



DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE AND INTERNATIONAL RELATION

The Dynamics of Pan-Ethiopianist and Ethno-centric Political Elites Contradiction and Transition to  
Democracy in Ethiopia since 1991

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**The Dynamics of Pan-Ethiopianist and Ethno-Centric Political Elites Contradiction and Transition to Democracy in Ethiopia since 1991**

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**A Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies of Addis Ababa University in Partial Fulfillment for the Degree of Masters of Arts in Political Science (Comparative Politics)**

Department of Political Science and International Relation  
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Addis Ababa University

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## DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that this thesis is my original work and has never been presented for any academic award in any other University, and that all sources of materials used for this thesis have been duly acknowledged.

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Addis Ababa University, Addis Ababa

April 2025

Advisor's Approval of the Thesis for Examination/Defense

Yonas Ashine (Ph.D)

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## APPROVAL FORM

Addis Ababa University  
School of Graduate Studies

This is to certify that the thesis prepared by Yalelet Gashaw entitled; The Dynamics of Pan-Ethiopianist and Ethno-nationalist Political Elites Contradiction and Transition to Democracy in Ethiopia in the period between 1991 and 2024; and submitted in the partial fulfillment of the requirement for the Degree of Master of Arts in Political Science, complies with regulations of the university and meets the accepted standards with respect to originality and quality.

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## LIST OF ACRONYMS

**ADP** - Amhara Democratic Party

**AI** - Amnesty International

**AU** - African Union

**EHRC** - Ethiopian Human Rights Commission

**ENDF** - Ethiopian National Defense Force

**EPLF** - Eritrean People's Liberation Front

**EPRDF** - Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front

**EZEMA** - Ethiopian Citizens for Social Justice

**FDRE** - Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia

**IMF** - International Monetary Fund

**NAMA** - National Movement of Amhara

**NEBE** - National Election Board of Ethiopia

**NGO** - Non-Governmental Organization

**NISS** - National Intelligence and Security Service

**ODP** - Oromo Democratic Party

**OFC** - Oromo Federalist Congress

**OLF** - Oromo Liberation Front

**PP** - Prosperity Party

**TPLF** - Tigray People's Liberation Front

**UNSC** - United Nations Security Council

**NDC** - National Dialogue Commission

## KEY TERMS AND TERMINOLOGIES

- **2018 Reforms:** - Abiy Ahmed's liberalization measures, including freeing political prisoners and inviting exiled political forces
- **Addis Ababa Master Plan:** - A 2014 urban expansion proposal that sparked ethnic protests, highlighting ethnic tensions
- **Amhara Marginalization:** - Perceived political and cultural exclusion of the Amhara group under EPRDF
- **Constitutional Crisis:** - Debates over Ethiopia's ethnic-based constitution and calls for reform.
- **Contradiction:** - The ideological and power clashes between unifying and divisive political forces.
- **Derge** - a Marxist-Leninist military junta that ruled Ethiopia from 1974 to 1987, responsible for widespread repression, and the Red Terror campaigns.
- **Electoral Authoritarianism:** - A system where elections exist but are manipulated to maintain incumbent power
- **Ethnic Federalism:** - A governance system organizing Ethiopia into ethnically defined regional state
- **Ethno-centrism** - A political approach prioritizing ethnic identity and regional autonomy over national unity
- **Fano Militias:** - Amhara nationalist armed groups opposing federal and regional rivals.
- **Medemer:** - Abiy Ahmed's political philosophy emphasizes national unity and inclusivity.
- **National Dialogue:** - Proposed reconciliation efforts to address historical grievances and political disputes
- **Pan-Ethiopianism:** - A political ideology advocating for a unified Ethiopian identity transcending ethnic divisions
- **Political Elites:** - Influential leaders and groups shaping governance, ideology, and power distribution
- **Revolutionary Democracy:** - EPRDF's ideological framework blending Marxist-Leninism with ethnic federalism
- **Tigray War:** - The conflict between federal forces and the TPLF, exacerbating ethnic fractures.
- **Transition to Democracy:** - the contested process of shifting from authoritarianism to pluralistic governance
- **Transitional Justice:** - Legal and institutional mechanisms to address past human rights abuses.

