Shashemene wereda, January 2010; OTK8, Farmers Cooperative Committee member, January 2010.

⁵³ Interview OTK4, Development Agent, Turufe Kechema, January 2010.

⁵⁴ Interview OTM21, farmer, Turufe Kechema, January 2010.

power in two sites in Oromiya, conducted during the first half of 2018: Halelo Cerri kebele in Kuyyu wereda, North Shewa and Shamo Gado kebele, Merti wereda, Arssi. Both are rural, agricultural sites, as well as being classified as food insecure and therefore included in the PSNP.

In principle, local administration in Oromiya was very similar to that in Tigray. At the kebele level, the main administrative body was the cabinet, comprising the chair, deputy chair, party leaders and head of the women's league, and the cabinet was accountable to the elected council. In practice, however, the main decision-making body was the 'party root', a committee of twenty senior party members.⁵⁵ The kebele cabinet was drawn exclusively from this party root, while the council consisted of 190 elected party members.⁵⁶ Moreover, it was a requirement for all state employees to be OPDO members, including the manager, development agents, health extension workers and school principal.⁵⁷ In addition, the local party structure, including the women's and youth leagues that were the 'wings of the OPDO', played an important role in evaluating the performance of the kebele leadership.⁵⁸

The kebele were sub-divided into three *zones* that replaced the earlier *gott*, and revised development teams of thirty households and 1-to-5s of five households. The forty kebele militia were distributed across these development teams to ensure that there was at least one militia in each.⁵⁹ In parallel to the development team structure, there was a party cell structure with each of the twenty members of the party root leading a cell of 7–25 members and all development team leaders were also members of the party cells and from model households.⁶⁰

While these structures existed on paper, in practice their functioning varied markedly. Respondents report that the structures initially functioned well in 2011 and that they were key to a big government push to meet development targets in the final year of the GTP1 and to mobilise people for the 2015 election.⁶¹ According to one development agent,

⁵⁵ Interview OKK2, Manager, Halelo Cerri kebele, July 2018.

⁵⁶ Interviews OMK3, Chair and Manager, Shamo Gado kebele, May 2018; OMC2, elder, Shamo Gado kebele, May 2018.

⁵⁷ Interview with OKK4, Development Agent, Halelo Cerri, March 2018; OMK1, Development Agent, Shamo Gado, May and June 2018; OMK3, Chair and Manager, Shamo Gado kebele, May 2018.

⁵⁸ Interview OMK3, Chair and Manager, Shamo Gado kebele, May 2018.

⁵⁹ Interview OMZ1, male Development Team leaders, Shamo Gado, May 2018.

⁶⁰ Interviews OKK6, Kebele Manager, Halelo Cerri, March and July 2018; OMK3, Chair and Manager, Shamo Gado kebele, May 2018; Focus Group OMF1, male residents, Shamo Gado, May 2018.

⁶¹ Interview respondents OKK4, Development Agent, Halelo Cerri, March and July 2018; OKK5, Health Extension Workers, Halelo Cerri, March 2018; OKK7, Party Leader, Halelo Cerri, July 2018.

During the national election the kebele cabinet including the development agents and health extension workers are pressured to follow up with the development teams and also to campaign and register voters. The development teams are expected to make sure that every household in their structure gets a voting card.⁶²

However, the functioning of the development teams varied considerably within the kebele, with much less activity in remote areas where extension agents rarely visited.⁶³ For example, one male respondent residing far from the kebele centre noted that,

We know we are in the 1-to-5 team but we never had a meeting ... So the 1-to-5 is just there in name but not active.⁶⁴

On the whole, male development teams were more functional than their female equivalents.⁶⁵ The Merti wereda health extension coordinator acknowledged that the women's development teams were 'more theoretical',⁶⁶ while a team leader stated that 'the organisation is just on paper it is not practical at all'.⁶⁷ Furthermore, in Halelo Cerri, there were no functioning youth development teams. Given the shortage of land and employment opportunities, many young people, especially men, migrated to Bale, Harar, Jimma, and Addis for work as daily labourers, while many young women left for Arab countries seeking employment as domestic workers.⁶⁸ It was a similar story in Shamo Gado, where young people resisted joining the youth league and development teams.⁶⁹ Again, the shortage of land and employment opportunities meant that the party-state had few material incentives with which to entice young adults into party structures.

Like in Tigray, the distribution of almost every conceivable resource households required for people's livelihoods – from land to agricultural inputs and credit to social transfers – was controlled by party-state affiliated organisations. Furthermore, the development teams were key to this distribution, as regional respondents acknowledged,

The development teams work together to support any targeting – the PSNP, credit, everything is filtered through the development teams.⁷⁰

⁶² Interview OMK1, Development Agent, Shamo Gado, May and June 2018.

⁶³ Interview OKK4, Development Agent, Halelo Cerri, March and July 2018.

⁶⁴ Focus Group OMF2, male residents, Shamo Gado, May 2018.

⁶⁵ Interview with OKK6, Kebele Manager, Halelo Cerri, March and July 2018.

⁶⁶ Interview with OMW5, Health Extension Coordinator, Merti wereda, May 2018.

⁶⁷ Interview OMZ4, female Development Team leader, Shamo Gado, June 2018.

⁶⁸ Interviews OKK6, Kebele Manager, Halelo Cerri, March and July 2018; OKW1, Administrator, Kuyyu wereda, March 2018.

⁶⁹ Interview OMK3, Chair and Manager, Shamo Gado kebele, May 2018.

⁷⁰ Interview ORG1, Manager, Oromiya Regional Government, Addis Ababa, June 2018.

Development team leaders conducted wealth rankings of their members, which were used for distribution of ‘any kind of support that comes to the kebele’.⁷¹ In the words of one team leader,

The farmers are ranked in three categories namely: leading, medium and very poor farmers. So, whenever a support comes we make sure that the very poor are prioritised and then when there is more support to share to the other categories the medium famers are the ones who come next.⁷²

Kebele officials used this wealth ranking to distribute support, ranging from the PSNP and emergency assistance to exemptions from health insurance contributions and support provided by NGOs, which were allocated by the kebele.⁷³ As in Tigray, there was a clear attempt to ensure that the ‘supports are spread to try to reach as many households as possible’.⁷⁴ As such, any one household only received one of the PSNP, emergency assistance, health insurance exemptions and NGO support. Indeed, in Shamo Gado, several zones forwent targeting entirely, dividing up the zone’s quota for emergency assistance equally to ensure that everyone got something.⁷⁵

The party-state also closely controlled distribution of agricultural inputs. The main supply of improved seeds and fertiliser was through the cooperative, while the only source of credit – essential for most farmers to buy inputs before the harvest – was through the OPDO-linked Oromiya Credit and Savings Institution.⁷⁶ Accessing credit furthermore required a letter of support from the kebele administration, while development teams – where operational – also verified members’ plans for fertiliser use and their creditworthiness.⁷⁷ Furthermore, based on the group-lending model of microfinance, there was a preference for lending to 1-to-5s to enable these networks to supervise the use and repayment of the loans, although this was not always practiced.⁷⁸

⁷¹ Interview OKZ1, male Development Team leader, Halelo Cerri, July 2018.

⁷² Interview OKZ1, male Development Team leader, Halelo Cerri, July 2018.

⁷³ Interview OKK3, female Kebele Food Security Taskforce member, Halelo Cerri, March 2018; OKK4, Development Agent, Halelo Cerri, March and July 2018; OKZ1, male Development Team leader, Halelo Cerri, July 2018; OMW4, Agriculture Office, Merti wereda, May 2018; OMK1, Development Agent, Shamo Gado, May and June 2018; OMK3, Chair and Manager, Shamo Gado kebele, May 2018; OMK4, Health Extension Workers, Shamo Gado, May and June 2018; OMZ3, Zone Leader, Shamo Gado, May 2018.

⁷⁴ Interview OMK1, Development Agent, Shamo Gado, May and June 2018; also OMZ1, male Development Team Leaders, Shamo Gado, May 2018; OKZ1, male Development Team leader, Halelo Cerri, July 2018.

⁷⁵ Interview with OMZ1, male Development Team leaders, Shamo Gado, May 2018.

⁷⁶ Interview OMK1, Development Agent, Shamo Gado, May and June 2018.

⁷⁷ Focus Group OKF10, with male residents, Halelo Cerri, July 2018.

⁷⁸ Interview OKK4, Development Agent, Halelo Cerri, March and July 2018; OMW4, Agriculture Office, Merti wereda, May 2018.

The result is that all households depended on resources distributed through party-state structures. State land was the most broadly distributed resource. Records on landlessness were limited in the two sites, but in Halelo Cerri kebele there were a total of 1,302 landholders and 1,329 households, suggesting that most households held at least some agricultural land. Moreover, landholders needed to access agricultural inputs and credit to make the most of their holdings. Meanwhile, the poorest and most vulnerable depended on the distribution of social transfers and emergency assistance, which combined to reach 23 per cent of the population of Halelo Cerri and 31 per cent of Shamo Gado in 2018. Maintenance of good relations with the kebele was vital for the vast majority of the population, while this was particularly the case for the poorest who depended on state-distributed support for their short-run survival.

In addition to their distributive role, party-state structures were used to disseminate information, with party cells and development teams used to announce meetings and new government campaigns.⁷⁹ However, the dissemination and discussion of the party newspaper was limited to the party cells with a smaller and more committed membership than the development teams, primarily because of the challenge of mobilising the population through development teams.⁸⁰ As such, the development teams appear to have provided limited infrastructure for the dissemination of party ideology and the pursuit of ‘hegemonic’ developmentalism. There were also attempts to use these structures for surveillance and monitoring of the population, both with respect to programme implementation and to maintain order. A wereda leader assigned specific responsibility for the kebele highlighted development teams’ work on, ‘pre-emptive activities such as sniffing information on peace and stability threatening conditions’.⁸¹ The development agent – also a party member with party political responsibilities – highlighted this aspect of the development teams’ roles,

The members in each group are responsible to control and monitor one another and if there is a member who is not in line with the rest of the group, he or she will be sanctioned by the group members.⁸²

In sum, the OPDO’s efforts to build a party-state infrastructure that could channel the state’s symbolic, distributive and coercive powers was

⁷⁹ Interview OKK2, Manager, Halelo Cerri kebele, July 2018; OKK6, Kebele Manager, Halelo Cerri, March and July 2018; OMK1, Development Agent, Shamo Gado, May and June 2018; OMK4, Health Extension Workers, Shamo Gado, May and June 2018.

⁸⁰ Interview OKK2, Manager, Halelo Cerri kebele, July 2018; OMK2, Party and Militia Leaders, Shamo Gado, May 2018.

⁸¹ Interview OMW6, Wereda Cabinet member, Merti, May 2018.

⁸² Interview OMK1, Development Agent, Shamo Gado, May and June 2018.

only partially successful. The illegitimacy of the ruling party meant that the OPDO had to rely to a greater degree on distributive resources and coercion, while the generational division in access to land, employment and social protection meant that young people evaded the party-state's efforts at enmeshment.

Distribution and Control in Urban Centres

The government's attempt to mobilise the population through party-state structures and to use distribution, alongside symbolic and coercive powers, to secure popular compliance was not limited to rural areas. After 2005, the government also sought to organise the entire urban population into development teams and mass associations that would serve the dual purpose of political control – disseminating propaganda, distributing material resources and monitoring the population – and the promotion of the government's developmental objectives.

Party-state building included the creation of 771 zones and 18,000 development teams in Addis Ababa ([Gebremariam 2020](#), p. 6), covering the general population, as well as the civil service and university faculty. Likewise, after 2005, the EPRDF established both party-affiliated Leagues, as well as Inhabitants', Women's and Youth Forums, to provide a means of dialogue between the government and communities ([Di Nunzio 2014a](#), [Gebremariam 2018, 2020](#)). In practice, the activities of the Associations, Leagues and Forums overlapped. This party-state infrastructure was utilised as a means of channelling the symbolic power of the state, by promoting the 'developmental state' agenda, though it is doubtful how successful the party was in this respect ([Di Nunzio 2014a](#)). Moreover, these structures contributed to the surveillance capacity of the party-state, monitoring communities for signs of unrest and passing information on to kebele and city administrations ([Di Nunzio 2014b](#)).

As in rural areas, the actual functioning of these structures varied considerably, depending on the degree to which members depended on the resources they distributed.⁸³ [Gebremariam's \(2020\)](#) study of urban food distribution clearly illustrates this process. High inflation led to a doubling of staple food prices between 2004 and 2008 ([Admassie 2014](#)), but unlike many other countries that experienced price hikes, there were no public protests. Rather, the government's response, at Meles' instruction, was to establish Urban Consumer Cooperatives (UCC) across Addis Ababa to distribute state-subsidised rations of basic goods such

⁸³ Many academics seemed to view the university structures as a bit of a joke, albeit one that they felt obliged to go along with.

as sugar, cooking oil, flour and petroleum (Gebremariam 2020). Not only did the cooperatives bypass the traders accused by the government of ‘rent seeking’, but the cooperatives tied households to the party-state. The party-affiliated Leagues played a central role in mobilising people to form cooperatives, while a cooperative leader acknowledged that the ‘EPRDF used to see UCCs as one of its Leagues’ (Gebremariam 2020, p. 19). Moreover, and in line with the logic of coercive distribution, the distribution through these cooperatives was intentionally broad-based,

the UCCs targeted *every household* in the city. Bringing *everyone* on board was one of the strategies. (Gebremariam 2020, p. 15, emphasis added)

The urban PSNP, adopted in 2016, employed community-based targeting like its rural equivalent, with development teams and 1-to-5 networks used to select the poorest within communities. As one World Bank official involved in the design acknowledged, ‘for good or bad it is a structure that is very effective for targeting’.⁸⁴ Similar arguments have been made regarding the Integrated Housing Development Programme, established after 2005 to provide mass housing for residents of Addis Ababa and other cities. On the one hand, the construction of mass housing was linked to a process of inner-city regeneration, intentionally used to clear urban slums identified by the party as the main source of unrest in 2005, with displaced populations dispersed across housing projects in the periphery (Di Nunzio 2014a, Weldeghebrael 2022). On the other hand, distribution of housing units based on a lottery with subsidised loans from the Commercial Bank of Ethiopia (Keller and Mukudi-Omwami 2017) was used to cultivate dependence. Planel and Bridonneau (2017, p. 37) argue that housing allocation established direct ties of dependence between condominium residents and local representatives of the party-state, providing an important source of ‘social and political control’.

Conscious of the opportunities presented by public programmes, these city-dwellers frequently adopt relatively conformist day-to-day behaviour that plays a big part in reproducing political domination. Dependency and domination are thus closely related. (Planel and Bridonneau 2017, p. 33)

The same distributive strategy was evident in the allocation of employment opportunities, with party-state structures used to link job seekers to work. As noted in Chapters 7 and 8, employment opportunities in industrial parks were allocated on a quota basis through wereda and kebele in the surrounding areas. Meanwhile, party membership was widely considered to be a pre-requisite – alongside academic qualifications – for entry into civil service positions (Weis 2015). Likewise, as Marco di Nunzio and Eyob

⁸⁴ Interview with ED20, World Bank official, by Skype, 24 November 2015.

Gebremariam's (2018) research shows, the party-affiliated Leagues, Associations and Forums 'constitute the very first avenues of access to training and job opportunities within government development programmes' (Di Nunzio 2014a, p. 11). As such, kebele youth offices and party structures played a key role in selecting young people for credit and training opportunities to establish MSEs, including programmes funded by NGOs and donor agencies (Di Nunzio 2014a). The party-state even intervened in the distribution of the most basic service sector 'jobs' such as parking attendants and minibus queue monitors, forming them into associations and regulating what were previously informal activities (Di Nunzio 2012, 2014b). To access these opportunities, there was strong pressure to join the EPRDF, and associated leagues and associations (Di Nunzio 2014a, Gebremariam 2018). The result was to tie economic fortunes to the fortunes of the ruling party, with one parking attendant acknowledging, shortly before the 2010 elections, that, 'our job depends on the outcomes of the next elections' (Di Nunzio 2014b, p. 453). These direct relations of dependence meant that political contestation or opposition came at great potential cost.

