Dirge for the Ethiopian Left

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Introduction

This paper consists of four sections. The first is a brief overview of the ESM and the trajectory it set. The second looks at the advent of the Ethiopian Federal Democratic Republic and the phases of EPRDF policy between 1991 and 2013, the third section looks at the turn from developmentalism to industrial policy between 2013 and 2018, while the fourth offers up some preliminary thoughts on the ongoing shifts in policy and ideology over the past few decades.

Modernity Through Revolutionary Means: The Ethiopian Student Movement

The ESM refers to decade-long protests, held initially by attendees of Haile Selassie University, that quickly spread to galvanise high school students from across the country as well as Ethiopians in the diaspora. The movement (and the scholarship it generated) commands public and academic scholarly interest commensurate with its singular imprint on the Ethiopian nation-building process. The overriding impulse of the movement was to bring about "all essential elements of modernity…socialism…would serve the aspiration to bring about modernity by revolutionary means.[1]" The ESM's embrace of modernity's promise of social justice, attendant on its conceptualization of modernity as the "realisation of human freedom", was buttressed by fervent engagement in theoretical consideration and knowledge production.

Scholarly recollections now tend to dismiss the ESM's knowledge production on epistemological grounds, i.e - its attempt to remake society in line with the positivist truths discovered by the students in their capacities as social scientists[2].

As an influential member of the movement, Andreas Eshete's 1970s Phd thesis entitled "The Social Structure of Freedom" offers some insight into a strand of the student movements thinking on the matter:

"The idea of an invariable end which is an independent object of knowledge that we discover and attempt to realise makes no sense…it is not the pre-established end that determines what men ought or ought not to do: rather, it is men who determine what ought or ought not be their end"

In 1974, civilian unrest from various demographics, including the students, led to the abolition of the monarchy, allowing the military to seize state power. Where the students had engaged, along with other groups, in civilian unrest to bring about an end to the imperial state, many very quickly graduated to the battleground in response to the military regime. The civil wars fought over the following 17 years by, and amongst, respective offshoots of the ESM, remnants of the aristocratic order, and the military government involved various theatres of ideological and geographic contention.

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[1] Eshete, op. cit p. 22.

[2] Zeleke op. Cit p.149

In both popular and scholarly accounts of the parties that emerged from the ESM, differences over such concerns as organisation, program, and related concerns are overshadowed by what has become known as the 'nationalities question'[3] — so much so that they are generally delineated along 'ethno-nationalist' and 'class-based''pan-nationalist' lines, with the latter being depicted as the true inheritors of the movement. Although there was cross-cutting acknowledgment of the inequalities between Ethiopia's distinct cultural components, how this should be institutionally redressed, and its intersection with the class question embodied in the slogan "land to the tiller", was more contentious. Despite this delineation, it's unclear that the "intersectional" view of class and ethnicity amounted to an abandonment of class concerns on the part of the so called 'ethno-nationalist' parties.

The *Derg*, as the military junta became known, appropriated aspects of the ESM's agenda; perhaps most significantly the public holding of land; the stripping of power from the aristocracy (although neither the redistribution of land nor the stripping of the aristocracies power occurred uniformly throughout the country or exclusively under the auspices of the state), while maintaining the unitary trajectory of the imperial nation-building process.

By the late 1980s, Marxism as a framework of analysis and socialism as an organizing principle for the Ethiopian left were increasingly challenged by the legacies, including genocide, of the military junta's hijacking of the 1974 revolution, the impending implosion of the Soviet Union, and the collapse of the labour movement within the West. Admassie and Fantaye note "there were no major challenges, battle lines, or defections in any of the political movements as they decided to drop Marxism-Leninism and they all did so in the decade between 1981 and 1991"[4]. Lencho Leta's (an influential figure of revolutionary Ethiopia, and a leader of the Oromo Liberation Front) remarks on the fragmentation of his party in the early 1990s as a result of the disorientation of the loss of socialism as a guiding destination of the student movement's struggle would suggest that there was indeed some contention around the issue.[5]

The Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), which proved the most effective militarily and politically among those who took to the battlefield (ethno-nationalist or otherwise), was by no means immune to the pressures Leta described. An important turning point in TPLF's history was a series of deliberations that concluded with a split amongst the leadership in the mid-to-late 1980s. These debates, held in front of its rank and file members and taped for posterity, precipitated various innovations including the formation of the Marxist Leninist League of Tigray (MLLT); the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front[6]; evolutions in military strategy; the *Derg*'s defeat; and the establishment of, and institutionalisation of the governance structures of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia.