## Table of Contents

<b>DECLARATION .....</b>	<b>I</b>
<b>APPROVAL FORM.....</b>	<b>II</b>
<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....</b>	<b>I</b>
<b>LIST OF ACRONYMS .....</b>	<b>II</b>
<b>KEY TERMS AND TERMINOLOGIES .....</b>	<b>III</b>
<i>Abstract .....</i>	<b>VII</b>
<b>Chapter One: Introduction .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>1.1. Background.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>1.2. Problem Statement.....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>1.3. Core Argument .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>1.4. Objectives of the Study.....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>1.4.1. General Objective .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>1.4.2. Specific Objectives .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>1.5. Research Questions .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>1.5.1. Core Research Question.....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>1.5.2. Specific Research Questions.....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>1.6. Study Area .....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>1.7. Methodology.....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>1.7.1. Data Sources .....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>1.7.2. Data Collection Tools .....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>1.7.3. Data Analysis Method .....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>1.7.4. Ethical Considerations.....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>1.8. Scope of the Study .....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>1.9. Limitations of the Study .....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>1.10. Significance of the Study.....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>1.11. Structure of the Thesis.....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Chapter Two: Conceptual and Theoretical Perspectives.....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>2.1. Definition of Concepts.....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>2.1.1. Political Elites.....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>2.1.2. Ethno-centrism .....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>2.1.3. Pan-Ethiopianism .....</b>	<b>11</b>

2.1.4. Contradiction .....	12
2.1.5. Transition to Democracy .....	12
2.2. Theoretical Perspectives.....	14
2.2.1 Elite Approach .....	14
2.2.2. Ethnicity and Nationalism Theory .....	15
2.2.3. Transition Theory (Democratization Studies).....	16
<b>Chapter Three:Historical and Ideological Foundation of Pan-Ethiopianism and Ethnocentric Politics in Ethiopia.....</b>	<b>19</b>
3.1. Political History of Ethiopia as a Background .....	19
3.2. Elites during the Imperial and the Derg Era (1930-1991).....	21
3.3. Elites during the EPRDF and Prosperity Era (1991-2024) .....	22
3.4. Pan-Ethiopianism: as A Historically unifying Framework.....	23
3.5. Ethnocentrism as a counter- Narration.....	25
3.6. Tensions between Pan-Ethiopianism and Ethnocentrism .....	26
<b>Chapter Four: Contradiction and Power Struggle between Pan-Ethiopianist and Ethnocentric Political Elites.....</b>	<b>28</b>
4.1. Ethiopian History as an Area of Contradiction and Power Struggle .....	28
4.2. Nation-Building as an Area of Contradiction and Power Struggle .....	30
4.3. National Symbol Politics as an Area of Contradiction and Power Struggle.....	33
4.4. Political Representation as an Area of Contest and Power Struggle.....	36
4.5. Ethnic-Federalism and the 1995 FDRE Constitution as an Area of Contradiction.....	37
<b>Chapter Five: The Impact of Elite Contradiction on Transition to Democracy in Ethiopia.....</b>	<b>42</b>
5.1. Elite Contradiction and Political Instability .....	42
5.2. Elite Contradiction and War Political Culture.....	45
5.3. Elite Contradiction and Contested Leadership .....	49
5.4. Elite Contradiction and Fragile Institutions.....	51
5.5. Elite Contradiction and Political Polarization.....	54
5.6. Pathways for resolving elite contradictions and facilitating democratic transition in Ethiopia.....	57
5.6.1. Inclusive Political Dialogue and Negotiation as a Pathway .....	57
5.6.2. Institutional Reforms and Decentralization as a Pathway.....	57
5.6.3. Electoral Reforms and Free Elections as a Pathway .....	58
5.6.4. Addressing Historical Grievances as a Pathway .....	59
5.6.5. Strengthening Civil Society and Media as a Pathway .....	60

<b>Chapter Six: Conclusion and Prospects.....</b>	<b>61</b>
<b>6.1. Conclusion .....</b>	<b>61</b>
<b>6.2. Prospects.....</b>	<b>63</b>
<b>6.2.1. Possible Scenarios for Transition to Democracy in the Future.....</b>	<b>64</b>
<b>References.....</b>	<b>66</b>
<b>Appendixes .....</b>	<b>75</b>