Conclusion

The party-state building effort following the Armageddons of the early 2000s established a hierarchy of party-state organisations from the federal government down to individuals and households that was used for the interdependent purposes of political control and state-led development. These structures were vital to the extension of developmentalism as a form of symbolic power, as well as providing a means of surveillance of the population, monitoring signs of anti-government or 'anti-development' activities. Vitaly, however, this party-state infrastructure was key to the government's strategy of coercive distribution. The EPRDF sought to monopolise the distribution of the main livelihood resources, distributing as broadly as possible to ensure that the majority of the population was enmeshed in ties of dependence with the party-state. This does not necessarily mean that all programmes were universal in their coverage, but rather that a patchwork of small and large programmes together combined to enmesh broad sections of the population, with a recurrent focus of government policy being that as many people as possible should get at least something.

This strategy for maintaining political order succeeded to varying degrees according to the legacy of state-building and the historic relations between the ruling party and population in different parts of the country. Moreover, the effectiveness of coercive distribution varied with the growing generational division in access to resources as a result of the successes

and limitations of the national development strategy. In Tigray, the long-standing relations between the TPLF and the Tigrayan population ensured some degree of lasting symbolic power, which, along with party-state mediated distribution and the potential resort to coercion, ensured a high degree of control. The Oromiya case studies present a marked contrast, with the OPDO's illegitimacy and limited infrastructural power resulting in more varied outcomes. The OPDO was able to consolidate its control for an extended period, albeit relying to a much greater degree on its distributive and coercive powers, rather than symbolic appeals. While the analysis here focused on the extreme cases of Tigray and Oromiya, the limited research on other regions suggests similar limitations to the government's strategy. In Amhara, for example, the development teams fell short of performance in Tigray and appear to have declined over time (Closser et al. 2019). Moreover, these structures were never more than an administrative fiction in many pastoralist areas where the party-state's infrastructure was always limited (Lavers et al. 2020).

The case studies also show that the party-state's ability to distribute resources and thereby enmesh the population was highly differentiated along generational lines. Those most dependent on the party-state were the middle-aged farmers whose access to land and agricultural inputs was mediated by the party-state, as well as the poorest households who depended on state-delivered social transfers for their day-to-day survival. In contrast, repeated efforts by the party-state to organise and mobilise younger generations enjoyed limited success across the case studies, including in Tigray. To a significant degree, this was because the party-state lacked the distributive resources that would provide the material inducements to ensure their participation. Ultimately Ethiopia's stalled structural transformation excluded younger generations from the distribution of resources, resulting in a significant hole in the government's strategy of enmeshment.

Overall, then, the party-state was able to achieve a high level of control for an extended period. The result was that the party-state in Tigray, and even in Oromiya and other parts of the country, appeared monolithic and impenetrable. As is often the case, however, Christopher Clapham's words ultimately proved prescient,

Ethiopian hierarchies are rarely as solid as they appear to be. They are characteristically held together, not by solid ties of loyalty and belief, but by pragmatic considerations of obedience ... the external appearance of uniformity can instantly be shattered once circumstances arise that make rebellion seem a practicable option. (Clapham 2009, pp. 184–185)

10 Distributive Crisis, Elite Fragmentation and the Collapse of the EPRDF

By the mid-2010s, the growing distributive crisis – manifest in extreme shortages of land and job opportunities that particularly affected young adults – was progressively undermining the EPRDF’s strategy of coercive distribution as a means of maintaining mass acquiescence. Despite engineering landslide electoral victories in 2010 and 2015, there were growing signs of popular discontent and mass anti-government protests exploded first in 2014, then again in late 2015. Beginning in Oromiya, the protests expanded rapidly in early 2016 first across that region and subsequently to the rest of the country. Government attempts to subdue the protests through outright coercion and new forms of distribution failed. By early 2018, the EPRDF was forced to concede a leadership change that ultimately led to the abandonment of its project of state-led development and the collapse of the ruling coalition.

This chapter provides a detailed account of these events with a view to analysing the causes of the protests, including both the initial sparks that led to the outbreak of protests and the underlying drivers that enabled their spread and sustained them over four years. The argument presented here highlights three main points. First, the distributive crisis meant that large numbers of young adults had escaped the EPRDF’s enmeshment and many were deeply disenchanted with unfulfilled promises of developmental progress and improved living standards. Second, the EPRDF’s response to the protests differed markedly from that of past crises due to emerging divisions within the ruling elite. Rather than a collective threat that required a coherent response, previously subordinate EPRDF factions saw the opportunity to use the protests as political leverage within the ruling coalition. Third, these mass and elite political dynamics were refracted through the prism of ethnic federalism. The result was that mass unrest and elite contestation divided along ethnic lines. Ethnic politicisation would subsequently prove to be a major factor in the EPRDF’s collapse into civil war, with a divided ethno-political elite mobilising mass discontent amongst their ethnic constituencies in the pursuit of their political ambitions.

The analysis uses multiple data sources to build up a picture of the evolving protest movement. In terms of quantitative data, the analysis draws on the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data (ACLED) (Raleigh et al. 2010).¹ While ACLED is the only data source that aims to provide comprehensive coverage of protests, riots and state violence, there are inevitably important limitations. First, ACLED relies heavily on media sources, albeit that events are verified and reviewed by three reviewers. As such, the dataset is shaped by what media outlets consider newsworthy and, in a context in which the Ethiopian state was intentionally restricting reporting and internet access, also what media was able to cover. Second, ACLED is likely to be biased towards urban centres rather than rural areas for several reasons. First, since urban centres have better communications and so protests are more likely to be reported and, second, since the ACLED analysis codes events to the nearest town when the exact location is unknown (Eck 2012). Consequently, there is a risk that the detailed geo-location data lead to a false sense of their accuracy. With this in mind, the data are used in the following analysis primarily to examine the broad spatial and temporal spread of the protests, acknowledging the limitations where relevant. Alongside these quantitative data, the discussion returns to several case studies from preceding chapters, namely the Wenji-Shoa sugar plantation (Chapter 5), the periphery of Adama town (Chapter 7) and Kuyyu and Merti *wereda* (Chapters 8 and 9). These cases provide an indication of the local impacts of the protests, though these cannot, of course, be generalised and these cases were by no means the areas most severely affected.

The chapter begins by documenting the spread of the protests from 2014 to the change in leadership in 2018, before outlining the detailed argument. The analysis concludes by considering competing explanations for these events drawn from the limited existing literature and relevant theory. The analysis considers the strengths and limitations of these contending explanations, and, where data allow, rules these out.

Mass Protests and the Unravelling of EPRDF Control

The initial phase of the Oromo protests appears to have begun on the 12 April 2014 with student protests at Jimma University against the Addis Ababa Masterplan. At the same time, on 12–13 April, the OPDO held a workshop on the new Masterplan, resulting in outspoken criticism of the plan from the party's rank and file that was broadcast on regional state television. Indeed, this broadcast inflamed resentment at

¹ ACLED is publicly available from acleddata.com.

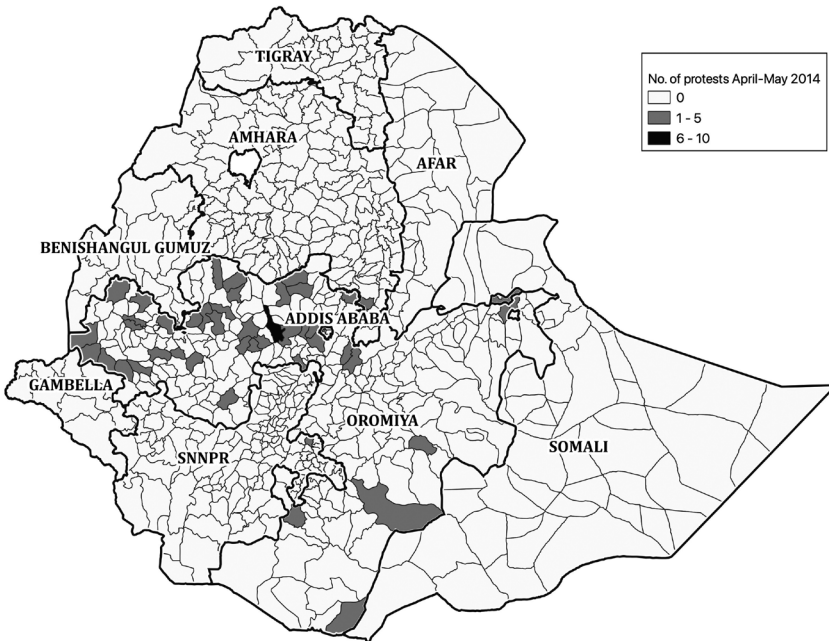


Figure 10.1 Map of 2014 protests

Note: data include all events coded as protests, riots and violence against civilians.

Source: author, based on ACLED.

land expropriations for urban expansion and agricultural investments, and entrenched the perception that the federal government was driving the expansion of Addis Ababa and the expropriation of Oromo land. Over the following two months, protests swept across western Oromiya, particularly focused on Ambo in West Shewa, and Wellega, although a scattering of protests were held across the region (see [Figure 10.1](#)). The security forces violently suppressed demonstrations, with ACLED documenting 52 deaths, and succeeded in putting an end to the protests by the end of May.

There was a distinct absence of protests during the following 18 months due to the heavy-handed initial response and the stringent measures taken to maintain political order and secure a sweeping victory in the May 2015 federal elections (see [Figure 10.2](#)). The narrative that the elections signalled mass EPRDF support was shattered, however, by a much larger wave of protests that swept across the region from 19 November 2015. This second phase began in the town of Ginchi

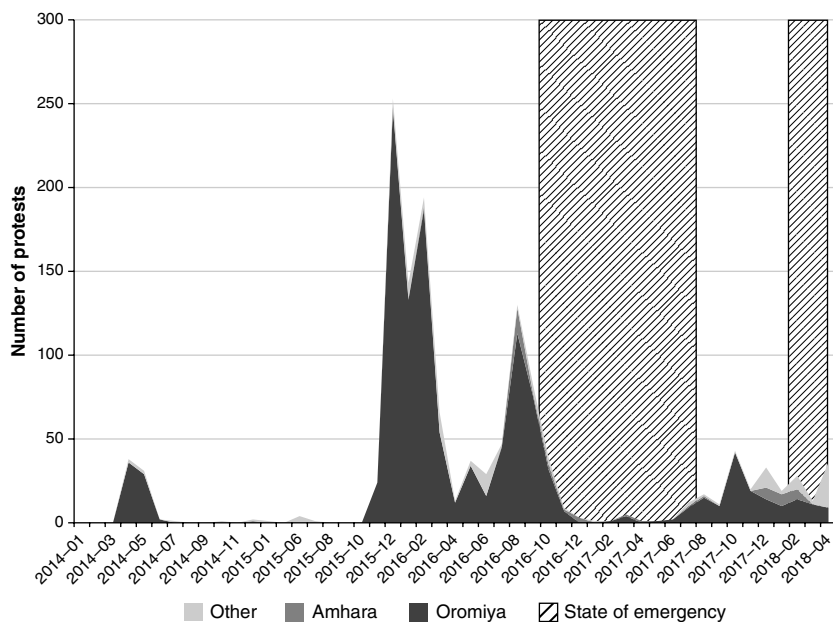


Figure 10.2 Trend in protests over time

in West Shewa, where the local population protested government plans to expropriate a football pitch and forested area for a new investment project (Fasil and Lemma 2015, Burke 2017). While resistance to the Addis Ababa Masterplan was initially a key rallying point, protestors' demands quickly evolved, with the result that very soon the motivation, according to one protestor, was 'no longer the Addis Abeba Master Plan, but "a better opportunity for all of them"' (cited in Fasil and Lemma 2015). Thanks to the rapid broadening of protestors' demands, the government's decision to withdraw the masterplan in mid-January 2016 did little to restore order, with protests continuing for several months.

The 2014 and 2015–2016 protests were largely peaceful demonstrations and particularly focused on universities and high schools. ACLED suggest that only a small proportion of demonstrations turned to violence, with rioters targeting government offices, businesses owned by the TPLF-affiliated EFFORT and, in December 2015, two Dutch-owned flower farms (Figures 10.3 and 10.4). However, peaceful protests were met with a violent response from the security forces, resulting in approximately 400 deaths by the end of March 2016 according to ACLED. Once again, the heavy-handed response ultimately contributed to a decline in protests, although this was only a temporary lull.

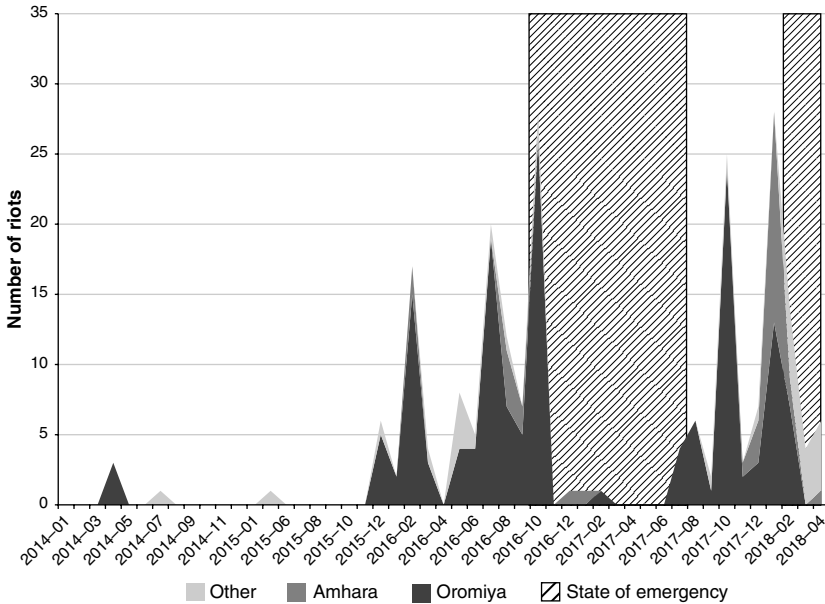


Figure 10.3 Trend in riots over time

Protests reached another peak in the second half of 2016. The main focus of the protest movement remained Oromiya, with the Grand Oromo Protest on the 6 August 2016 constituting the biggest single day of action. Moreover, this region-wide protest signalled the protesters' ability to coordinate action rather than just carrying out spontaneous, locally organised protests. However, the crisis deepened at this time with the spread of protests to the second most populous region, Amhara.² Protests began on the 31 July in Gondar, primarily focused on the contested territory of Western Tigray. This area had, for much of recent history, been administered from Gondar as part of Begemder Province, but was placed in Tigray under the federal system due to its predominately Tigrigna-speaking population. Many Amhara claim the area as an integral part of Amhara and believe that the TPLF artificially changed the ethnic balance of the area through the promotion of agricultural investments since the 1990s and resettlement in the mid-2000s (see Chapter 5). The contested status of the territory was an important issue

² ACLED documents a few previous protests in Amhara, but primarily undertaken by Oromo students studying in the region. Sporadic protests on a much smaller scale spread to SNNPR, Somali and Tigray in December 2015.

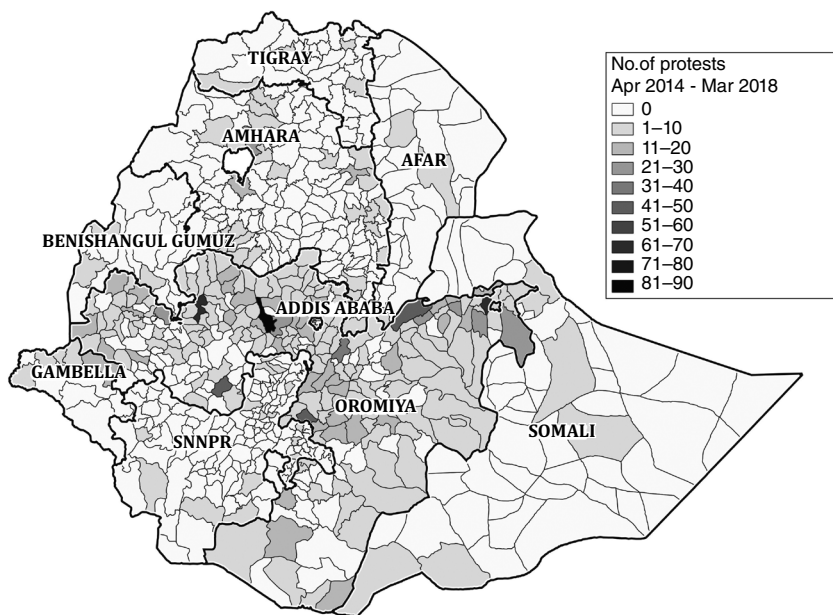


Figure 10.4 Map of 2014–2018 protests

Note: data include all events coded as protests, riots and violence against civilians.