TPLF's active preoccupation with redefining its socialist aspirations in line with global, and its own, advancements - that is, anticipation of the capture of the unitary state, and the establishment and governance of the multinational state within the context of a suddenly

[3] Zeleke, *op.cit.* p.93.

[4] Admassie and Fantaye, *op.cit.* p.188.

[5] Lencho Leta, interview, Betty Show, LTV, July 2019.

[6] The EPRDF was initially established through an alliance consolidated through the mid to late 1980s between an EPRP splinter group, the Ethiopian Peoples Democratic Movement, and the TPLF. The EPDM's ranks were swollen by the absorption of nearly 7000 *Derg* POW's that took up the TPLF's offer to switch sides. This provided its Oromo members fertile recruiting ground to establish the Oromo Peoples Democratic Organization. The front came into being in the aftermath of a political crisis within TPLF and on the eve of the fall of the *Derg*.

unipolar world would continue until the advent of Democratic Developmentalism in the aftermath of the Ethiopian-Eritrean War of the late 1990s.

Three volumes, titled "*netsa hagerawi economy*", (loosely translated as Nationalist Capitalist Economies) were distributed to the TPLF cadre in 1985 making a case for the inevitability of the "capitalist stage of accumulation" in the "transition to socialism". In 1992, EPRDF cadre deliberated on an overt abandonment of socialism, exalting "fighting poverty" from a "transitory phase" to the desired destination. Five volumes, published in 2002, marking the arrival of Democratic Developmentalism moved the front away from Marxist frameworks of analysis, rearticulating its program within accepted liberal formulations.[7]

The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia

The EPRDF's military defeat of the *Derg* was quickly followed by a Peace and Democracy Conference held in July 1991. The conference adopted a charter that would form the basis of the constitution adopted in 1994. The deliberations that produced the constitution were imbued with many of the controversies that animated debate during the student movement and the revolutionary wars it birthed.

The federative arrangements that emerged from those debates gave institutional legitimacy to the ESM's historiography; particularly its view of Ethiopia as a 'prison house of nations'. The constitution, written in the language of "we the nations, nationalities and peoples" maintained the public holding of land, drew new linguistically delineated regions around national communities, and conferred upon them the right to secession, even during national emergencies such as war. The upshot of the convergence of the public ownership of land and the right to secession is the offer of a "powerful weapon against central government tyranny over cultural communities and their citizens.[8]"

The particular nexus between the public holding of land and identity gives rise to accusations of the constitution being insufficiently liberal, yet it does provide for strong protection of liberal rights that had been absent during both the imperial and military periods. One of the outcomes of political liberalisation was the introduction of a free press (however constrained), and the establishment of a large number of NGOs, think tanks, and political parties that were near uniformly hostile to the EPRDF's, and more broadly the ESM's, political project, despite in many cases having been members of the movement themselves.

Zeleke traces the work of various academics, think tanks, and politicians between 1990 and 2005[9], describing a consolidated attempt "to shift the terms of the policy debate around land and the nationalities question to one in which the newly popular post–Cold War notions of civil society and human rights would become hegemonic."[10] Implicit to this project was the rejection

[7] These were republished in a single (posthumous) volume, not as party policy but as Meles Zenawi's intellectual property cementing a break with a tradition of collective ownership of knowledge within EPRDF that, perhaps stopped with the publication of Bereket Simon's book on the 2005 elections. See Meles Zenawi, *Ethiopia: The Renaissance Journey. Meles Zenawi's Notes on Building Development and Democracy,*[in Amharic], Addis Ababa, Meles Zenawi Foundation, 2017; and Bereket Simon, *A Tale of Two Elections: A national journey that averted calamity* [In Amharic], Addis Ababa, Mega, 2011.

[8] Andreas Eshete Federalism –*New Frontiers in Ethiopian Politics, Ethiopian Journal of Federal Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 1, May 2013

[9] Pivotal elections still widely perceived as the most competitive in Ethiopian history

[10] Zeleke, *op.cit.,* p. 152.

of the multinational state and the historiography it legitimised. The work of these think tanks and would-be civil society representatives reflected donor antagonism to multinational federalism, and suspicion of the EPRDF's leftist tendencies. That these discontents were often expressed in inflammatory anti-Tigrayan terms, reliant on stereotypes and dehumanising narratives set in part by the 'othering' of imperial historiography[11] and its project of limited modernization, was met with what can most generously be described as donor ambivalence towards hateful rhetoric.