## **Abstract**

*The politics of transition to democracy in Ethiopia between 1991 and 2024 has been marked by the interplay of two competing ideological frameworks: Pan-Ethiopianism and ethno-centric nationalism. This thesis explores the contradictions between these ideologies, their impact on political elites, and the challenges they pose to transition of the country's politics. The paper has empirically examined the nature of elite political contestation and its implication on the contemporary political transition in Ethiopia. Specifically, the study comparatively analyzes the nature of elite contradiction from historical and ideological point of view, explored the nature of elite contradiction and power struggle and examined the impact of those elite contradictions on transition to democracy in Ethiopia. Theoretical literature reveals that contestation between the elites in terms of ethnicity, history, ideology and symbol politics hinder the democratic transition in the country. The study has employed the qualitative comparative exploratory research approach to address the research questions that deal with pan-Ethiopianist and Ethno-nationalist elite's contradiction and the possibility of democratic Transition in Ethiopia under the study period. Primary data is collected from purposely selected key informants and first hand documents. Secondary data is collected from plethora of written documents available on internet and AAU Kennedy library. Thematic discourse analysis method is used to analyse the collected data. The study shows that pan-ethiopianist and ethno-centric group of elites in Ethiopia have their own ideological and historical roots. Secondly the two elites contradict each other in a number of agendas including Ethiopian history, national symbol politics, constitutional making, nation building, the federal structure and power sharing. Then the research reveals that though pan-ethiopianist and ethno-nationalist group of Ethiopian elites tactically collaborated to cause leadership change within EPRDF regime, strategic cooperation and bargaining is a never possible development because of division, polarization, war political culture, politically motivated killings, political instability, fragile democratic institutions, constitutional crisis and gripe of power among others. Hence, the contemporary political ecology of the country is not conducive to transition to democracy given extreme ideological difference between elites. Therefore, reconfiguration of the national politics and inclusive political bargaining on critical national agenda are paramount important as far as Ethiopia as a nation state is concerned.*

### **Keywords:**

*Contradiction, Ethiopia, 1991, Ethno-centric; Pan-Ethiopianist; Transition to democracy,*

## Chapter One

### Introduction

#### 1.1. Background

Political elites play a crucial role in a shift toward democracy (Bahiru, 2001). The endurance of any given regime depends on the trust developed and the consensus reached among elites. In similar terms, the stability of a given political change within a given state is contingent to the capability of the political elite to yield an active role in the transition process (Higley and Burton, 1989). Antagonism and differing narratives toward the previous regimes and contestation among elites on nation-building processes as well as symbol politics make the political regimes remain unstable. Elite contradiction occurs when one group of elite aims to control power and resources at the expense of others. Such contradiction negates transition to democracy unless resolved via cooperative bargaining. Political instability would prevail when elites refuse to settle their difference through a win-win political dialogue (Hirblinger et al, 2019).

Ethiopia is one of the oldest states in the world. The political ecology in Ethiopia has been controlled by elites, often drawn from the aristocracy, military, and bureaucratic classes, who have influence over governance and resource allocation (Clapham, 1988). The 1960s can be considered as a turning point in the political history of Ethiopia. This is because it was in the 1960s Ethiopian Students Movement that almost all of the major controversial political questions that Ethiopia is facing today emerged (Bahiru, 2002). On the one hand, the *Derge* regime, eager to foster pan-Ethiopian feeling, has tried to undermine the issue of ethno-nationalist sentiments. On the other, the quest of self-determination up to secession of nationalities appeared to be the main agenda of the post 1991 period. Particularly the political polarization emanated from elite manipulated phraseology of 'self-determination up to secession' and the idea that the Ethiopian is the “prison of nationalities” has become causes of conflict among elites on national politics which in turn circumvent every endeavor towards transition to democracy (Merera, 2007).

Ethiopia's political environment since 1991 period has been manifested by a complex antagonism between pan-Ethiopianism and ethno-centric nationalism ideologies, shaping the country's move toward democracy. Pan-Ethiopianist elites support for a unified national identity, focusing the shared history and social fabric of Ethiopia. Ethno-centric elites; on the other hand, pro-pone for the interests of their specific ethnic groups, often at the expense of national unity or the interests of other ethnic groups. These two ideological frameworks contradict each other, and create collision in the political

discourse (Tronvoll, 2009). The pressure between the two complicated Ethiopia's transition to democracy (Clapham, 2017).

The fall of the *Derg* regime in 1991 marked the beginning of a federal system that underlined ethnic federalism, institutionalizing ethno-linguistic identities as the basis for political organization (Abbink, 2006). This shift was pioneered by the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), which claimed addressing historical imbalances among Ethiopia's diverse ethnic groups (Aalen, 2006). However, the instalment of ethnic federalism has also entrenched ethnocentric political elites, fostering fragmentation along ethnic lines (Merera, 2003).

On the eve of the 2018 reform, both Pan-ethiopianist and ethno-centric category of elites cooperated to remove the EPRDF regime. Elite driven political struggles have been conducted in Ethiopia mainly Amhara and Oromia regions to oust the non-democratic EPRDF system. The political movements had both violent and non-violent forms. Elites from within the incumbent party conducted non-violent struggle from within while social groups, *Fano* and *Qero*, as well as competing parties violently resisted the political repression (Abemelak, 2021).