Source: author, based on ACLED.

in the 2005 elections and the Welkait Identity and Self-Determination Committee subsequently formed to demand a referendum on three wereda: Tselemt, Tsegede and Welkait.³ The arrest of the committee's leaders sparked protests first in Gondar and subsequently the regional capital, Bahir Dar, and North Wello.

Protests reached another peak in October 2016, following the Irreecha festival that took place on the 2 October. Irreecha is a traditional thanksgiving festival led by the Aba Gadaa and celebrated in Bishoftu which had become an increasingly politically contested terrain in the preceding years (Debele 2019). The Mecha and Tulema Association promoted Irreecha as unifying symbol for the Oromo people and a celebration of the Oromo traditional religion (*Waaqqeffana*). When Mecha and Tulema was banned in 2004 for its role in protests against the relocation of the

³ Similar demands were subsequently made regarding Raya in southern Tigray. As with many border areas, however, the complex ethno-linguistic history of Raya constitutes 'a category error' that defies the simplistic classification required by ethno-linguistic federalism (Weldemariam 2019).

regional capital to Adama, the Oromiya Regional Bureau of Culture and Tourism took over festival organisation. The Bureau of Culture and Tourism used its authority over the Aba Gadaa to promote a managed form of Oromo ethno-nationalism and to use the event to laud the regime's developmental achievements (Debele 2019).⁴ In 2016, protestors used the large-scale gathering to chant anti-government slogans and security officials caused a stampede in which some 100 people died when they attempted to disperse the crowd with tear gas and, according to some claims, live ammunition (Burke 2017).

Outrage at the Irreecha tragedy led to a break from peaceful protests, with diaspora leaders calling for 'five days of rage' through attacks on government offices and investment projects (Allo 2018, p. 38, Debele 2019). Amongst others, rioters attacked textile and juice factories, flower farms and tourist lodges across Oromiya (Maasho 2016), as well as the Wenji-Shoa Sugar plantation, discussed in Chapters 5 and 6.⁵ In attacking these projects, protestors did not just target symbols of the 'developmental state', but also sought to deter foreign investors and thereby increase the economic pressure on the government. Protestors also targeted local state officials and their offices. The period from 2015 to 2018 was described by the chairman of Dhenkore Dhenku kebele, where land was expropriated for Adama Industrial Park and other infrastructure projects (see Chapter 7), as 'a time of wild fire' in which youth protestors burned down the Farmer Training Centre and the health post. Indeed, the situation was so bad that for three years the kebele administration 'feared to enter the kebele during the day', instead resorting to night-time raids to arrest suspected protestors.⁶

With the situation rapidly deteriorating the Federal Government declared a State of Emergency in October for six months, which was subsequently extended for a further four months, finally ending on 4 August 2017. The State of Emergency created a Command Post which took control of all federal and regional security forces, and the authority to ban all public demonstrations, shut down communications, arrest individuals without warrant, impose curfews and reorganise state administrations. This State of Emergency resulted in a sharp reduction in protests and riots, and brought back some degree of stability (Figures 10.2 and 10.3).

⁴ The role of the Bureau of Culture and Tourism in overseeing the Aba Gadaa and customary law was discussed in Chapter 9.

⁵ Interviews WK7, Manager, Awash Bisholla kebele, October 2018; OAK2, chairman, Dhenkore Dhenku kebele, Adama, 30 October 2018.

⁶ Interviews OAK1, Aba Gadaa, Adama, 6 November 2018; OAK2, chairman, Dhenkore Dhenku kebele, Adama, 30 October 2018.

During this period, a new challenge emerged, however, with the outbreak of widespread violence around the long disputed Oromiya–Somali border. As in many other places, the complexities and fluidity of ethnic identity and the mobility of pastoralists constitute a poor fit for the rigid territorial principles of ethnic federalism. Referenda were held in 2004 in 422 kebele along the border with 323 kebele opting to join Oromiya, including many that had previously been in Somali region (Adugna 2011, Kefale 2013). From early 2017, the Somali regional government seized on instability in Oromiya to attack the Oromo population in these areas, resulting in many deaths and the displacement of hundreds of thousands of people. For this purpose, the Somali regional government used its Liyu police force that had been built up over the previous decade with federal support to carry out a counter-insurgency campaign against the ONLF. Consequently, many Oromo suspected that the TPLF-dominated military leadership was using the Liyu police to attack the Oromo (e.g. Has-sen Hussein 2017, Lefort 2017).

Even before the State of Emergency ended, further protests broke out in June and July 2017, triggered by government actions that seem particularly obtuse in light of the precarious stability. In June 2017, the Oromiya regional government implemented a change in the order of the letters in the Afaan Oromo alphabet (*qubee*) taught in schools without any consultation with Oromo society (OPride Staff 2017). Based on a decision taken more than a year before, the move symbolised the EPRDF's standard top-down practice and triggered further protests in Ambo. Shortly afterwards, the government created further resentment when it imposed major tax increases on small businesses resulting in protests during July and August across Addis Ababa and Oromiya, ultimately forcing the government to scrap its plans (Abera 2017, Davison 2017). Moreover, the end of the State of Emergency in early August 2017 almost immediately led to a resurgence of protests and riots across Oromiya and Amhara. In particular, a five-day strike called by the opposition Oromo Federalist Congress (OFC) on 23–27 August 2017 brought the region to a standstill and blocked all roads into Addis Ababa.

Initial protests in 2014 and 2015 were dominated by students. However, as the movement gathered pace, the protests drew in a broader range of young people, both those in and out of education and particularly the unemployed (Abebe 2020). The main actors in the protests came to be known as the *qeerroo*, an Afaan Oromo term meaning an unmarried young man, approximately 20–36 (Østebø 2020b, discussed in more detail below). While young men were at the forefront, young women – known as *qarree* – also actively participated (Debele 2019). Though some people of all ages participated in the protests, the driving

force of the movement was undoubtedly the youth population, in particular, the generation of young people that had slipped through the net of the EPRDF's strategy of enmeshment as a result of the acute shortage of land and employment.

The government's response to this deepening crisis sought to employ a similar combination of internal reform, coercion and distribution that had achieved political stability and economic growth following the 'Armageddons' of the early 2000s. The government's initial response was to cast the protestors as 'an organized and armed terrorist force' financed by Egypt and Eritrea (Getachew Reda, Minister of Communication, cited in [HRW 2015](#), [France 24 2016](#)). This 'terrorist' threat was, in turn, used to justify violence and mass repression of largely peaceful protests. Police also arrested the leadership of the OFC, one of the few political parties that had continued to engage in the stacked electoral process. The government limited protestors' ability to coordinate their activities, shutting down internet and phone services, which remained under the exclusive control of the state Ethiopian Telecommunications Corporation.

The TPLF's old guard had conducted a study tour in 2014 in rural Tigray, which highlighted widespread grievances amongst the population. Consequently, this group proposed a 'Deep Renewal' of the EPRDF – mimicking the *tehadso* carried out in the early 2000s – to root out corruption and improve party discipline ([Lefort 2015](#)). Deep Renewal was announced at the EPRDF Congress in August 2015 ([Berhane 2016](#)) and government officials frequently admitted the failings of the party, including corruption, along with promises of reform (Getachew Reda, in [EBC 2016](#)). Protests in November 2015 gave added impetus to Deep Renewal. However, from the outside at least, the resulting changes in the federal government appeared modest. More substantive was the removal of the OPDO leadership in October 2016 and the installation of apparent reformists Lemma Megersa as President and Abiy Ahmed as his deputy.

The government also expanded forms of mass distribution that fit the EPRDF's productivist ideology in an attempt to repair the holes in its strategy of enmeshment. As discussed in [Chapter 8](#), the Urban Productive Safety Net Programme, though initiated in response to earlier inflation, finally began implementation in 2015/16, as the protests exploded. The Ministry of Urban Development responsible immediately formulated proposals for a large-scale expansion of the UPSNP in direct response to the expanding protests. The government also sought to extend its support for MSEs that had formed the bedrock of its support for young people lacking access to land and employment. The 2017 budget announced a Youth Revolving Fund in which the Commercial

Bank of Ethiopia would provide 10 billion *birr* to be distributed through the party-affiliated microfinance institutions. Given the political importance of the Fund, the supposedly independent microfinance institutions came under strong political pressure to issue low interest loans, regardless of the technical criteria used to assess borrowers' credit-worthiness.⁷ Among those who received loans were twenty-five *qeerroo* organisers in Adama who had been imprisoned for their role in the protests and were immediately given one million *birr* on their release to start a cattle-fattening business.⁸ Moreover, the criteria for distributing funds were shaped by political pressures. For example, Dodota wereda, which had been comparatively peaceful, received only 4.6 million *birr* to distribute to youth in the *wereda* whereas neighbouring Robe *wereda*, where the protests had been particularly destructive, targeting banks and government offices, received 15 million *birr*. The unfortunate lesson drawn by *qeerroo* in Dodota was that 'the more violent you are the higher the budget you will get'.⁹

The government also sought to address the grievances related to land administration, which had provoked the initial protests. In late 2016, the federal Agricultural Investment Land Administration Agency (AILAA), created to centralise control over large-scale and foreign agricultural investments, was disbanded and the authority to allocate land to investors was returned to regional administrations. The new Oromiya regional government also cancelled hundreds of underperforming land leases and redistributed some land to groups of young people (Fekade and Lemma 2018). Furthermore, in October 2017, Prime Minister Hailemariam Dessalegn established the National Integrated Land Use Policy Directorate under the Prime Minister's Office. This Directorate was given three years to propose an organisational structure for land administration and to formulate a National Land Use Policy to guide city expansion and industrial zoning, amongst other land uses.¹⁰

On this occasion, however, the combination of coercion and distribution was unable to stem the tide of resistance. Protests and riots continued, finally forcing the EPRDF into more substantive reforms. On the 15 January 2018, the government announced the release of some 6,000 political prisoners, including the OFC leadership, to great public celebration. By this time, however, anything less than regime change was

⁷ Interview ARG10, senior official, Amhara Credit and Savings Institute (ACSI), Bahir Dar, 31 October 2018.

⁸ Interview OAK2, chairman, Dhenkore Dhenku kebele, Adama, 30 October 2018.

⁹ Interview WW6, Micro and Small Enterprises Manager, Dodota wereda, October 2018.

¹⁰ Interview EG46, senior official, National Integrated Land Use Policy office, Ministry of Environment, 30 October 2018.

insufficient to satisfy protestors. A series of protests across Oromiya and in the periphery of Addis Ababa effectively blockaded the capital from 12–13 February, and two days later, Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn resigned as Prime Minister and EPRDF chair, triggering a leadership contest that was eventually won by the OPDO's Abiy Ahmed, who took office as prime minister on the 2 April.

Abiy's ascent to the premiership constitutes the beginning of the end of the EPRDF's authoritarian state-led development project that originated in the TPLF's revolutionary struggle. Abiy's selection symbolised the TPLF's loss of power within the ruling coalition and the ascent of a different EPRDF faction without ties to the revolutionary movement. The EPRDF leader was selected by the EPRDF Council in which each of the four parties had equal vote shares. The key question was whether the EPRDF would select a new leader from long-standing senior party figures – most likely Demeke Mekonnen of ANDM or Shiferaw Shigute of SEPDM – or from the reformist OPDO. Lemma Megersa, Oromiya president and the most popular Oromo politician, stood aside since he was not a member of parliament, paving the way for his deputy Abiy Ahmed. Though the votes in the leadership contest were not made public, the TPLF was widely believed to have opposed the OPDO leadership, instead nominating Demeke. However, Demeke refused the nomination, opting to remain deputy Prime Minister and throwing his support behind Abiy Ahmed. The result was that the TPLF and some SEPDM officials supported Shiferaw Shigute but Abiy Ahmed won comfortably based on the support of the OPDO, ANDM and many in SEPDM (Fekade and Lemma 2018, Fisher and Gebrewahd 2018). As discussed in Chapter 11, Abiy's subsequent premiership saw the TPLF steadily marginalised within the federal government, while the new administration, with strong support of western donors, announced a series of reforms to liberalise the economy, marking a break from the EPRDF's 'developmental state'.

Explaining Mass Protests and the Collapse of the EPRDF

The protest movement that ultimately led to the EPRDF's collapse was the result of multiple, intersecting processes. The argument put forward here is that the key factors were the mass distributive crisis that meant large numbers of young adults escaped the EPRDF's strategy of enmeshment; the fragmentation of the ruling elite, at least partly the result of a divided response to mass protests; and the federal system and the politicisation of ethnicity, which shaped the form of both mass protests and elite factionalism. Each of these is considered in turn.

Distributive Crisis and Mass Protests

The argument put forward in the preceding chapters is that the failings of the government's development strategy in the context of rapid population growth eroded the strategy of coercive distribution that the EPRDF had used to maintain political order. When the EPRDF came to power, it sought to secure popular acquiescence through a strategy of coercive distribution that established direct ties of dependence with individual households. Initially, distribution focused on state-owned land and agricultural inputs. From an early stage, the government recognised that rapid population growth would inevitably erode the effectiveness of this political strategy. ADLI was therefore framed as a race against population growth to achieve structural transformation, utilising an agrarian surplus to finance industrial employment creation that would absorb rural surplus labour and thereby replace access to land as the key distributive resource. ADLI would therefore combine productivity growth, improving livelihoods and equality in the short-term, and structural transformation and the maintenance of political order in the long run.

The political crises of the early 2000s highlighted ADLI's limitations and forced a re-think in the government's strategy. As part of the 'developmental state', there was a shift in agricultural policy, which increasingly prioritised productivity growth and commercialisation over equality. While government statistics show a sharp subsequent rise in agricultural productivity, the individualisation of land tenure that sought to promote agricultural productivity effectively excluded a generation of young adults from access to an agricultural livelihood – previously the key form of distribution. Alongside population growth – the main cause of land shortages – key projects of the 'developmental state' that sought to accelerate economic growth through the promotion of agricultural and industrial investments, infrastructure projects and urban expansion enhanced competition for land, expropriating existing landholders with minimal compensation. In contrast to ADLI, which sought to protect the peasantry from displacement, the 'developmental state' necessitated the exit of large numbers of people from the agricultural sector in order to raise productivity.

The incorporation of this surplus labour through industrial employment creation was therefore a political imperative. Industrial policy focused first on domestic capitalists and, subsequently, foreign investment in state industrial parks, yet delivered mixed results. On the one hand, the government delivered rapid and sustained economic growth over a period of more than a decade and this growth translated into major improvements in almost all social indicators. On the other hand,

however, the strategy, in the context of rapid population growth and the constraints of the global economy, resulted in a growing distributive crisis along generational lines, with large numbers of increasingly well-educated young people lacking access to land and a realistic possibility of an agricultural livelihood, but also lacking off-farm employment opportunities in line with rising expectations. As shown in [Chapter 8](#), a combination of ideological resistance to ‘welfare dependency’ and resource constraints meant that the government remained committed to the belief that the only solution was labour-intensive growth, with more direct forms of distribution, such as social transfers, woefully insufficient to address the growing crisis. The result was that the government’s strategy of coercive distribution had less and less to offer a generation of educated young adults with rising aspirations. The hole in the government’s strategy of enmeshment was all the more visible in Oromiya, where the OPDO had long lacked local legitimacy and party discipline.

The results of this distributive crisis are best demonstrated by a series of ethnographic studies focused on young adults and children. A consistent theme of the work of [Abebe \(2020\)](#), [Mains \(2012\)](#) and [Di Nunzio \(2019\)](#) carried out in different parts of Oromiya and Addis Ababa is the resentment, despair and frustration of young people – particularly young men – bypassed by rapid growth and lacking opportunities either in agriculture or beyond. In this regard, there is a clear resonance with [Gurr’s \(1970\)](#) theory of relative deprivation, in which the gap between people’s expectations and the state’s ability to meet those expectations is proposed as a central driver of rebellion. In Ethiopia, rising educational attainment led to the expectation of improved economic opportunities, yet for too many the ‘developmental state’ failed to deliver. This distributive crisis translated into a major political crisis in part because the government had so visibly taken responsibility for the distribution of land, jobs and most other services as part of its strategy of coercive distribution. Consequently, the inability to provide access to land and jobs was a deeply political issue that inevitably led to resentment of the party-state that had failed to deliver.