Despite these concerns, the kind of violence associated with processes of democratisation during the period of neoliberal triumphalism, for instance the Rwandan genocide, was avoided despite the growth of armed groups and the swelling of their ranks in the leadup to the snap elections of June 1992[12]. Indeed, such scales of violence would be avoided until the still incomplete 2020 election cycle.

Economic liberalisation preceded the fall of the *Derg*, which had agreed to implement structural adjustment measures shortly before its demise. While this was also taken up by an EPRDF, admittedly discombobulated by global events, its insistence on a gradual approach staved off the types of social crises visible during the 'shock therapy' experienced by citizens of other command economies[13]. The EPRDF "understood that the transition from a socialist to a market economy did not have to mean an end to economic management by the party. Instead, it opened up a whole new range of market building measures which if implemented correctly, would support the kind of political structure it had in mind[14]"

What this meant in practice was the conscious crafting of a political economy supportive of the new federative arrangements, that is, decentralised markets complementary to the new decentralised governance structures. The EPRDF attempted to achieve this primarily at the micro level by building agricultural markets driven by smallholder farmers. This, in turn, was achieved by turning the smallest level of local government within the regional states into the chief site for developmental endeavours and community action. Policy guidance for these efforts was provided by "Agricultural Development Led Industrialization" (ADLI), which, after its launch in 1992, would remain in place until the 2013 introduction of the "Transition from Agriculture to Industry".

At the macro level, particular service sectors and strategic state owned companies, the 'commanding heights of the economy', remained protected.[15] Amongst the sectors EPRDF was reluctant to liberalise was the financial sector. This pitted it in opposition to the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) attempts, backed in particular by the US and UK treasuries, at achieving the global free flow of capital. In the late 1990s an impasse was reached between the government of Ethiopia and the IMF, ostensibly over the government's facilitation of Ethiopian Airlines' (a prized SOE) loan repayment to an influential American bank. The bank demanded the US Treasury's involvement, leading to the U.S executive director at the

[11] Toni Weis, *Vanguard Capitalism: Party, State, and Market in EPRDF Ethiopia*, Doctoral thesis, University of Oxford, 2016, p 66.

[12] An Evaluation of the June 21, 1992 Elections in Ethiopia, African American Institute

[13] Christina Tekle Collins, *The Meaning and Uses of Privatization: The Case of the Ethiopian Developmental State*, AFRICA Vol. 92 Issue.4, Cambridge University Press, 2022, pp.602-624, p. 611.

[14] Toni Weis, *Vanguard Capitalism, op.cit.* p. 181.

[15] ibid

Fund to query Ethiopia's ESAP status. The issue would escalate when Ethiopia refused to liberalise its capital markets in an act of rebellious financial repression[16]. Ethiopia's bargaining power would be further eroded by the outbreak of war with Eritrea in the midst of these negotiations[17].

Although Ethiopia was able to maintain its protectionist position on capital markets while still renewing access to IMF funds, the overlap between increased confrontations with international financial institutions and the economic pressures of the Ethiopian-Eritrean War officially ended EPRDF's socialist aspirations[18] and marked major developments in not just its policies, but the framework through which they were articulated, ending its ideological ties to Revolutionary Democracy. EPRDF formally adopted "Democratic Developmentalism" under the rubric of *"Tihadeso"* (loosely translated as renewal.)

'Tihadeso' represented the conclusion of a power struggle within TPLF that cascaded throughout EPRDF[19]. Soon after it's conclusion, Young and Tadesse mused "In retrospect, a debate over the role of the national bourgeoisie… in the mid-1980s…to some extent represented a struggle between reformist and revolutionary perspectives, (&) was a harbinger of the struggle that is the subject of this analysis."[20] Unfortunately, they fail to elaborate on how the initial split of the 1980s was a harbinger of the second, and how this ties into the question of the national bourgeoisie. Despite its lack of elaboration, what can be inferred from their insight is TPLF's concern with the development of domestic capital and the terms upon which national sovereignty should be negotiated with global capital throughout the period in question.