The point is that the political resistances masterminded by both pan-ethiopianist and ethno nationalist group of elites brought about political reforms in Ethiopia from within the party in 2018 (Abdisa, 2021). However, in the post-reform period, the political arena in Ethiopia is characterized by polarizing political interests between pan-ethiopianist and ethno-nationalist political forces. Instead of transition to democracy, Ethiopia is now in a precarious situation because of historical, political and military controversies among political actors. So critically investigating the relationship between elite political contest and contemporary politics of transition in Ethiopia with special focus on the advocates of civic nationalism and ethnic nationalism group of elites is important.

## **1.2. Problem Statement**

The shift toward democracy in Ethiopia since 1991 has been determined by an intricate ideological and historical dynamics between pan-Ethiopianist and ethno-centric political elites. On the one hand, the nationalist discourse denotes Ethiopia as a composite nation formed through long historical processes of integration and disintegration, and demonstrates the country as a nation that has come onto the historical scene fully formed. On the other hand, the ethnic-entered discourse claims that Ethiopia is not a historically constituted society and describes the nation as a conglomeration of diverse groups brought together forcibly (Clapham, 2017). These contradictions are undermining all the efforts to transition to democracy.

Lack of consensus among political elites on Ethiopian history; nation-building narrations, constitutional settlement and power-sharing created unfavorable political ecology. Pan-Ethiopianist elites often view ethno-centric approaches as a danger to national unity, while ethno-centric elites perceive pan-Ethiopianist ideologies as a continuation of historical marginalization and domination (Merera, 2003; Tronvoll, 2009). The failure to reconcile these contrasting visions has hindered the establishment of inclusive democratic order in Ethiopia (Merera, 2007; Lefort, 2012).

This paper seeks to explore the dynamics of these elite contradictions and their implications for Ethiopia's democratic transition. It asks: How have the competing ideologies of pan-Ethiopianism and ethno-centrism shaped democratization in Ethiopia from 1991 to 2024? What are the institutional barriers to reconciling these ideologies, and how have they contributed to the problematic nature of the transition? By addressing these questions, the study aims to provide a nuanced understanding of the challenges facing Ethiopia's political system and offer insights into the conditions necessary for a sustainable democratic future.

Ethiopia has numerous wasted probabilities to make a smooth transition to democracy. The 1974 hope for political liberalization was aborted due to the failure of the country elites to properly handle the nationality issues. The 1991 change once again failed to establish democracy due to its centrifugal and divisive tendencies. Again the 2018 political reform is in a precarious condition because of opposing views of pan-Ethiopians and ethno-nationalist elites. The centripetal and centrifugal group of political elites found in hostility and defaming each other in that the efforts to democratize the country have been threatened by several problems and the success is uncertain. Moreover, the 2005 disputed national election worsens state-society ties and sparked countrywide unrest (Faleg, 2019; Lyons, 2019). Furthermore the civil war in Tigray region, as well as Guerrilla movements in Amhara and Oromia regions, are about to circumvent the country's progress toward democracy.

The early steps toward political liberalization taken by the 'deeply reformed' EPRDF, including the release of political prisoners, revision of draconian laws, relaxation of media restrictions, and outreach to exiled political groups, were either partially or entirely short-lived. In its place rather, elite contradiction, polarizing political interests, violation of human rights, and limited monopoly of violence, ethnic cleansing and civil wars are the manifestations of the day. Pan-Ethiopianist and Ethno-centric group of elites having tactically collaborated to bring the TPLF monopolized system to an end in April 2018. Soon after, however, the connection between the two has regressed to its old days of disputes (Addisu, 2020 and Mosley, 2020). Today the issue of transition to democracy in

Ethiopia is not fixed because there is very little institutional approach to democracy (Paulos, 2019). Furthermore, ethnic and group rights are being highly politicized by their respective power elites to monopolize political and economic power (Addisu, 2020 and Mosley, 2020). All these political problems are undermining every attempt to move toward democracy.

The researcher focused on the Pan-ethiopianist and ethno-nationalist political elites contradistinction to investigate the possibility of transition to democracy in Ethiopia for two interconnected reasons. The initial point to consider is that much of Ethiopia's political history can be interpreted as a struggle between the two (Baxter, 1978). Second, there is a lot of powerful symbolic politics ingrained by former regimes between these two camps of elites. The history of struggle and symbolic politics are deeply intertwined with democratic processes. The nation's fate, whether it enjoys peace and stability or descends into chaos and political turmoil, has been shaped by these two elite groups. A peaceful political transition and governance can only occur if these elites reach a consensus. However, if they remain divided by conflicting political ideologies and systems, the struggle will persist.