A number of observers have pointed to state expropriation of small-holders to make way for agricultural investments, urban expansion and infrastructure development as major causes of the protests ([Rahmato 2019](#)). While the injustice of displacement was undoubtedly an important spark for the protests, state expropriation was by no means the main cause of the distributive crisis. Rather, land expropriation was just the most visible expression of the inequality and injustice of the ‘developmental state’. The rapid spread of protests across Oromiya and elsewhere, however, clearly show that additional factors – beyond the grievances related to individual investments or infrastructure projects – drove the

broad spread of resistance. Indeed, throughout this period access to land and employment remained central themes of the protest movement, with slogans such as *'lafti keenya lafee keenya'* (our lands are our bones) a regular chant of protestors (Abebe 2020, p. 9). Moreover, for the most part, it was not expropriated middle-aged farmers that drove the protests, but rather their children and a generation of young, relatively well-educated adults with few economic opportunities in agriculture or outside who had escaped the EPRDF's enmeshment.

*Elite Fragmentation and Collapse of
Party-State Infrastructural Power*

Existing theory clearly shows that while mass protests grab the headlines, regime collapse requires not just mass opposition, but also elite divisions. These divisions erode the state's ability to provide a coordinated response and raise the possibility that elite factions might align with protestors to support regime change (Skocpol 1979, O'Donnell et al. 1986, Haggard and Kaufman 1997, Geddes 1999, Brownlee 2007, Levitsky and Way 2010, Slater 2010). This general point is evident in the EPRDF's collapse and the contrasting response to anti-government protests in 2005 and 2014–2018. As discussed in Chapter 4, the 2001 TPLF split centralised power around Meles Zenawi who installed regional leaders that depended on him for their power. The result was that the food crisis and urban protests in 2002–2005 were collective threats to the political elite that necessitated a coherent and decisive response. In sharp contrast, mass protests from 2014 intensified emerging divisions within the ruling elite, undermining the government's response to the crisis and leading, ultimately, to a catastrophic fallout between contending factions.

The EPRDF had always been a somewhat unstable coalition of a revolutionary party – the TPLF – characterised by strong ideological commitment and party discipline, and a collection of fragmented parties formed by creating or co-opting ethnic leaders. Elite cohesion was maintained after 2001 not through party institutionalisation, but Meles' centralisation of power. Leadership succession and generational turnover is invariably a key test of organisational strength (Huntington 1968, Brownlee 2007, Geddes et al. 2018). Indeed, for the EPRDF Meles' 2012 death presented a fundamental challenge. Prior to his death, Meles had begun a process of generational change in the EPRDF leadership with key figures from the civil war and founding leaders of many parties retiring to make way for a new generation. Foremost amongst this new set of leaders was Hailemariam Dessalegn, Meles' apparent chosen successor. A number of key figures retired in this period including Seyoum Mesfin and Abay Tsehaye, founding members of the TPLF,

Addisu Legesse and Tefera Walwa from ANDM, and Girma Birru and Shiferaw Jarso of the OPDO. Moreover, the remainder of the founding generation, including Meles, was expected to stand down before 2015.

Long-standing tensions regarding the subordination of non-TPLF parties within the coalition and this generational turnover became increasingly apparent following Meles Zenawi's death. An immediate succession struggle was avoided by installing Hailemariam Dessalegn as Prime Minister. Hailemariam, from the small Wolayita ethnic group, a minority protestant denomination, and the fragmented and weak SEPDM, was a compromise candidate between the increasingly assertive ANDM and OPDO, and the once dominant TPLF. However, the compromise undermined elite cohesion and federal authority, with regional administrations acting increasingly autonomously. Indeed, this weakness was acknowledged by Hailemariam soon after leaving office,

Since Meles, there has been a fierce power struggle within the party which I was able to navigate through, as I was considered a neutral person – between those who considered the TPLF to be the dominant party and those in the other three parties which wanted to end this dominance. (Hailemariam, cited in Mills 2018)¹¹

The growing power struggle within the coalition was not just between parties, however, but also a generational division between the old guard and a younger generation (Lefort 2012b, Saaddo 2016, Fisher and Gebrewahd 2018). Despite the plan for generational change, most political leaders and economic advisors from the past two decades remained in influential advisory or party leadership positions. Again, this point was clearly acknowledged, in retrospect, by Hailemariam,

Younger leaders, including myself, interpreted this [Meles' plan] as being the need for older leaders to give over power. This created a clash with the older guys, who were communist-minded, in both ideological and generational terms. This caused instability in the party as we tried to reduce the influence of the old guard, who were particularly influential in the TPLF [and] ANDM. (Hailemariam, cited in Mills 2018)

These divisions forced a return to the collective leadership that had prevailed before Meles' centralisation of power in 2001, as well as a considerable slowdown in decision making in the federal government and growing regional autonomy (Lefort 2014). However, tensions did not lead to a breakdown of the ruling coalition until mass protests magnified these emerging divisions.

¹¹ The context of the interview is important since Hailemariam has sought to downplay his role in the violent suppression of protests, implying that this was driven by the TPLF-dominated security services.

The first clear indication of problems came at the presentation of the Addis Ababa masterplan in 2014. The masterplan was jointly approved by the Oromiya regional government and the Addis Ababa administration, and contained forwards written by Oromiya regional president and OPDO chairman, Alemayehu Atomsa, and the Oromo Mayor of Addis, Kuma Demeksa, the original leader of the OPDO. The planning process also reportedly had the support of senior OPDO figures such as Abdulaziz Mohammed, deputy regional president and Aster Mamo, deputy prime minister (Weldegebrael 2014). Yet, the presentation of the plan to OPDO officials in Adama in April 2014 was vigorously resisted by the rank and file (Yibeltal 2014). Takele Uma, then head of the regional Land Administration, was broadcast on Oromiya Regional television criticising the plan in a remarkable break from the principles of democratic centralism that should ensure party discipline,

The issue of Addis Ababa and surrounding Oromia region is not a question of towns; it is a question of identity. When we speak of identity, there are fundamental steps we ought to take to ensure that the plan would incorporate and develop the surrounding towns while also protecting Oromo's economic, political, and historical rights ... We don't want a city that pushes out farmers and their children but one that accepts and develops with them ... more importantly, we don't want a master plan developed by one party and pushed down our throats. (Takele, as cited in Hassen and Ademo 2017)¹²

However, senior OPDO officials did not immediately seize on this resistance from within the party and the initial mass protests that followed. Rather, expanding protests magnified existing fractures in the OPDO and EPRDF, undermining the government's response and ultimately leading to a major internal power struggle. As the protests spread and intensified, they contributed first to leadership change within the OPDO and the collapse of the party-state infrastructural power that was vital to the maintenance of political order. OPDO and ANDM leaders subsequently encouraged protestors, attempting to ride the wave of protests in order to challenge TPLF supremacy.

These changes are most evident in the OPDO, which in October 2016 was forced into a change in leadership in which the old guard – widely seen as subservient to the EPRDF and lacking local legitimacy – was replaced by a younger generation resistant to the masterplan and demanding a stronger role in the EPRDF. An important theme of the early protests focused on the OPDO's illegitimacy, subservience and corruption (Yibeltal and Waldyes 2016). Indeed, the leadership change

¹² Takele had previously been major of Sululta, one of the towns directly affected by the plan and was subsequently appointed mayor of Addis Ababa in July 2018.

was regarded as the first time that the OPDO had itself initiated leadership change, rather than at the EPRDF's instruction (Fekade and Lemma 2018). Regional President, Muktar Kedir,¹³ and deputy, Aster Mamo, were replaced with Lemma Megersa and Abiy Ahmed. Both Lemma and Abiy were long-standing OPDO members and, in Abiy's case, had held senior positions within the security services. Nonetheless, Team Lemma – as the duo and colleagues became known – rose to prominence due to their stated opposition to the masterplan and support of the protestors' demands. For example, in November 2015, when Speaker of the Oromiya parliament, Lemma stated that,

As for the Integrated Addis Ababa Master Plan, even if it is for the benefit of the Oromo people; even if it were to pour gold on us, it will not be implemented if rejected by the public; it will not be implemented. (Lemma, cited in OPride 2017)

This rhetoric continued once Lemma took office, with frequent statements expressing solidarity with the protestors and, at times, opposition to the federal government and, implicitly, TPLF dominance.

Why persist with costly street protests when we have made your demands our own? If we failed to deliver using existing legal and institutional mechanisms, I and all of us here will join you in the protests. (Lemma, cited in Hassen and Ademo 2017)

I took the oath of office to serve my people not shadowy elements hiding behind the cover of strict adherence to party dogma. (Lemma, cited in OPride 2017)

Lemma and the new leadership achieved a remarkably rapid turnaround in popular perceptions of the OPDO, from illegitimate and corrupt to being a legitimate voice of Oromo opposition (Hassen and Ademo 2017).¹⁴ A less dramatic but nonetheless important shift in the ANDM leadership also took place in the years after Meles' death. From 2008 onwards, key leaders such as Addisu Legesse, Tefera Walwa and Bereket Simon retired or moved out of formal positions of power. This enabled the rise of a new generation that was more assertive and resistant to what many Amhara consider to be the EPRDF's frequent attempts to scapegoat Amhara chauvinism for all of Ethiopia's failings.

There are strong indications that from at least 2016 onwards, some senior OPDO and ANDM leaders fuelled the expanding protests. According to Juneydi Saaddo, a former President of Oromiya (2001–2005), senior members of the ODPO and ANDM 'started actively

¹³ Previous president Alemayehu Atomsa passed away in 2014.

¹⁴ One diaspora Oromo website named Lemma runner up in the Oromo Person of the Year awards for 2017 (OPride 2017).

colluding with opposition parties and activists' (Saaddo 2016), while a document presented to the National Security Council in November 2017 acknowledged the role of unspecified members of the ruling party in stoking protests (Addisstandard 2017). More specifically, ANDM leaders were directly implicated in the August 2016 Welkait protests (Davison 2016, Lefort 2016).

These divisions presented a challenge to the security services' ability to suppress the protests. Regional police are required to speak Afaan Oromo and are therefore almost exclusively Oromo. In contrast, federal police are required to speak Amharic and are recruited nationally, making them largely non-Oromo. Federal police can be sent to a region when a situation exceeds the regional police's capacity and on request by regional authorities (Arriola 2013). Regional police attended to the initial protests, but as protests spread and the federal government sought to crack down in December 2015, it drafted in the federal police, military and even apparently the Somali Liyu police in parts of eastern Oromiya (HRW 2016). The post-2016 OPDO leadership took an explicit stand against federal intervention, attempting to prosecute members of the federal armed forces that had killed peaceful protestors and, in December 2017, rejecting the federal intervention that had not been requested by the regional government (OPride 2017).¹⁵

Factional struggles and leadership change in the OPDO also accelerated the collapse of party-state infrastructural power after 2015, weakening structures which already had limited influence over younger generations. Respondents in Kuyyu and Merti reported a sharp decline in the development teams and system of performance evaluation from 2015. Respondents across state levels from the regional government to the kebele also noted a sharp decline in the pressure from higher levels of the party-state – distracted by elite political wrangling and leadership change – to mobilise the population. As one regional government official noted in early 2018,

At the moment there are big challenges. The instability, it holds your attention, it is hard to focus on development.¹⁶

The result in the research sites was a significant reduction in what had been regular performance evaluations or *gim gema* for kebele officials

¹⁵ A similar pattern appears to have occurred in 2014–2018 to the one highlighted by Arriola (2013) regarding the 2005 electoral protests, where regional forces were associated with less violence than the federal forces. According to Arriola, federal intervention was more likely to spiral out of control, leading to greater casualties, due largely to miscommunication.

¹⁶ Interview ORG1, senior official, Oromiya Regional Government, Addis Ababa, 11 June 2018.

and sub-kebele organisations.¹⁷ Moreover, there was no attempt to conduct the annual assessment of model farmers or households for several years,¹⁸ while there was no hint of the democratic centralism and discipline that previously underpinned the development team structures,

Nothing happens to anyone who does not follow the messages that come from 1-to-5 groups. If you like you apply it if you don't like you can leave it. It is a voluntary.¹⁹

Moreover, local leaders and the general population were inspired by the protests and the new OPDO leadership to refuse to acquiesce to the demands made by the party-state hierarchy. Several health extension workers, for example, took the previously unthinkable action of cancelling their OPDO membership.²⁰ Indeed, one male development team leader argued,

Previously if you speak or criticise the government you will be labelled as OLF and you might end up in prison. So people were living in fear. But after Lemma became president that fear was broken.²¹

According to a male focus group participant,

there is a hope these days ... Because of the change we are seeing at the top. Because of this change we do not fear to express our views and dissents anymore. Previously if you speak against the kebele cabinet they label you as OLF, they say you have 'anti-government view'. The kebele militia including this guy [pointing to one of the FGD participants] used to harass you. Now that has decreased.²²

The growing factional divisions were therefore an important additional factor in the spread of the protests from about 2016 onwards, undermining the infrastructure of party-state control, and inspiring resistance to the federal government. The growing assertiveness of ANDM and OPDO leaders ultimately led them to coordinate activities to demand change within the ruling coalition. This alliance was evident in December 2017 when the two parties announced that their MPs would boycott parliament in protest at state violence (Hassen Hussein 2017). The ANDM-OPDO alliance was also believed to have been a key factor in

¹⁷ Interviews OKK4, Development Agent, Halelo Cerri kebele, March and July 2018; OKK6, manager, Halelo Cerri kebele, March and July 2018; OMK1, Development Agent, Shamo Gado kebele, May and July 2018; OMK4, Health Extension Workers, Shamo Gado kebele, May and July 2018.

¹⁸ Interviews OKK6, manager, Halelo Cerri kebele, March and July 2018; OMK4, Health Extension Workers, Shamo Gado kebele, May and July 2018.

¹⁹ Interview OKI1, male 1-to-5 member, Halelo Cerri kebele, July 2018.

²⁰ Interview OMK4, Health Extension Workers, Shamo Gado kebele, May and July 2018.

²¹ Interview OMZ1, male Development Team leader, Shamo Gado kebele, July 2018.

²² Focus group OMF2, male residents, Shamo Gado kebele, May 2018.

forcing Hailemariam to resign and, ultimately, the selection of Abiy Ahmed as his replacement. Political parties can be effective ‘vehicles for elite collective action’ that underpin authoritarian rule (Slater 2010, p. 50). In post-Meles Ethiopia, in contrast, the EPRDF became the battleground for bitterly fought factional struggles, in which mass protests magnified emerging fractures within the ruling elite and were used by political elites as leverage to shift the balance of power in the coalition.

Federalism and the Politicisation of Ethnicity

Distributive crisis and elite fragmentation were both vital drivers of the protests and the collapse of the ruling coalition. However, the federal system and the growing politicisation of ethnicity fundamentally shaped the form that the protests and conflict took, with the protest movement and elite factionalisation organised along ethnic lines.

When the EPRDF came to power in 1991, ethnic self-identification was not ubiquitous. The TPLF and, to some degree, OLF had promoted ethno-nationalism as a means of popular mobilisation in their home regions. However, the creation of political units for ethnic self-administration and political parties to represent ethnic groups extended the principle of self-rule to many groups which had not demanded it. As one observer noted,

The Ethiopian constitution reads as if someone attempted simply to deduce the appropriate structure of the federal state from a set of first principles, in conjunction with a census of ethno-linguistic groups. One result of this is that federal autonomy has been accorded to ethnic groups that had not in fact mobilized politically for it, and indeed may not have identified themselves as ‘nations’ at all. (Kymlicka 2006, pp. 55–56)²³

Federalism was therefore not a neutral act of recognising existing ethnic groups and settlement patterns. Rather federalism took a range of social markers, notably language, and politicised them, territorialising ethnicity and making a singular ethnic identity the central reference point in individuals’ engagement with the state and access to the resources it provided. In doing so, federalism entrenched previously fluid and complex ethnic boundaries, and in some cases created ethnic divisions where none previously existed.