Meles Zenawi's unpublished monograph "Dead Ends, New Beginnings", primarily a by-product of these debates, lays out a technocratic case for equality and liberal democracy from the perspective of market efficiency. The argument rests on social capital's[21] reduction of costs associated with contractual enforcement and facilitation of an environment conducive to complex market interactions. The commercialization of the farmer, and the particular structuring of agricultural demand, were seen as key not only to the creation of the surplus necessary for industrial takeoff (including the overcoming of coordination and other market failures associated with export-led industrialization) but also the reduction of costs associated with contractual enforcement, and the complementary relationship with democratisation.

Despite EPRDF's technocratic turn, what was maintained throughout this decades-long line of debate (as briefly touched on above in, and throughout, this document) was a political commitment to the popular classes as the social basis of achieving the student movement's 'modernist' aims. The decade following EPRDF's adoption of Democratic Developmentalism marked a period of expedited growth with remarkable equity; by 2012 the number of people living in poverty fell from 54 per cent in 1992 to 27 per cent, while life expectancy increased

[16] See Jean-Pierre Christophe Chauffour, Muluneh Ayalew Gobezie, *Exiting Financial Repression: The Case of Ethiopia*, Policy Research working paper, World Bank Group, 2019.
[17] See Robert Hunter Wade *Capital and Revenge: The IMF and Ethiopia,* Challenge, Vol.44, No.5, 2001, Taylor and Francis, pp.67-75.
[18] Martin Plaut and Sarah Vaughan, *op.cit.,* p.112.
[19] Toni Weis, *op.cit.* p.217.
[20] Medhane Tadesse and John Young, *"TPLF: Reform or Decline?",*Review of African Political Economy, n.97, 2003, pp. 389-403, p. 395.
[21] Defined in his work as individual and social norms and values that under-gird efficient and complex economic interactions.

from forty-seven to fifty-nine years (by comparison the average across South Saharan Africa is five years, from fifty to fifty-five)[22].

To the extent that there is agreement on the empirical outcomes[23] of EPRDF'S experiment with Democratic Developmentalism, its success has been ascribed to the peculiarities of Ethiopian history with various scholars claiming that amongst the favourable conditions was the preexistence of an autonomous state[24]. Lavers for instance claim's "political centralization and nation building over the long run process of state formation gives rise to state structures with the potential to play development roles"[25]. This insight seems to miss the jist of Ethiopian history over the last three quarters of a century.

Admassie offers a similar attempt at situating the 'Ethiopian Developmental State' in historical context, using insights from Brenner to trace its roots to the social structure forged by the 'rupture' of the 1974 revolution. He contends that the nature of the dominant 'landlordist' class and its exploitative agrarian relations prohibited accumulation on an extended scale, denied enterprising firms an internal market, and had a preference for consumption over productive reinvestment which meant what manufacturing firms were introduced to the economy were foreign owned and that the 'political configuration tended to sustain a predatory and repressive but extraordinarily weak state[26]'.

He goes on to argue that much of this was remedied by the military regime, most significantly through the reconfiguration of the imperial social structure in a manner that set the stage for capitalist relations to take hold. This was, he argues, achieved through the abolition of "institutional obstacles to rural production", the coerced commodification of the peasantry, concomitant creation of "a huge potential internal market"[27], and the expansion and subjugation of labour. While the EPRDF certainly benefited from the removal of the rentier elite, Admassie exaggerates the extent to which the social structure as inherited by the EPRDF was conducive to industrial takeoff. Arkebe Oqubay, a key policy maker under Hailemariam Desalegn's administration, contrasts the Ethiopian social structure with that of South Korea claiming "the formation of the capitalist class and workforce, which evolved during the Japanese occupation had significant implications for South Korea's industrialization.[28]"

Admassie's insights on the nature of the state, which, he claims "(after) 1974 expanded, deepend and gained a high degree of relative autonomy[29]" too are hyperbolic. Indeed, he

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[22] Figures from the World Bank quoted in Arkebe Oqubay, *Made in Africa. Industrial Policy in Ethiopia,* Oxford, Oxford University press, 2016, pp. 62

[23] See Alemayehu Geda, Abebe Shimeles, John Weeks
*Growth, Poverty And Inequality In Ethiopia: Which Waw For Pro-Poor Growth?*Journal of International Development, v.21, 947–970 2009

[24] See Tom Lavers *Ethiopia's 'Developmental State': Political Order and Distributive Crisis* (African Studies). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2023.

[25]Lavers,op cit pp25

[26] Samuel Andreas Admasie, "*Historicizing Contemporary Growth: The Ethiopian Revolution, Social-Structural Transformation, and Capitalist Development.*" Northeast African Studies 16, no.1 (2016): 65–88, pp.73

[27] Ibid pp. 75

[28] Arkebe Oqubay, *Industrial Policy and Late Industrialization in Ethiopia,* Working Paper Series n.303 African Development Bank Group, 2018, pp.19

[29] Admassie op cit pp 79

contradicts his own claims about the nature of the state under the military regime with his admission that there was an "extreme expansion' that also "deepened their (EPRDF's) reach into the social, geographic, and political hinterlands"

He also identifies that the military regime's inability to bring about the modernist aims of the ESM including but not limited to, industrial takeoff, was not a factor of its 'state capitalism', which in any case had made way for private enterprise from the mid 1980s, but in its military expenditure, made necessary by "new, temporary and non structural factors inhibiting growth"[30]. He elaborates that this included the Eritrean crisis and increased assertiveness by nationalist fronts such as the TPLF who were, perhaps only incidentally, waging war to restructure the unitary state. In some sense then, Admassie too misses the jist of Ethiopian history over the last three quarters of a century, the novelty of the 1995 constitution, and the manner through which the state expanded its reach, particularly in the hinterlands; the multinational state.

There is no doubt that the institution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia and the economic policies of the EPRDF benefited from the aspects of the social structure that emerged from the 1974 revolution. To claim the preexistence of an autonomous state with significant geographic reach and the preexistence of a social structure conducive to economic growth however, fails to account for why Developmentalism may have been necessary in the first instance, and the central preoccupation of EPRDF policy-making before the arrival of the "Transition from Agriculture to Industry' arrival; nation building.

The Turn from Developmentalism to Industrial Policy

There is no scholarly agreement on the periodization of the phases of policy making under EPRDF, including the advent and demise of the developmental state. Some, like Christina Tekie Collins, have for instance put forth the implausible argument that what came to an end with the arrival of Abiy Ahmed's "prosperity" regime is 'revolutionary democracy' (understood as multinational federalism) not developmentalism, which she contends is still the guiding ideology. Lavers presents the five year plans since 2005's Plan for Accelerated and Sustained Development to End Poverty (PASDEP) as representing the start of the "Democratic Developmentalism" period and as a definitive break with ADLI[31]. Arkebe Oqubay identifies a definitive break with ADLI in 2015, but claims that manufacturing was increasingly pursued as "the prime driver of structural transformation post 2010"[32]. The debates around periodization largely revolve around the extent to which policy viewed the particular structuring of agricultural demand as the primary driver of industrial take off and ADLI's characterization as agricultural rather than industrial policy.

It is my contention that a new phase of liberalisation commenced with the 2013 launch of the "Transition from Agriculture to Industry". The conventional wisdom around this period is that it was one of stagnation in policy creativity. This may in part be due to EPRDF'S own emphatic claims of policy continuity throughout the 2010s,[33] the nebulous nature of nascent theory on

[30] Ibid

[31] This is contradicted by the fact that agricultural spending rose in absolute terms as a proportion of government spending from 2003, coincidentally the same year sharp increases in the proportion of farmers receiving advice from development agents after 2003 with extension services attributed an important role in increased uptake of improved seeds and other productivity increasing measures.

[32] Oqubay op cit pp.4

[33] Arkebe Oqubay, Interview, Addis Fortune, published online January 4, 2016.

'developmental states', and the wide perception of sustained equitable economic growth over the 2000 to 2018 period.[34]

There are a number of changes in the conceptual frameworks that undergirded policy making for the first twenty years of EPRDF's policy making and those that informed policy making in its final decade, including the definition of growth and development, markets (both domestic and foreign), learning, the limits and possibilities of comparative vs competitive advantage, and others that are analogous to wider debates between heterodox and orthodox economists. The industrial parks which were the flagship projects of the "Transition from Agriculture to Industry" were meant to "facilitate"[35] a Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) based export platform and marked a change in the focus on the encouragement of domestic firms and concomitant terms upon which national sovereignty should be negotiated. Perhaps more significantly, the policy required the redirection of the nation-building process. An important aspect of the developmental state, a feature that sets it apart from state interventions to "fix", for instance, market failures recognised by the endogenous variety of neoliberal economic theory, is that the interventions taken on by the developmental state are tailored to the idiosyncrasies of a given nation's political history rather then the requirements of any given economic theory. In Ethiopia, the decades-long struggles to give commitments to cultural equality and regional autonomy an institutional basis in the form of the 1995 constitution means that the nationalities question cannot be ignored when crafting policy.