Wimmer’s (2018) work highlights three main factors that underpin nation-building and defuse inter-ethnic tensions. The first is rooted in histories of state formation, with common spoken and written language underpinning exchange relations between actors and groups, while

²³ This point is particularly clearly illustrated by Vaughan’s (2003) work in SNNPR.

linguistic diversity ‘slows down nation building’ (Wimmer 2018, p. 30).²⁴ Second, nation-building depends on states’ ability to provide public goods and services. Where high capacity states deliver valued services, individuals of any ethnic background are more likely to engage with the state and establish exchange relations, while in the absence of broad-based provision, ‘alliance networks will compartmentalize along ethnic divides’ (Wimmer 2018, p. 28). Finally, where voluntary organisations reach across ethnic divides before the transition to a nation state, political leaders use these networks to build a multi-ethnic political class, depoliticising ethnicity. In contrast, where elite networks form along ethnic lines, ‘political competition pitted ethnic community against each other, and ethnic identities became more politically salient than the imagined community of the nation’ (Wimmer 2018, pp. 65–66).

Ethiopia’s history of state formation, discussed in Chapter 3, provided a problematic legacy for nation-building. The Imperial conquest of southern Ethiopia in the late nineteenth century and abortive attempts at forging a unified national identity based on the Amharic language and the Orthodox Church resulted in a country with enormous linguistic diversity, and an Imperial state incapable of public goods provision. Moreover, attempts to project Imperial authority into the newly conquered south through land grants to northern settlers resulted in inter-ethnic exploitation and eliminated any possibility of multi-ethnic elite networks. However, the EPRDF’s creation of the federal system in the 1990s – inspired by Lenin and Stalin’s approach to the nationalities question in the Soviet Union – could hardly have done more to entrench ethnic divisions and undermine national unity. The move to use local languages for primary education and government administration certainly had the positive effect of expanding access to the state for the majority of non-Amharic speakers. Yet, the unfortunate result was also to entrench linguistic divisions, with even highly educated members of different ethnic groups lacking a common language.²⁵

In some respects, the EPRDF’s focus on mass distribution does resonate with the importance of public goods provision. As argued throughout this book, the EPRDF sought to tie people to the regime through the generation and distribution of key resources, from land and jobs to education and health. Despite major expansion of access, any positive effect of service delivery on national integration was muted by several

²⁴ Building on earlier work that highlights the importance of language, education and print media in the creation of ‘imagined communities’ (Anderson 1991).

²⁵ The decision to use the roman-based *qubee* alphabet rather than Amharic script for Afaan Oromo further increased linguistic divisions (Bulcha 1996).

factors, however. First, goods and services were distributed not by a neutral national authority, but through what was widely considered to be a Tigrayan-dominated federal government working through ethnically defined regional administrations. This leads to the possibility that exchange relationships are formed primarily between ethno-regional elites and their ethnic constituencies, not necessarily the federal government. Second, federalism itself raises problematic questions regarding the links between ethnicity and resource access, and thereby the rights of national citizenship. Regional borders were drawn to maximise ethnic homogeneity within regions and ethnic heterogeneity between regions to enable self-administration of an ethnic group's territory and resources. The strong implication of the federal system, therefore, is that each ethnic group has its own region and that within that region ethnic insiders have a greater claim to resources than ethnic outsiders, undermining any claims associated with Ethiopian citizenship.²⁶

The ethno-politicisation of resource access is particularly evident with respect to land. As [Boone's \(2014, p. 68\)](#) work has demonstrated, land tenure regimes define patterns of political authority, territorial jurisdiction and 'boundaries of membership in a political community' and, in doing so, shape the pattern of distributive conflicts. The result is that land tenure regimes rooted in divisions between insiders and outsiders translate into 'conflict that runs along ethnic lines' ([Boone 2014, pp. 322–323](#)). The territorial implications of federalism therefore translated into distributive conflicts being framed in ethnic, rather than class or generational terms. This process is particularly visible with respect to the inter-ethnic competition for ownership of ethnically diverse cities under federalism, discussed in [Chapter 7](#). Under federalism, protestors interpreted the state-driven expansion of multi-ethnic Addis Ababa into surrounding Oromiya as a prime example of a broader pattern of ethnic oppression rather than the outcome of population growth and urban economic development. Similarly, the expropriation of peasant farmers to make way for agricultural investments and infrastructure projects were often interpreted not in class terms, but as the actions of the TPLF-dominated federal government that exploits and marginalises ethnic insiders to the advantage of ethnic outsiders (Ethiopian or foreign). The EPRDF's reliance on party-owned, military and politically affiliated companies for this purpose inevitably heightened the sense of injustice and perception of political and ethnic favouritism. Finally, widespread land shortages under a federal

²⁶ [Eshete \(2003\)](#) and [Selassie \(2003\)](#) make similar points. The implications of federalism for land conflicts are analysed in [Lavers \(2018\)](#).

system that prioritises ethnic insiders has led to inter-ethnic conflict over territory. The most visible recent examples include disputes over Welkait and Raya between Tigray and Amhara regions, and along the Oromiya–Somali border, both of which directly contributed to the protests. In the context of federalism, therefore, resource shortages are interpreted primarily in terms of insider-outsider claims between ethnic groups, rather than demographic pressures and the demands of state-sponsored capital accumulation.

Finally, far from building new multi-ethnic organisations and networks that might de-politicise ethnicity, federalism further entrenched intra-ethnic elite networks and inter-ethnic elite divisions. Civil society – long repressed under past administrations – was constrained under the EPRDF that considered any independent organisation to be a threat to its authority. As such, the main organisation that could plausibly have provided such a unifying role was the ruling party itself. However, the EPRDF was created not as a multi-ethnic national party, but a coalition of ethnically defined parties.²⁷ Ethnic federalism provides powerful incentives for ethnic parties to adopt an ethno-nationalist message to mobilise mass support with which to contest power at the centre. Maintaining cohesion within the EPRDF coalition was always something of a challenge. However, the dominance of the TPLF in the 1990s and then Meles after 2001, and the subordination of other factions, constrained regional leaders who were expected to maintain order and implement federal plans within their regions. Over time, however, non-Tigrayan junior partners accumulated grievances, from ANDM's resentment at Amhara chauvinism being blamed for all of Ethiopia's problems to the OPDO's perception that the EPRDF represented the continuation of past oppression by northern ethnic groups, rather than real self-determination. Following Meles' death in 2012, central control weakened considerably with the result that EPRDF parties increasingly sought to build popular legitimacy through ethnic mass mobilisation, in doing so entrenching inter-ethnic divisions. The OPDO and ANDM support for popular protests from 2016 onwards was the result.

The protest movements were fundamentally shaped by the federal system and the politicisation of ethnicity. Protests began in opposition to what was perceived as the TPLF-dominated federal government's

²⁷ Samuel Huntington, in a brief report prepared for USAID and shared with the government in 1993 noted the risk of combining ethnic regions with ethnic parties that 'cumulates cleavages and can have a disastrous effect on national unity and political stability' (Huntington 1993, p. 16).

attempt to expand Addis Ababa into Oromiya and subsequently morphed into broader protests against the ethnically structured state. In such circumstances, it is unsurprising that they took the form of ethnic protests.²⁸ The protests quickly became known as the *Oromo* protests and were inseparable from the *qeerroo* and its association with Oromo nationalism. According to some accounts, at least, the *qeerroo* were cast as the youth generation of the Oromo Gadaa system (Hamza n.d.). Not only were the *qeerroo* young men, they were framed as part of the *qubee* generation, the first to be educated using the Afaan Oromo alphabet introduced to formal education in 1992 (Debele 2019, Abebe 2020). Oromo nationalist songs, such as those of Hacaalu Hundessa, moreover, quickly became the soundtrack of the protest movement.²⁹ As such, the protestors were immediately cast not just as a generation of relatively well-educated young men with rising aspirations, but also as self-identifying Oromo. Protestors were the product of the EPRDF's Ethiopia in terms of education and ethno-nationalism, yet lacking the economic opportunities that the government had promised. As the protests spread, they were primarily sparked by local, ethnically framed grievances, such as the Welkait dispute for Amhara, and entailed not the formation of a nationwide youth movement, but separate ethno-nationalist movements. Even when the *Fano* – the Amhara youth movement that drove protests there – expressed their support and solidarity with Oromo protestors in 2016, there was never any question that the two groups might merge to form a multi-ethnic movement. Instead, the aim was to coordinate distinct ethnic movements, which – temporarily – had the shared objective of overthrowing the TPLF-dominated EPRDF.

The result was that a generation of young adults with rising expectations but few economic opportunities either in agriculture or outside escaped the EPRDF's strategy of enmeshment and mobilised along ethnic lines. Within an increasingly fragmented ruling coalition, these ethnic-based protests provided a political opportunity for the previously subordinate leaders of parties representing the largest ethnic groups to displace the TPLF and claim a greater share of power within the federal government. This factionalism led to the EPRDF's collapse.

²⁸ Mamdani (1996, p. 24) makes a similar point with respect to independence movements in Africa where the 'form of rule shaped the form of revolt against it. Indirect rule at once reinforced ethnically bound institutions of control and led to their explosion from within. Ethnicity (tribalism) thus came to be simultaneously the form of colonial control over natives and the form of revolt against it'.

²⁹ Hacaalu's *Maalan Jira*, released in 2015, for example highlights the establishment and expansion of Addis Ababa on historically Oromo land and the expropriation of Oromo farmers (Abebe 2020).

Competing Theories of Protest and Regime Collapse

In order to strengthen confidence in the argument presented above, it is important to consider the strengths and limitations of alternative explanations for the EPRDF's collapse (George and Bennett 2004, Bennett and Checkel 2014). Some of these have been proposed by a growing body of work that focuses on the protests, while other possible explanations can be drawn from existing theory with potential relevance to Ethiopia. Several alternate explanations can be ruled out based on available evidence, while others, I would suggest, complement but cannot replace the argument presented above.

Research on regime transitions in general and Africa in particular highlights that economic crisis is a common cause of regime breakdown (Bratton and van de Walle 1992, Haggard and Kaufman 1997, Geddes 1999, Levitsky and Way 2010). Economic crisis prevents political elites from buying the support of key intermediaries – whether state bureaucrats, party footsoldiers or security services – resulting in the loss of state coercive powers. This hypothesis is worth considering with respect to Ethiopia given that the ‘developmental state’ model was showing signs of strain by the late 2010s. In particular, the government faced growing concern about its ability to service growing foreign debt due to poor export performance and foreign exchange shortages. Debt ballooned under the Growth and Transformation Plans as the state made vast investments in mega projects seen as essential means of accelerating structural transformation such as hydropower dams, railways, sugar factories and plantations, and industrial parks. The IMF – which had long opposed Ethiopia's state-led development strategy – raised its assessment of Ethiopia's debt risk from low to moderate in late 2015 and in October 2016 the Ministry of Finance issued a directive limiting non-concessional borrowing by state enterprises (IMF 2018). The development strategy, which by that time was focused on attracting foreign investment, was further hit by the protests, which from late 2016 targeted agricultural and industrial investment projects. As shown in Figure 10.5, the protests did break the trend of rising foreign investment in 2017 and 2018.

While the debt crisis presented an important and growing challenge to the state-led development model and the protests contributed to the growing economic problems, it would be hard to make the case that either factor was a major cause of the political crisis itself. Available data do not support the hypothesis that economic crisis resulted in an inability to pay lower-level officials. Figure 10.6 shows that government expenditure continued to rise throughout the protests. Indeed, the government ring-fenced pro-poor spending on sectors such as health,

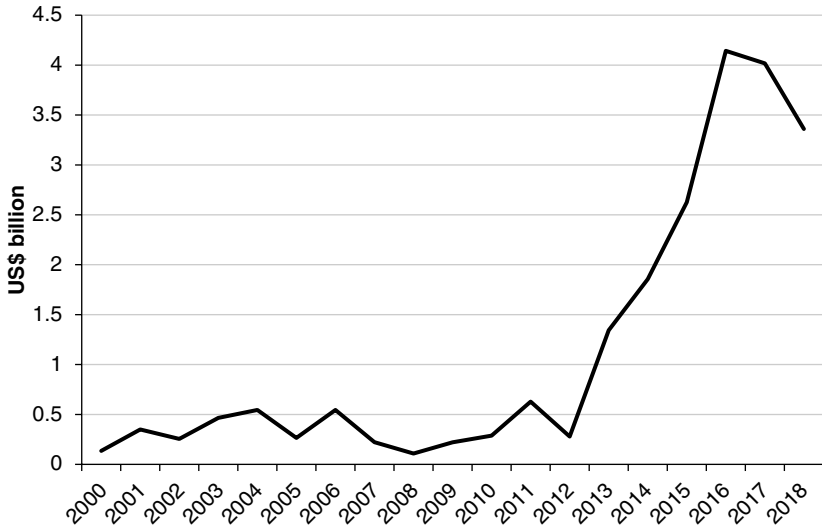


Figure 10.5 Foreign direct investment net inflows
 Source: author, based on World Bank, World Development Indicators.

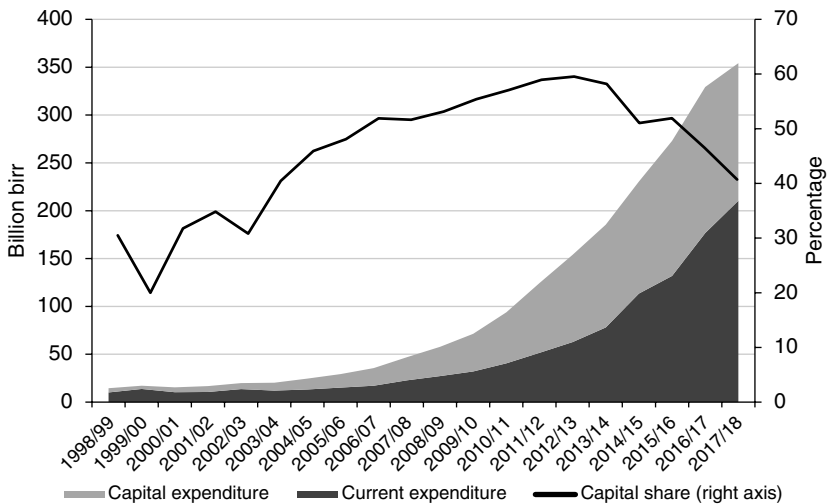


Figure 10.6 Government expenditure
 Source: author, based on NBE annual reports.

education, agriculture, roads and food security – including salaries for state officials – when it sought to limit overall spending after 2016 (Ronnås and Sarkar 2019, pp. 20–21). Moreover, attempts to placate protestors through measures such as the Youth Revolving Fund led to further spending increases through supplementary budgets (Ronnås and Sarkar 2019, p. 21). Government spending on capital investments reduced slightly as a proportion of total spending from 2013/14 and then in absolute terms in 2017/18. The result was to slow progress with some major infrastructure projects, though this seems highly unlikely to have contributed to what were by then already widespread protests.

The other major economic factor that might plausibly have contributed to the protests is inflation. Inflation certainly was a major problem, eroding real incomes for public and private sector workers, as well as many smallholder farmers who are net buyers of food. However, as shown in Figure 8.1, the main inflation peaks were in 2008 and 2011. By the outbreak of the protests in 2014–2015, inflation had stabilised at comparatively low levels. While inflation no doubt contributed to a general squeeze on livelihoods for many, on its own it does not provide a strong explanation for the 2014–2018 protests.

Another potentially useful perspective concerns social movements and, in particular, the role of technology in protest organisation. Further research is undoubtedly required to deepen the limited grey literature that has examined the *qeerroo* and other groups that led the protests (Aga 2020, Burayu 2020, Østebø 2020b). The approach taken in this book has focused on intra-elite politics and state strategies for popular incorporation, based on the argument that these factors fundamentally shaped the potential for mass mobilisation and regime breakdown. Broadly speaking, this approach aligns with research on the ‘political opportunity structures’ that shape the potential for social movements (Tarrow 1998). Nevertheless, a complete understanding of the protests requires more detailed analysis of the organisation of the *qeerroo* movement itself. The literature on social movements has focused on three main factors (Goodwin 2001, pp. 55–58). The first is the collective beliefs and identities that are used to inspire mass mobilisation, with movement leaders framing material reality as unjust and alterable, and articulating a set of shared grievances through a particular interpretation of historical events (Sewell 1985, Jasper 1997). Second, is the material resources required to sustain social movements, including money, facilities, communications and transport infrastructure (Tilly 1978, McAdam 1986, Tarrow 1998). The third factor concerns the key role of social networks in recruiting participants, and sustaining and coordinating collective action (McAdam 1986, Gould 1995).