The tension between the attempted adherence to technocratic feasibility through the "Transition from Agriculture to Industry" and its flagship industrial parks is vividly illustrated by the following quote from an Ethiopian policy maker shared by Lavers "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." Oqubay, the leading force behind the initially clandestine policy changes, too seems to have come to the belated realisation that "Federalism, ethnic diversity and commitment to equitable regional growth make concentration of rents and industrial clustering and agglomeration more challenging in Ethiopia"

Beyond the industrial parks, during this period Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn publicly complained about the technocratic feasibility of the 'mega projects' planned during GTP1, essentially for their distance from viable markets. The mega projects, the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD), the national railway system etc. were conceived not just from the perspective of market feasibility but primarily from the perspective of nation building. One could even argue that such projects were carried out despite market feasibility, which is why you would require state intervention in the first instance, to make unfeasible markets feasible. The rationale underpinning their spatial logic was informed less by the requirements of the market and more by the requirements of multinational state building, which, of course, would involve the devaluation of markets historically concentrated around the capital. The geographic constriction of the national rail project to the Addis Ababa light railway and the Addis Ababa-Djibouti train exemplifies the change in thinking. Hailemariam was heavily criticised by Tigrayans for asserting "you won't get a railway because Tigray's geographic distance to ports

[34] See Goitom Gebreleuel, Ideology, Grand Strategy and the Rise and Decline of Ethiopia's Regional Status, International Affairs, Oxford University Press, 2023, vol. 99 no. 3 pp.1127-1147.

[35] See Justin Yifu Lin, "Growth Identification and Facilitation: The Role of the State in the Dynamics of Structural Change", *in New Structural Economics. A Framework for Rethinking Development and Policy,* Washington, The World Bank, 2012.

make it impractical from a market perspective" in 2017[36]. At the same time, with the Oromo protests that eventually brought down his government in full swing, Desalegn launched investigations into the economic primacy of Tigrinya speakers which fuelled long standing anti-Tigrayan narratives that would eventually set the rhetorical basis for genocide.

The Addis Ababa Master Plan which initially incited protests in the Oromia region too has been lauded for its technocratic proficiency[37]. But such proficiency is at odds with the institutions devised by Ethiopian political history. Lavers provides perhaps the most detailed insights (to date) into the failure of the Shift from Agriculture to Industries inability to cope with the combined pressures of youth landlessness and joblessness, and the ways in which state control over land rents would make the state particularly subject to public anger[38]. However, he leaves out the fundamental incongruence between 'technical feasibility' and the multinational state building project and its governing structures.

The abysmal failure of the turn from developmentalism to industrial policy in the early 2010s isn't fully accounted for by its inability to stimulate employment in the volumes necessary to cope with our Ethiopia's 'youth dividend', nor by the fact that despite claiming an export-oriented economy, exports in 2017 stood 40% lower than they did in 2012. It's failures aren't fully accounted for by the lack of technology transfer and learning, or that we saw significant reversals in social indicators during this period, but, above all, by the fact that less than a decade after its the launch, Ethiopia is once again the poster child for war and famine it was in the 1980s. The most fundamental failure of the turn from Developmentalism to Industrial policy is the reversal of gains made in nation building.

Samuel Assefa succinctly summarises the issues that arise from incompatibility of policy with the institutions produced by Ethiopian political history:

"Promoting compatibility is firstly a matter of recognizing that the country's multinational federal structure introduces certain constraints on strategy development and choice. Specifically, it means excluding options that are necessarily linked, tacitly or explicitly, to a unitary state structure or a single, unitary national identity. Such mismatched strategies, if implemented, would always be subject to severe strains and relentless friction with the legitimating norms and governing structures on the ground. Reasons of law or principle aside, this would frustrate efficient execution and all but preclude sustainability, no matter how technically feasible or however sound the economics considered abstractly, in isolation from the structural features of the Ethiopian state. Nor should these ill-conceived, fated-to-fail strategies be allowed, along the way, to undermine the stability of the constitutional order by subjecting federal arrangements to jarring contradictions and exceptional stress[39]."

As these economic pressures started to be felt politically, the constitutive elements of the EPRDF began to seek legitimacy within their respective regional states by adopting increasingly populist rhetoric, borrowing language from and creating alliances with opposition

[36] See "Speech on the railway network given by PM Hailemariam Desalegn in Adwa" [in Amharic: □/□ □□□□□□□ □□□□ □□□□□ □□□□□ □□□□ □□□□□ □□□□], Horn Affairs, April 26, 2017: http://hornaffairs.com/am/2017/04/26/pm-hailemariam-desalegn-speech-adwa-about-railway/

[37] Stephan Dercon, Gambling on Development: Why Some Countries Win and Others Lose, C. Hurst & Co.[SEP], 2022, pp.253.

[38] Lavers op.cit 209

[39] Samuel Assefa, Political Economy Dimensions of Large Scale Commercial Agriculture Commissioned Paper for Ethiopian Development Research Institute, unpublished, 2016

groups that had long been dependent on anti-Tigrayan vitriol[40], that is to deploy right wing populism in lieu of the kind of economic populism, that is broad based inclusive growth that had become associated with the EPRDF, partly because it had stopped delivering that kind of development. At the same time, the EPRDF as a collective front at the federal level begun to speak about the need to do away with 'ethnic' politics and work towards a more unified national identity, in line with the assumptions of the economic policies discussed above[41].

This untenable pattern of rousing centrifugal forces at the regional level and centripetal forces at the federal level became more pronounced with the resignation of Hailemariam Desalegn and competitive selection of Abiy Ahmed as chairman of the EPRDF. His conversion of the Front into a unified party espousing the evangelical gospel of prosperity, quickly followed by the indefinite suspension of elections, would be amongst the immediate catalysts of the outbreak of war and committal of genocide.

Conclusion

"A million may die but Ethiopia will live forever" Abiy Ahmed, December 2020
"*We can raise another million lives to send to war"* Abiy Ahmed, November 2023

There can be little doubt that what has been ushered in by Abiy Ahmed's prosperity regime represents such a "sharp departure from Ethiopia's recent past such that it might be regarded as ushering a post-left era"[42]. What has come to the fore with the Prosperity regime is a resurgence of right wing nationalism that has not only abandoned, but condemns the values, history, and epistemological traditions of the ESM.

The argument laid out above shows that the turn to the industrial policy of the 2010s had already abandoned key elements of the left's (as articulated by the ESM) agenda in terms of its dual and complementary commitments to social justice and the nationalities question.

It is as of yet unclear what, if any, reasons made the policy shifts outlined above necessary, or otherwise desirable, despite their obvious incompatibility with the nation-building trajectory set by the ESM. The literature on dominant-party states, such as Ethiopia under the EPRDF, tends to view concessions to liberalisation and democratisation as a factor of a ruling party's perception of existential threats to its power[43]. Indeed, this framework has frequently been applied to understanding policy making developments within the EPRDF[44], which also, in some ways paradoxically, tied the need for legitimacy to EPRDF's pro-poor growth strategies. Given there was a happy coincidence between commitments to social justice on the one hand, and the requirements for legitimacy on the other, the accurate identification of motivation was in some regard an academic exercise.

It is, however, unclear that such an existential threat, (or even the perception of it) existed at the time of the technocratic turn of the early 2010's, although such threats became evident in

[40] Martin Plaut and Sarah Vaughan, *Understanding Ethiopia's Tigray war, op.cit.*, p. 115.
[41] Interview, Getachew Reda, Awllo media, 2019
[42] Andreas Eshete and Samuel Assefa, *Reflections on Expanding Ethiopia's Democratic Space*, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2018
[43] See Dan Slater and Joseph Wong, (2013). The Strength to Concede: Ruling Parties and Democratisation in Developmental Asia. *Perspectives on Politics, 11*(3), 717-733.
[44] Lavers op cit pp.85

the aftermath of the "less ideological tinkering.[45]" Central to deciphering what led to the monumental reversals we've witnessed in Ethiopia is the question of how and why do issues of social justice get sidelined? And, in the absence of such unifying aims, what replaces them? It is tempting, given the biblical loss of life experiences in Ethiopia in the post-left era, to conclude that social justice has been replaced instead by eschatology.

[45] Dercon