To date, there is insufficient research on the protests to provide a full analysis of the movement in terms of these analytical categories, though a preliminary assessment of key factors can be attempted. Clearly shared beliefs and identities were an important motivation for the protestors in the face of state violence. In the context of federalism, grievances were articulated in ethno-nationalist terms. For the Oromo, this took the form of opposition to TPLF domination, which undermined meaningful ethnic self-determination, and continued more than a century of exploitation by the Ethiopian state. For the Amhara, in contrast, resistance contested the scapegoating of the Amhara for the failings of Ethiopian state-building that had been used to justify the confiscation of territory and political power.

Existing analyses are more divided when it comes to the origins and organisation of the protest movement. The protests have generally been portrayed as a spontaneous uprising, with some local organisation, but very little 'horizontal' organisation between protestors in different areas. According to this line of argument, a key role in the coordination was played by the diaspora activist, Jawar Mohammed, who utilised his satellite television station, the Oromia Media Network, and Facebook to communicate with protestors (Østebø 2020b). Ethiopian Satellite Television, associated with diaspora opposition politicians, played a similar role in the Amhara protests. When the government cut internet access, protestors resorted instead to communication through text, phone or word of mouth. A quite different view has recently been put forward by individuals who claim the Qeerroo Bilisummaa Oromoo (Youth for Oromo Freedom) organised the protests. This Qeerroo organisation was apparently established in 2011, inspired by the Arab Spring (Aga 2020, Burayu 2020). After several years building organisational networks, the protestors were able to mobilise large numbers of youth, while, they claim, Jawar Mohammed played a modest role. Depending on the assessment of these competing claims, the resources available to the social movement and, in particular, the internet, social media and satellite television, may have played a key role in the protests.

While important questions remain therefore concerning how protestors were able to mobilise and organise so effectively, such an analysis would be supplemental to the core arguments presented above. As leading social movement theorists have long argued, the key factor shaping social movements' success is the political opportunity structure, which provides signals to emergent movements regarding potential allies among the political elite and shapes the repressive capacity of the state (Tilly 1978, Tarrow 1998, Goodwin 2001). A deeper analysis of the organisation of the protests would nuance understanding of the protests,

but the key factors leading to the EPRDF's collapse remain the failings of the EPRDF's strategy of coercive distribution, the articulation of these distributive failings in terms of ethnic inequality and marginalisation, and elite fragmentation.

Conclusion

The wave of protests that swept across Ethiopia from 2014 and ultimately led to the EPRDF's collapse were the result of multiple intersecting factors. Foremost amongst these were the mass distributive crisis, primarily affecting young adults, and the fragmentation of the ruling elite, both of which were refracted through the prism of ethnic federalism. On coming to power in 1991, the EPRDF identified its lack of control over the country's ethnically diverse peasantry and rapid population growth as the main threats to its rule. This threat underpinned elite cohesion in the pursuit of a project of state-led development that promised to provide the distributive resources to secure mass acquiescence. Despite its early identification of these threats to its authority, the EPRDF ultimately proved unable to address them. Population growth outpaced government successes in promoting agricultural productivity growth and industrial employment creation, while the federal system that was intended to contain ethno-nationalism led to the politicisation of popular and elite grievances along ethnic lines. Ultimately, this led to the collapse of the ruling coalition and the end of its project of state-led development.

11 Late-Late Development and Political Order

This final chapter reflects on the broader implications of the rise and fall of the EPRDF's project of state-led development. The discussion considers, first, the legacy of the EPRDF for Ethiopian politics and development, and, second, the relevance of the Ethiopian case for the debates raised in [Chapters 1](#) and [2](#) about late-late development and authoritarian durability.

The preceding analysis traced the EPRDF's project of state-led development to, on the one hand, the formation of the Ethiopian state and the 1974 revolution, which left the legacy of a relatively powerful and autonomous state, and, on the other, the threat perceptions of the EPRDF ruling elite once in office. In particular, elite concerns about the lack of a mass base and the threat of ethno-nationalism led the EPRDF to establish an ethnic federal system to allow for ethnic self-determination and to pursue broad-based distribution in ways that tied the masses to the regime and secured their acquiescence. While the government's initial distributive focus was on land and agricultural inputs, the need for additional distributive resources was a major factor driving an evolving industrial strategy that was intended to maintain political order by generating mass employment opportunities. State-led development was therefore not just an economic strategy, but also a political strategy for maintaining power. Industrial policy failures and limited employment creation, in turn, constituted a political crisis, with large numbers of young adults escaping the government's attempts to enmesh them in relations of dependence. It is precisely these groups that mobilised along ethnic lines from 2014 onwards, protesting the injustices of the 'developmental state', leading to the fragmentation of the ruling coalition, and the collapse of the EPRDF and its project of state-led development.

The TPLF/EPRDF, along with other groups formed in the revolutionary period of the 1970s, sought to tackle two foundational issues – the land question and the national question. Despite its developmental successes, the EPRDF failed to resolve either definitively and was ultimately undone as a result. Indeed, new manifestations of these same

underlying issues continue to divide Ethiopian politics through to the post-EPRDF era. At the present time, the land question of the 1970s must be reframed in terms of the *agrarian question of labour* concerned with the creation of secure employment in sufficient numbers to meet the needs of a rapidly growing population. In the agrarian society of Imperial Ethiopia where a landed elite dominated land ownership and exploited tenants on their land, these distributive questions were understandably framed in terms of access to land. Reforms carried out by the Derg administration and the TPLF temporarily addressed this land question by providing broad-based access to the key factor of production. Yet, rapid population growth and a stalled process of structural transformation have meant growing pressure on limited land resources and a severe shortage of employment opportunities outside agriculture. The agrarian question of labour now facing Ethiopia – and many other late developing countries – is therefore how to provide decent and productive work and economic opportunities to significant sections of the population, particularly younger generations, when these are deemed surplus to the needs of capital.

The legacy of the EPRDF's failed attempt to resolve the national question is equally problematic. The national question originates in the history of state-building, the incorporation of diverse ethno-linguistic groups into Ethiopian territory and the incomplete attempt at nation-building undertaken by past regimes. Inspired by Stalin's approach to the national question, the EPRDF adopted federalism in an attempt to defuse ethno-nationalism through the provision of limited self-determination. Like in the Soviet Union, however, rather than defusing ethno-nationalist sentiment, federalism politicised ethnicity by linking access to resources and political power to ethnic affiliation. Moreover, federalism was based on a simplistic assumption that equates language, ethnicity and territory, resulting in conflict regarding, for example, the ethnic ownership of diverse urban centres, the borders between ethnic regions and the status of ethnic minorities outside their 'home' region. It is doubtful whether the EPRDF ever intended to devolve meaningful powers to regional administrations. However, the growing emphasis on state-led development after 2001 necessitated further restrictions on regional administrations, which were reduced to implementation of a federal development strategy, undermining any tenuous claims they had to representation of the ethnic group of their region. The result was that the distributive crisis and intra-elite divisions coalesced along ethnic lines. Ethno-regional political elites have mobilised their ethnic constituencies, drawing on historical grievances, inequalities and material deprivation, as a means of pursuing power nationally.

This combination of distributive crisis and ethnic politicisation was not only a major factor in the political transition in 2018, but also in the political and humanitarian crisis that has unfolded since. Far from resolving political problems, the EPRDF's collapse led to an explosion of inter-communal violence due to the loss of central control that had previously placed a lid on growing tensions. Among the numerous conflicts across the country were those: between the Guji Oromo and Gedeo (SNNPR), between the Berta, Gumuz, Amhara and Oromo ethnic groups in Benishangul-Gumuz; along the contested Oromiya-Somali border; between the Afar and Issa Somali clan; and between the Sidama and Wolayita in Hawassa. Each of these conflicts had complex, historically rooted causes. However, a common theme was conflict over territory, resources and political power, with ethno-political elites seizing opportunities to mobilise their ethnic constituencies against ethnically defined others.

This political crisis is most dramatically and tragically illustrated by the civil war that broke out in northern Ethiopia in November 2020 and which has devastated Tigray, as well as parts of Amhara and Afar regions. With the selection of Abiy Ahmed as EPRDF chairman in 2018, the TPLF leadership retreated from the federal government in Addis Ababa to Tigray to consolidate control over that region. The result was that as inter-communal conflicts spread across the country after 2018, the TPLF continued to deploy its extensive party-state infrastructural power to maintain political order in Tigray. Relations between the TPLF and Abiy Ahmed were strained from the beginning, resulting in a power struggle as Abiy and his allies in the OPDO and ANDM attempted to consolidate power, while the TPLF sought to retain regional control and the party's dominant economic position. Abiy removed the Tigrayan heads of the military and intelligence services in June 2018 (Ashine 2018), retired members of the old guard, including several Prime Ministerial advisors, and removed TPLF-allied leaders in Somali and Afar. Moreover, the leadership of MetEC – drawn from the Tigrayan-dominated military leadership – and Bereket Simon, a long time senior ANDM minister and advisor, were arrested and charged with corruption. The reform process was not just limited to political elites, however, with the new government removing Tigrayan civil servants – previously over-represented – from the federal bureaucracy (Lefort 2018). Abiy's move to consolidate power by merging the EPRDF parties into the single Prosperity Party in late 2019 marked the complete breakdown of relations with the TPLF. The TPLF refused to join a party that it considered to be a means of centralising Abiy's political power.

The following year saw the build-up of federal and regional security forces and escalating tensions between the two camps, not least over the delay to federal elections originally planned for May 2020.¹ Conflict eventually began when Tigrayan forces attacked the Ethiopian army's Northern Command near the Tigrayan capital Mekele to pre-empt what it believed was an imminent federal attack on the region. The conflict quickly drew in other protagonists, beyond the Tigrayan regional and federal forces. Most notably, this included the Eritrean military which cooperated with the Ethiopian army to settle old scores with the TPLF and the Amhara regional forces and youth movement (*Fano*) that sought to take Tigrayan territory that had long been claimed by Amhara in Welkait and Raya. As the conflict spread, other actors were pulled into the conflict, including the Oromo Liberation Army, which had returned to its own armed insurrection in Oromiya and formed an alliance with historic rivals the TPLF, while Afar regional forces collaborated with federal military to resist TPLF incursions into Afar. The conflict also took on an international dimension with regional powers such as the United Arab Emirates, Turkey, Iran, Egypt and Sudan engaging through supply of arms, or military or diplomatic support. At the time of writing in late 2022, Ethiopian and Tigrayan forces have agreed a provisional peace deal which has limited the fighting but not yet resolved the key political and territorial grievances that drove the war. Meanwhile, the conflict has had a catastrophic human cost, likely resulting in hundreds of thousands of deaths, widespread human rights abuses, including sexual violence against civilians, the destruction of infrastructure including health facilities, schools and bridges, and the return of famine to northern Ethiopia for the first time in a generation.

The outcome of the war will have vitally important implications for the future of Ethiopian politics and development. The first relates to the national question. The conflict has increasingly been framed as a battle between federalists – represented by the TPLF and OLF – and those favouring a return to a centralised state under Abiy Ahmed (Young 2021). While there are ideological differences between the two camps, the differing views of federalism result as much from divergent elite

¹ Elections were delayed to August 2020, the latest date allowed under the constitution, due to the Covid-19 pandemic. When the electoral board announced a further delay to June 2021, the Tigray government proceeded with its own regional election, despite the ballot being declared illegal by the federal House of Federation. The result was that the federal government dismissed the legitimacy of Tigrayan elections, resoundingly won by the TPLF, while the Tigray government rejected the legitimacy of a federal government whose electoral term had expired. Federal elections were eventually held in 2021, with the exception of Tigray. Reminiscent of its predecessor, the EPRDF, the Prosperity Party won 454 of 470 seats.

interests as ideological commitments. While the TPLF was instrumental in establishing federalism, as the dominant player in the EPRDF, the party routinely undermined regional autonomy by enabling federal encroachment on regional responsibilities where this was in line with political or economic priorities. The TPLF's renewed commitment to regional autonomy only came when the party was reduced to a regional administration resisting federal government intervention. Likewise, Abiy Ahmed rose up through the ranks of a subordinated OPDO into national office under the EPRDF and then rode the wave of Oromo nationalism to the premiership without any apparent objection to federalism. It is only once at the head of the federal government seeking to consolidate power and increasingly dependent on the support of Amhara nationalists that he appears to have developed a preference for a centralised state. While the war is, at root, a factional struggle between contending elites, its outcome will nonetheless have far-reaching implications for the structure of the Ethiopian state and the role of ethnicity within it.

The war likewise has important implications for national development and the distributive crisis highlighted in this book. Soon after Abiy came to office in June 2018, he announced the opening of key state enterprises, such as Ethio Telecom, Ethiopian Airlines, Ethiopian Electric Power, and the Maritime and Logistics Corporation to private investment and competition for the first time (Maasho 2018). Furthermore, large-scale financing from the World Bank, IMF and US government, required to address Ethiopia's growing debt burden, were made conditional on a series of targets related to economic liberalisation (World Bank 2018b, IMF 2019). Subsequently, the government's 2021 *Ten Year Development Plan* announced 'a gradual transition from public to private sector-led growth' with a focus on promoting macroeconomic stability (PDC 2021, p. 8).² The result is that the Prosperity Party has come to favour economic liberalisation and private sector development in sharp contrast to the EPRDF's project of state-led development.

Economic liberalisation in agriculture and manufacturing has important implications for attempts to promote structural transformation and address the distributive crisis. With respect to agriculture, a longstanding political and academic debate concerns the land question and, principally, whether land should be privatised or remain under state ownership (Rahmato 1994, 2009, Nega et al. 2002, Githinji and Gebru Mersha 2007). There have been consistent suggestions that Abiy favours land privatisation as part of

² The plan was dubbed the 'Homegrown Economic Reform' in an apparent attempt to dispel the widespread belief that the reforms were driven by foreign donors in exchange for debt relief.

a future constitutional revision.³ While privatisation would have important implications for agricultural productivity and the distribution of landholdings, a single-minded focus on privatisation neglects the reality, discussed in [Chapter 5](#), that while land access remains important, it provides a livelihood for an ever declining share of the population. Neither state ownership nor privatisation alone offers any realistic possibility of addressing the severe shortage of rural land and growing population of young adults in need of employment opportunities. Rather, the agrarian question of labour can only be addressed by situating land in the broader context of structural transformation, employment creation and social protection.

With respect to industrial policy, the new government reinforced the trend towards foreign investment promotion from the late EPRDF era, with Abiy announcing the construction of additional industrial and agro-industrial parks amid efforts to court foreign investors. In the short-to-medium term, however, industrialisation has been badly affected by, first, the Covid-19 pandemic and disruption to retail and global supply chains, and, subsequently and more significantly, the civil war. Many of the EFFORT-owned factories in Tigray were destroyed in the conflict, which shattered the perception of political stability that had been so crucial to attracting foreign investment in the first place. The main challenge, however, was the US government's decision in late 2021 to remove Ethiopia from AGOA privileges in response to human rights abuses and the catastrophic humanitarian situation ([Whitfield and Maile 2021](#)). This withdrawal undercut the business model – based on tariff free exports to the US – of many foreign investors in Ethiopia's industrial parks. The result has been the withdrawal of key firms such as PVH that was vital to the flagship Hawassa Industrial Park. At the very least, it will take years before investor confidence recovers and a foreign investment driven export oriented industrial strategy becomes feasible again.

As discussed in [Chapter 6](#), however, while there is undoubtedly potential for a dynamic manufacturing sector to employ an increased share of the labour force, the EPRDF era has shown that manufacturing alone is unlikely to resolve the country's distributive crisis. Even should investors return and fill up the existing industrial parks, it is implausible that the resulting manufacturing sector would be on a scale required to resolve the distributive crisis that grows with every passing year. In a best-case scenario an increasingly productive and dynamic agricultural sector would provide improved livelihoods for something like the 16 million households currently involved in agriculture and a revitalised manufacturing sector would create something like the two million jobs that were

³ Personal communication with a senior state official.

planned under the EPRDF. However, this would still be dwarfed by the growing population and the need for productive economic opportunities for young adults.

The EPRDF government resisted the idea that social protection could be more than a sticking plaster, providing modest levels of essential support to the poorest for a limited period of time, but ultimately destined to be eliminated as the economy grew and the poorest achieved self-reliance. The likes of South Africa, Brazil and many other Latin American countries – despite their very different histories – highlight a different potential future, however. In these countries – in the context of high land inequality and capital-intensive industry that provides relatively few employment opportunities – there has long been an implicit acceptance that labour availability exceeds the needs of capital. The result is that governments have expanded social transfers to broad sections of the population excluded from productive opportunities, using social protection as a means of maintaining political stability (Seekings and Natrass 2005, Saad-Filho 2015). EPRDF ideological commitments and resource constraints have limited the expansion of social protection, but the distributive crisis may ultimately necessitate a growing and long-term role for social protection for those surplus to the needs of capital.⁴

Overall, then, the legacy of the EPRDF era is a complex mix of rapid economic growth and improvements in infrastructure and social indicators, as well as a growing distributive crisis and the politicisation of ethnicity. The result since 2018 has been widespread political instability that is conducive neither to structural transformation nor political stability, and which threatens many of the socio-economic gains of recent decades.

The EPRDF's Ethiopia and the Politics of State-Led Development in Africa

The rise and fall of the EPRDF's state-led development model is not just of vital importance for Ethiopian politics and development, but it also raises significant questions about the drivers of and prospects for structural transformation in Africa and other late-late developing countries. The beginning of the twenty-first century has seen resurgent interest in structural transformation in Africa and the role for industrial policy. As in Ethiopia, this growing concern with industrialisation is, in part, related to

⁴ It is far from clear that the Prosperity gospel, which appears to be influential within the current government, is any more compatible with expansive social protection than the developmental ideology that preceded it.

the challenge of youth unemployment (Garcia and Fares 2008, *African Economic Outlook 2012*, Meagher 2016). While Ethiopia's experience with industrial parks has increasingly figured in these debates, there has been little attempt to analyse the political dynamics that shaped state-led development in Ethiopia and to set these in comparative context.

The first issue raised in Chapter 1 concerned the feasibility of African states pursuing authoritarian state-led development along similar lines to late developing East Asian countries. In this respect, the analysis in Chapters 3 and 4 showed that the EPRDF's pursuit of rapid development as a means of consolidating political power shares certain similarities with the likes of South Korea and Taiwan, with political centralisation and elite threat perceptions playing an important role. Inevitably, the process of state formation differed in each case. In South Korea and Taiwan, Japanese colonial rule played an important role in enhancing state capacity and establishing basic manufacturing (Kohli 2004), while political crises after the Japanese withdrawal led to further strengthening of the state and land reform that eliminated the landed elite (Vu 2010). In Ethiopia, it was the 1974 revolution that served to bureaucratise the Imperial state, as well as eliminating the landed elite through extensive land reform. In Ethiopia's case, however, the legacy of state formation was not uniformly positive: unlike in Korea and Taiwan, the post-revolutionary Ethiopian state had to wrestle with the challenge of linguistic diversity. Nonetheless, the result was that by 1991 Ethiopia had what was, in comparison with many of its African neighbours, a relatively powerful and autonomous state.

There are also certain similarities in the way in which the EPRDF, like the political elite in South Korea and Taiwan, came to see rapid and broad-based development as essential to consolidating power. South Korea and Taiwan faced both external threats from neighbouring communist regimes and severe internal threats from communist revolutionaries (Campos and Root 2001, Doner et al. 2005). Severe internal threats to the ruling elite were even more important in Malaysia, where class conflict overlapped with ethnic divisions (Slater 2010). The result in each case was that rulers pursued distributive strategies involving land redistribution and the provision of agricultural extension and social services aimed at binding the masses to the regime and denying opposition movements a political base (Albertus et al. 2018). Where distributive pressures exceeded resource availability, elites also had a strong incentive to pursue structural transformation as a means of 'growing the pie' and expanding resources available to distribute and consolidate their control (Campos and Root 2001, Doner et al. 2005). A comparable dynamic underpinned the EPRDF's push for state-led development.

The EPRDF came to power at a time when the nation-state system had greatly reduced the threat of foreign invasion.⁵ Nonetheless, the EPRDF leadership perceived ethnic and class divisions, and demographic pressures to pose a major threat to their rule. The result was a strategy that sought to enmesh large sections of the population through broad-based resource distribution, while pursuing rapid development to enable the maintenance of political order over time.

While there are certain similarities between the Ethiopian experience and that of several East Asian countries, therefore, there is a sharp contrast with the standard portrayal of African states. From this perspective, African regimes – far from centralising political power and building high capacity states – lack control over much of their territory and people, instead relying on chiefs and clan leaders to maintain political order and using state bureaucracies to distribute patronage opportunities, undermining state capacity and coherence (Evans 1995, Mamdani 1996, Herbst 2000, Kohli 2004). Explanations for this state of affairs largely focus on colonialism,⁶ which divided populations along ethnic lines and created arbitrary borders. In the absence of severe external threats or strong revolutionary movements, African rulers have often consolidated the political order left by colonial regimes, rather than pursuing political and economic transformation that might threaten their hold on power (Boone 1992, Mamdani 1996, Mkandawire 2002).

Ethiopian history is certainly unusual in comparison to other African countries, and, as argued in Chapter 1, this makes the country a leading contender for authoritarian state-led development. However, Ethiopia is not completely exceptional, as sometimes suggested. Africa is an enormously diverse continent, including in terms of the potential for states to play a role in development. While the legacy of colonialism in Africa has often been problematic for state-led development, there remains the possibility of relatively rapid state transformation in extreme circumstances of revolution and conflict, and more gradual and peaceful state-building over extended periods. Perhaps the most obvious comparison with Ethiopia is that of Rwanda, another authoritarian regime that has achieved relatively rapid developmental progress in recent decades.⁷

⁵ The conflict with Eritrea is a partial exception. However, the 1998–2000 war did not threaten Ethiopia's existence in the same way as North Korea and China threatened South Korea and Taiwan, respectively.

⁶ In contrast, Herbst (2000) and Boone (2003) – while presenting quite different theories – share the view that the limitations of African states are rooted in state–society relations rather than colonial strategies.

⁷ Other authors have made related claims about Angola's natural resource-fuelled growth (Soares de Oliveira 2015, Ovadia 2016) and even Cameroon (Khan-Mohammad and Amougou 2020), with regimes seeking legitimacy and political control through

Rwanda traces its history to a fifteenth century pre-colonial kingdom, which undertook significant centralisation of power and territorial expansion in the nineteenth century (Newbury 1988, Vansina 2005). State-building reinforced the division between the Tutsi and Hutu, which was further racialised and institutionalised under Belgian colonial rule, framing the Tutsi ruling elite as foreign conquerors and the Hutu masses as the indigenous population (Mamdani 2001). This division was politicised in the lead up to independence resulting in the 1959 'revolution' which overthrew Tutsi local chiefs and displaced the king, installing a Hutu-dominated regime and forcing many Tutsi into exile. The remaining Tutsi were politically marginalised in independent Rwanda, though it was not until the early 1990s that a multitude of factors combined to produce the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi. These included an economic crisis caused by the collapse of coffee prices in the late 1980s, an agrarian crisis manifest in land shortages and inequality (André and Platteau 1998, Verwimp 2013), multi-party political competition that politicised ethnic divisions and the invasion of the Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF) dominated by Ugandan Tutsi exiles that was framed by Hutu extremists as an attempt to restore Tutsi political domination.

The RPF defeated the Rwandan army and ended the genocide, coming to power in 1994 in a context of extreme insecurity. The Rwandan state and economy were devastated, while the RPF – dominated by Anglophone Tutsis who had grown up in neighbouring Uganda – sought to consolidate power over a predominately Hutu population that had been indoctrinated to despise and fear the Tutsi and, in particular, the RPF (Prunier 1998). Moreover, there remained a significant military threat posed by remnants of the Rwandan Army in the Democratic Republic of Congo. The RPF initially focused on restoring political order, and then formulated its longer-term strategy for ruling Rwanda from the late 1990s. Like the EPRDF, the RPF faced a situation in which ethnicity was politicised and the government sought to rule over a population within which it enjoyed little support. Rather than allowing for ethnic self-determination as in Ethiopia, the RPF argued that ethnic divisions were artificially imposed by colonial rule and sought to build a post-ethnic Rwandan nation. The result is that ethnic self-identification has been restricted, while the government has sought to inculcate a Rwandan national identity (Purdeková 2012).

However, like the EPRDF, the RPF placed also mass distribution at the centre of its political narrative in order to ensure that all Rwandans

developmental performance. However, economic performance has not been as impressive or consistent and there has been little progress in structural transformation in either case.

had a material stake in the new government and its vision for the country. Protais Musoni, former minister and leading RPF member, articulated this thinking,

we believe we need a unified nation to achieve development and provide services to people. Singing about unity is not enough, we still need the cement that is an equitable distribution for everybody in order to cement the sense and pride of a nation ... With poverty, people can say 'we have a nation that is unified, but what is in it for me?'⁸

Broad-based distribution became a central feature of the RPF's political narrative and the construction of a post-ethnic society, while, in the context of extreme resource shortages and intense demographic pressures, rapid development was considered essential to 'grow the pie'. Not unlike the EPRDF then, for the RPF rapid development became synonymous with consolidating political power (Booth and Golooba-Mutebi 2014, Mann and Berry 2016, Harrison 2017). Unlike Ethiopia, however, this impulse did not initially lead to a clear focus on agrarian transformation or industrialisation. The government sought to leapfrog directly from low productivity agriculture into high productivity services such as tourism, communications, finance and real estate in recognition that Rwanda's tiny domestic market and landlocked geography provided limited potential for manufacturing. Nonetheless, these emerging high productivity service sectors provided little in the way of employment creation, with most new jobs instead emerging in low wage, low productivity service activities (Behuria and Goodfellow 2019).

By the mid-2000s, the RPF was forced into a re-think, with high inequality and stagnant poverty reduction threatening the RPF's political narrative. The result was a renewed focus on agricultural extension and subsidised agricultural inputs to raise productivity through regional crop specialisation (Booth and Golooba-Mutebi 2014, Harrison 2016), as well as attempts to expand horticulture and promote value addition and upgrading in the coffee sector (Behuria 2020). From 2015 onwards, the government has also sought to promote industrial expansion by establishing a special economic zone with the aim of attracting foreign investors to take advantage of preferential trade agreements with US and Europe. Thus far, however, industrial development has remained at an incipient stage, with government policy inconsistent and lacking in effective implementation (Behuria 2019).

This developmental push has, like in Ethiopia, been accompanied by a massive expansion of state infrastructural power, as a means of

⁸ Interview Protais Musoni, former Minister of Local Development of Rwanda, Kigali, 28 May 2015.

implementing government policies and consolidating control over society. Of particular importance is the decentralised state structures that reach down to village level, with all state officials subject to performance contracts (*imihigo*) that aim at alignment between national priorities and local development activities (Chemouni 2014). These state structures, party- and military-owned business conglomerates and related organisations such as agricultural cooperatives (Harrison 2017) are used to promote economic transformation and to establish political control down to the individual level, with Rwandans given clear indications of expected behaviour (Ansoms and Cioffo 2016).

The results of the RPF's development project have been hotly contested. Official figures show rapid economic growth of 7.2 per cent per annum in the decade to 2019, while crop yields massively increased after 2007 (Booth and Golooba-Mutebi 2014, Harrison 2016). Growth in smallholder productivity, in turn, was believed to have had a major impact on poverty (World Bank 2015c, p. 20). Subsequent assessments have questioned these trends, however, suggesting that poverty actually rose, rather than falling rapidly between 2011 and 2014 (Desiere 2017) and that agricultural productivity was stagnant after 2007, with claimed growth actually the result of overestimation and inaccurate yield assessments (Desiere 2016, Heinen 2021). Whatever the extent of socio-economic progress, both critics and those more positively disposed to the RPF agree that the massive expansion of state capacity has been channelled effectively to consolidate the position of the ruling coalition (Golooba-Mutebi 2008, Reyntjens 2013). In a country that is much smaller and more densely populated than Ethiopia, the government has thus far been able to use the party-state infrastructure to stifle any hint of domestic political opposition, whatever the distributive challenges presented by its development model. Time will tell whether the attempt to forge a united Rwandan nation will succeed and whether the modest progress made in the pursuit of structural transformation will contribute to political instability in Rwanda as it did in Ethiopia.

Overall, the Ethiopian and Rwandan cases therefore show that, while comparatively rare, under particular circumstances, elite perceptions of internal threats can provide the incentive for ruling elites in Africa to pursue state-led development as a means of consolidating power. Moreover, state capacity – rooted in the legacies of state formation, but expanded where rulers prioritise developmental progress – is vital to deliver on these developmental plans. Despite the progress that has been achieved, however, elite commitment to development in Ethiopia and Rwanda has, as yet, been insufficient to realise structural transformation.

The Challenge of Late-Late Development

The EPRDF's commitment to state-led development and its considerable socio-economic achievements can be understood through comparison with examples of state-led development in East Asia and the theories advanced to understand these processes. However, an assessment of the broader significance of the Ethiopian experience for late-late developing countries requires a comprehensive analysis of the reasons for the ultimate failure to achieve structural transformation and the political crisis that followed. Chapters on agrarian transformation ([Chapter 5](#)) and industrial policy ([Chapter 6](#)) highlighted multiple factors that contributed to the failure or inefficiency of particular projects, constraining economic performance and, ultimately, limiting the distributive resources available to secure mass acquiescence.

Many problems relate to domestic factors and, in particular, the limitations of both domestic capitalists and the state. While past regimes left a somewhat positive legacy in terms of state capacity and autonomy, the EPRDF was at a disadvantage with respect to domestic capitalists. Haile Selassie's modernisation drive prioritised foreign investors, providing little incentive for the landed elite to turn to manufacturing, while the Derg nationalised private firms, providing protection for inefficient state enterprises. The result was that in 1991 there was no existing domestic capitalist class with manufacturing experience on which to build. Despite the EPRDF's pronouncements regarding the embrace of capitalism post-2001, the reality was more ambiguous with the EPRDF maintaining its suspicion of the 'rent seeking' tendencies of the private sector. The result was that party-state enterprises and politically affiliated firms were often prioritised as part of the industrialisation drive. This lack of sectoral experience among domestic firms proved a major stumbling block when the government sought to establish basic manufacturing in the early 2000s ([Whitfield and Staritz 2021](#)).

Furthermore, while the EPRDF inherited a relatively strong state compared with neighbouring countries in Africa, Ethiopia in the 1990s was far from the technocratic Leviathan portrayed – perhaps to the point of caricature – in some of the literature on East Asian development. On taking power, the Ethiopian state was inefficient and lacked technical expertise in priority economic sectors. The EPRDF invested heavily in education, training and bureaucratic reforms to improve technical expertise and implementation capacity. However, the EPRDF's state-led development project remained an elite-led, politically driven effort, in which senior party officials – and Meles in particular – invested considerable time and effort studying East Asian development strategies and

re-interpreting them for an Ethiopian context. The result was that the bureaucracy was dominated by party hierarchies and largely reduced to implementing centrally defined priorities (see also [Weis 2015](#)). As the distributive crisis grew during the period covered by the two Growth and Transformation Plans (2010–2020), political leaders set ever higher and more unattainable targets. This over-ambition is surely part of the explanation for the growing focus on high-risk mega-projects, which offered the faint possibility of outpacing the growing distributive crisis and digging the coalition out of a deepening political hole. The reality, in contrast, was that developmental ambitions outpaced or entirely bypassed moderate state capacity, resulting in a series of enormously expensive projects that either did not deliver the expected benefits or failed catastrophically, ranging from the Ethiopia-Djibouti railway, the Addis Ababa light railway, the sugar plantations and fertiliser factory contracted to MetEC, and a series of ever larger hydroelectric dams ([Gebresenbet and Kamski 2019](#), [Rode et al. 2020](#), [Lavers et al. 2021](#), [Terrefe 2022](#)).

While the state and affiliated party-state enterprises undoubtedly made several expensive mistakes as part of the EPRDF's drive for structural transformation, the failings of this strategy cannot be solely attributed to limited state capacity, however. Research repeatedly underscores that industrial policy is an inherently high-risk activity, requiring pragmatism and adaptation in response to initial failures. South Korea and Taiwan succeeded not through an enlightened technocracy laying out a blueprint that was diligently implemented over the following decades, but through a process of trial and error, designing industrial policies that responded to previous failures and an evolving context ([Amsden 1992, 2001](#)). Though there were many limitations to the EPRDF's development strategy, analysis of the government's approach to agricultural, industrial, urban and social protection policy clearly shows some willingness to adapt and innovate in response to policy failures and new challenges, often with considerable success.

An important argument put forward in this book, in contrast, is that the EPRDF's hope that structural transformation could provide the mass employment that would address the distributive crisis and consolidate political order was unrealistic, whatever the state's capacity or the leadership's commitment to state-led development. The infeasibility of this strategy, moreover, was the result of, on the one hand, the constraints imposed by the contemporary global economy and, on the other, rapid population growth resulting from a delayed demographic transition. The contemporary global economy presents a far more challenging context in which to undertake structural transformation than that which faced

earlier industrialisers. The technological frontier, even for relatively low productivity activities such as assembly roles in apparel, has advanced so far at this point that it is extremely hard for new domestic firms which lack required technological capabilities to bridge the divide or to secure market access in global value chains. The absence of an experienced manufacturing class is a condition shared to some degree by all late-late developing countries (Amsden 2001). However, as noted, Ethiopia was particularly disadvantaged in this respect given the severe lack of manufacturing experience on which to build (Whitfield and Staritz 2021). The government's attempt to buck this trend was ultimately unsuccessful. The subsequent promotion of foreign investment in industrial parks was, arguably, better aligned with the opportunities available to late-late developing countries in the contemporary global economy. However, the pursuit of broad-based development through foreign investment has its own challenges. Resolving the agrarian question of capital through foreign investment breaks many of the potential links between industry and agriculture, leaving the politically sensitive agrarian question of labour (Bernstein 2004). Moreover, for foreign investment to translate into significant value added, mass employment creation and industrial upgrading requires strong state support to promote linkages between foreign investors and domestic suppliers, a challenge that has proved beyond not just the Ethiopian state, but many others also.

The EPRDF's evolving industrial strategy did deliver a number of successes, notably in floriculture and cement, and, as investment flowed into new industrial parks, there was considerable promise that this could generate significant employment. However, even under the most optimistic assessment – one that often prevailed within the ruling elite – this industrial employment would have paled in comparison with population growth and the demand for jobs. By the 2010s, agriculture had long since exhausted any capacity to absorb this growing labour surplus, while industrial expansion was far too modest and slow to address the problem. In Ethiopia, as elsewhere, the result was rapid growth in low wage, low productivity services (Benanav 2014). While the EPRDF's concerted pursuit of state-led development was relatively unusual, the ultimate result is a context-specific manifestation of a global problem in which population growth has expanded beyond the needs of capital (Benanav 2014, 2019).⁹ Rapid population growth and growing numbers

⁹ The standard response in the development industry has been to neglect labour demand entirely, concentrating on supply-side factors through investment in education and attempts to improve the functioning of labour markets. This approach is, however, likely to 'create more perturbed unemployed job-seekers, rather than more plentiful jobs' (Amsden 2010, p. 60).

of young adults without access either to land or urban employment is 'not a Malthusian problem of resource constraints but a capitalist one of distended and broken labor markets' (Benanav 2014, p. 116).¹⁰

The introductory chapter to this book made the case that in many respects Ethiopia constitutes a most likely case for authoritarian state-led development whereby a ruling coalition pursues structural transformation as part of its strategy for political survival. Detailed analysis of the EPRDF era partially supports this view, in that the EPRDF did pursue rapid development as a means of maintaining political control with considerable success. However, the distributive crisis that resulted from the limitations of this strategy and the ultimate collapse of the ruling party suggests that the prospects for late-late developing authoritarian states to maintain political order through the structural transformation of their economies may be limited. If African countries are to tackle the challenge of structural transformation, they will need to identify strategies and supportive configurations of political forces suited to the specific challenges of late-late development.

Mass Politics and Authoritarian Durability

The arguments in this book also have important implications for resurgent debates about authoritarian durability. Ethiopia under the EPRDF was a noteworthy example in which the ruling coalition came to associate its own political power with rapid development. For the EPRDF, agricultural productivity growth and industrial employment creation were not just desirable, but an essential means of creating the distributive resources that would bind the masses to the regime and maintain political order. The failings of the EPRDF's development strategy were, in turn, a major contributing factor in the coalition's ultimate collapse.

The dominant trend in recent work on authoritarian durability has been to focus on intra-elite cohesion, for which strong political parties are of particular importance (Brownlee 2007, Levitsky and Way 2010, Slater 2010, Geddes et al. 2018, Lachapelle et al. 2020). Well institutionalised political parties can regulate access to power between contending

¹⁰ The inadequacy of industrial employment creation is clear even before the effects of automation are taken into account. There is concern that automation will replace many manufacturing jobs, particularly low productivity jobs in the global south (Brynjolfsson and McAfee 2014, Hallward-Driemeier and Nayyar 2017, Schlogl and Sumner 2020), albeit that some of the more apocalyptic predictions have been contested (Parschau and Hauge 2020, Hauge 2021). Even if automation does not replace labour on a large scale, however, it seems highly unlikely that industry will create mass employment for those currently deemed surplus to the needs of capital.

factions, providing opportunities for advancement and compensation for those not selected for senior positions (Brownlee 2007). A common analytical focus in this literature concerns critical junctures such as political crises, civil wars or national independence that lead to party and state building, which underpins authoritarian durability in the long run (Slater 2010). This elite focus is important and has formed a central thread of the analysis in this book. Intra-elite wrangling, ultimately leading to cohesion was an important factor in the TPLF's ascent to power, the focus on state and party building that sustained the EPRDF in power over nearly three decades and the pursuit of state-led development.

Nonetheless, the dynamics of authoritarian rule under the EPRDF can only be partially understood through the lens of elite politics. A more complete understanding of the EPRDF's initial consolidation of power and its eventual collapse necessitates analysis of mass politics. As argued in Chapters 3 and 4, a central concern of the TPLF/EPRDF from very early on was how to gain and retain the support, or at least the acquiescence, of the peasantry. This focus on building a mass base drew on Maoist ideology and subsequently informed the EPRDF's focus on mass distribution and development on taking power in the 1990s. However, the Ethiopian experience highlights another important insight that is often downplayed in recent work on elite politics and authoritarianism – namely, that authoritarian durability is a dynamic challenge. While critical junctures can shape patterns of state and party building over extended periods, demographic changes, evolving class structures and ethnic divisions present a continually changing political challenge to incumbents. As such, ruling coalitions must continually refine and adapt their political strategies, even where they have built powerful party and state institutions to maintain political order. In Ethiopia, the EPRDF initially consolidated political power based on control over the distribution of land and agricultural inputs. However, rapid population growth in the absence of structural transformation led to a generational divide in access to land and employment, undermining the government's strategy of coercive distribution. Moreover, federalism, which had initially stabilised the political system by allowing for some degree of ethnic self-determination, led to growing ethnic politicisation, with the result that mass distributive pressures were framed primarily as ethnic conflicts. Ultimately the EPRDF's inability to respond to the dynamic challenge of population growth, urbanisation and the distributive crisis that this represented proved to be its downfall.

Consequently, the literature on elite politics and authoritarian durability can usefully be complemented with a focus on the dynamics of mass politics and elite-mass relations. To do so, research can build on a long line of

work that highlights the importance of long-run factors such as the changing balance of class forces and their relations with the state in patterns of authoritarianism and democratisation (Moore, Jr. 1967, Rueschemeyer et al. 1992). Moreover, Albertus' (2015, 2021, Albertus et al. 2018) recent work has highlighted the importance of mass politics and distribution as a strategy for mass control. Such an analytical approach must focus both on intra-elite politics and elite-mass relations, paying attention not only to critical junctures, but also the dynamic nature and evolving challenge of authoritarian durability. Even the strongest authoritarian regimes cannot afford to rest on their laurels, but must continually adapt to new threats resulting from demographic change and structural transformation, and the particular political manifestation of these in class and ethnic cleavages.

Analysis of the Ethiopian case – as a leading contender for authoritarian state-led development in Africa – highlights the challenges for late-late developing authoritarian regimes pursuing the structural transformation of their economies as a strategy for maintaining power. However, this certainly does not imply the demise of authoritarianism in general. Indeed there have been growing claims of an authoritarian wave that is in the process of rolling back the gains of the third wave of democratisation in the 1990s (Lührmann and Lindberg 2019). Rather than developmental forms of authoritarianism, a more common outcome in recent decades has instead been a transition to electoral or competitive authoritarianism. While past authoritarian regimes would routinely outlaw all political opposition, by the early 1990s few countries – and none in receipt of significant western aid – failed to hold elections at all. A combination of the breakdown of Cold War allegiances, diplomatic pressure and political conditionality from western donors, and domestic pressures have led most authoritarian regimes to introduce some degree of electoral competition (Levitsky and Way 2010). However, a common result has been that incumbents have resorted to ‘feigning liberalism while monopolizing power’ (Brownlee 2007, p. 17) rather than undertaking meaningful democratic transitions. Indeed, competitive authoritarianism has become the dominant form of authoritarian rule in the post-Cold War era (Magaloni and Kricheli 2010).

Under competitive authoritarianism there are constitutional mechanisms for competing for office and meaningful electoral competition takes place, but competition is heavily skewed in favour of the incumbent through its influence on the electoral system, the media, distribution of state resources and the state's coercive apparatus (Levitsky and Way 2010). Elections have failed to transform politics in many competitive authoritarian regimes. Yet, elections do present leaders with additional challenges. Notably, these include how to limit the defection

of political elites seeking to advance their careers by establishing opposition parties and how to secure a majority of votes as the ballot box. A common tendency has been to build broad coalitions, often through allocation of patronage, that co-opt would be political challengers (Arriola 2009), while also extending patronage to politically important constituencies in an attempt to secure votes (Van de Walle 2014). While such coalition building can be a means of maintaining political stability, it is likely to erode the autonomy, capacity and elite cohesion required for state capacity and state-led development (Slater 2010, Vu 2010).

A useful comparison to Ethiopia and Rwanda in this respect is Uganda, where Yoweri Museveni and his National Resistance Movement (NRM) have consolidated power through competitive authoritarianism at the cost of undermining economic transformation. In many ways, the Ugandan experience is more typical of contemporary authoritarianism than developmentally focused regimes in Ethiopia and, to a degree, Rwanda. British colonial rule in Uganda produced a postcolonial political and economic elite that was fragmented and polarised along ethnic, religious and class lines. This fragmentation presented a challenge to post-independence stability that ultimately led to a military coup and a civil war that ended with military victory for the NRM in 1986 (Mamdani 1996, Golooba-Mutebi and Hickey 2013, Whitfield et al. 2015). While conflict continued in northern Uganda for much of the following 20 years, the NRM consolidated power and brought about political stability in the rest of the country by expanding its broad but fractious coalition. Having initially curtailed political competition with a view to prioritising political stability, the NRM was forced to accept multi-party elections from 2006 as a result of a series of defections from the Movement from those that saw little potential for advancement (Tripp 2010, Golooba-Mutebi and Hickey 2013, Whitfield et al. 2015). Since that time, Uganda has closely resembled competitive authoritarianism, with the government retaining the formal trappings of democratic institutions, but routinely manipulating these to strengthen the regime's hold on power (Tripp 2010). In particular, the NRM has used the distribution of patronage to buy the support of key elite groups and electorally important political constituencies (Tripp 2010, Hickey 2013, Whitfield et al. 2015), while also resorting to arbitrary violence which 'makes civic spaces fragile, undermines collective action, and destabilizes those who would seek to challenge the state' (Tapscott 2021, p. 5). As such, the NRM governs 'not by crushing opposition outright, but instead by destabilizing, fragmenting, and diluting it' (Tapscott 2021, p. 19).¹¹

¹¹ Tapscott (2021) argues that the EPRDF and RPF are additional examples of the 'arbitrary state' she observes in Uganda. As argued above and in previous chapters, however,

While the NRM has solidified its hold on power, the unpredictable nature of competitive authoritarianism has undermined the bureaucratic capacity, autonomy and elite cohesion required to bring about state-led development. Pockets of effectiveness within the state are largely limited to those sectors required for the maintenance of political order (Hickey 2023). In its early years, the government relied heavily on foreign aid to finance the state, resulting in a strong focus on macroeconomic stability and expansion of social services (Whitfield et al. 2015). While this resulted in relatively high economic growth rates, this did not translate into a strong focus on the reforms required to bring about agricultural productivity growth or expansion of manufacturing. Indeed, the attempt to build a broad and diverse political coalition undermined attempts at land reform and the expansion of agricultural extension (Joughin and Kjær 2010, Kjær 2017). Moreover, despite occasional government claims to promote structural transformation along East Asian lines (Hickey 2013), industrial policy has been inconsistent and poorly implemented due to divergent political and economic interests, and ideological differences within the ruling coalition (Whitfield et al. 2015, Behuria 2021). As is the case in many other African countries (Whitfield et al. 2015), the NRM's efforts to retain political support in a context of competitive authoritarianism have undermined the pursuit of structural transformation.

In sum then, while the beginning of the twenty-first century has seen resurgent interest in state-led development and industrial policy in Africa, there has been insufficient attention to date to the political economy drivers that might realise structural transformation in a context of late-late development. For many East Asian late developers, authoritarian leaders pursued rapid development as a means of maintaining political order. While somewhat comparable processes underpinned rapid economic growth in Ethiopia, the ultimate failings of the EPRDF's project of state-led development raise doubts regarding the potential for authoritarian state-led development in Africa. Rather than developmental forms of authoritarianism, a more common pattern to date has been for authoritarian regimes to introduce constrained forms of political competition that have enabled rulers to retain political office while undermining the potential for state-led development. The realisation of hopes for structural transformation in Africa will require new political

the EPRDF and RPF have attempted to secure complete control over their populations, leaving individuals in no doubt what was expected of them or indeed the consequences of failing to acquiesce to party-state instructions. This is a marked contrast to the arbitrary and unpredictable authoritarian rule in Uganda.

configurations – democratic or authoritarian – that provide rulers with the incentives to pursue development as part of their political survival strategies within the constraints of late-late development. Our understanding of these processes and possibilities, meanwhile, will require a frame of analysis that focuses as much on the strategies for distribution as well as accumulation, of mass politics and elite-mass relations as much as intra-elite politics, and of the structural constraints imposed by class, demography and the global political economy as well as the agency of leaders.

Glossary

- Aba Gadaa** – the political leader of the *gadaa*;
- Awraja** – an administrative unit in the Imperial era, roughly equivalent to a county;
- Bao-jia** – a system of local organisation and control in Imperial China and Taiwan;
- Birr** – the Ethiopian currency;
- Chat** – known as *khat* in Arabic, a mild stimulant and a major cash crop in Ethiopia;
- Chika shum** – a village headman who acted as intermediary between the landlord and peasants;
- Derg** – literally a committee (Amharic), the name given to the committee of junior military officers that overthrew Haile Selassie in 1974;
- Gadaa** – the customary age-grade system of social and political organisation in Oromo society;
- Garee** – development team (Afaan Oromo);
- Gebbar** – a tribute-paying peasant;
- Gim Gema** – a system of evaluation used by the TPLF and then extended to the civil service;
- Gott** – a sub-kebele administrative unit;
- Gult** – non-hereditary land held as a fief;
- Kebele** – a sub-wereda administrative unit;
- Kushet** – a sub-tabiya administrative unit;
- Neftegna** – literally a rifleman (Amharic), the name given to military leaders rewarded with land grants in southern Ethiopia as part of the Shewan-Amhara conquest;
- Qarree** – an Afaan Oromo term meaning an unmarried young woman, approximately 20–36;
- Qeerroo** – an Afaan Oromo term meaning an unmarried young man, approximately 20–36;
- Qubee** – the Afaan Oromo alphabet;
- Rist** – a descent-based land tenure system common in much of northern Ethiopia prior to the 1974 revolution;
- Tabiya** – a sub-wereda administration in Tigray, equivalent to the kebele in the rest of Ethiopia;
- Tehadso** – literally renewal, the purge of opposing factions and reorganisation of the EPRDF undertaken under Meles' leadership in the early 2000s;

Were – a cell, a unit of party-state organisation;

Wereda – an administrative district;

Weyane – a revolt, refers to the revolt in south and east Tigray in 1943 sparked by tax reforms. The TPLF's insurrection against the Derg was framed as a second Weyane.

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