Several studies have explored related themes using various approaches at different times. For example, Mosley (2020) examined Ethiopia's transition and its implications for the Horn of Africa and the Red Sea Region, highlighting external challenges faced by Dr. Abiy's government. Similarly, Sisay (2013) analyzed the difficulties of establishing democratic governance structures for development in Ethiopia, identifying ethnic federalism, authoritarian governance, and a historical legacy of conflict and stagnation as barriers to democracy. Additionally, Hagman (2006) studied the 2005 elections, concluding that Ethiopia's political culture resists change due to a patrimonial system and the elite's relentless pursuit of power. Other research has focused on the 2015 and 2016 protests and the government's responses. However, a significant gap remains: none of these studies have empirically demonstrated the relationship between elite divisions, specifically between pan-Ethiopianist and ethno-centric elites, and the transition to democracy in Ethiopia. In other words, there is a lack of recent, comprehensive, and well-documented research on how elite political competition influences the democratic transition in Ethiopia. Therefore, this study aims to address the gap in the existing literature by empirically examining the relationship between elite political contradiction and the transition to democracy in Ethiopia since 1991. It focuses on the roles of pan-Ethiopianist and ethno-nationalist elite groups, utilizing current and reliable data.

### **1.3. Core Argument**

The paper assumes that elite fragmentation, driven by competing visions of national identity, has hindered consensus-building, institutional stability, and inclusive governance, ultimately impeding transition to democracy in Ethiopia.

### **1.4. Objectives of the Study**

#### **1.4.1. General Objective**

The study aims to critically examine the interplay between pan-Ethiopianist and ethnocentric ideologies among Ethiopia's political elites and their impact on transition to inclusive democracy.

#### **1.4.2. Specific Objectives**

The specific objectives of this thesis are the following.

1. to analyse the historical and ideological roots of pan-Ethiopianism and ethnocentric political elites in Ethiopia
2. to examine the contradictions and power struggles between pan-Ethiopianist and ethnocentric political elites
3. to assess the impact of elite contradiction on Ethiopia's transition to democracy

### **1.5. Research Questions**

#### **1.5.1. Core Research Question**

The core research question of the study is how the ideological and historical contradiction between pan-ethiopianist and ethno-nationalist group of elites affects Ethiopia's transition to democracy during the period between 1991 and 2024, when a new political configuration was introduced in the country?

#### **1.5.2. Specific Research Questions**

1. What are the historical and ideological roots of pan-Ethiopianist and ethnocentric political elites that shaped the political landscape in Ethiopia from 1991 to 2024?
2. What are the fundamental areas of contradiction and power struggle between pan-ethiopianist and ethno-centric group of elites in Ethiopia?
3. How elite confrontations affect transition to democracy in Ethiopia?

## **1.6. Study Area**

This research explores the elites' contestation in Ethiopia and its effects on the political development of the country. Situated in the Horn of Africa, Ethiopia is a landlocked country with a geographical space of 1.1 million square **kilometres**, a country of varied topographies such as the Semen Mountains and the Danakil Depression (Bahru, 2010). Having a three-thousand-year-old cultural past, Ethiopia vanquished colonial occupation and has a varied range of ethnic groups, languages, and religions (Teshale, 1995). Despite its diversity, Ethiopians have long united to defend national sovereignty (Wagaw and Geremew, 2023)

Ethiopia is a federal parliamentary republic with power shared between twelve regional states based on ethnicity and two chartered cities, which are Addis Ababa and Dire Dawa. The Prime Minister exercises executive power, while the President has largely symbolic responsibilities. The political situation has been characterized by competition among elite groups, especially between pan-Ethiopianist and ethno-centric factions. The governing Prosperity Party (PP), established in 2019 as a political party to succeed the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) administration, has encountered colossal challenges in combating deep-seated tensions as various ethnic groups and opposition parties persist in challenging its legitimacy. Ethiopia is presently confronted with enormous internal displacement, interethnic conflicts, and economic hardships. The government's capacity to combat these challenges while upholding national harmony is a determining test of the nation's fate (Aalen & Tronvoll, 2021).

## **1.7. Methodology**

Research methodology aims to systematically address the research problem and scientifically guides the way through which research is undertaken (Kothari, 2004). The paper used qualitative research design to examine the dynamics of elites' contradiction and its effect on transition to democracy in Ethiopia. Qualitative research design is indispensable to investigate attitudes, thoughts, behavior, and experiences (Dawson, 2007). The rationale behind the use of this approach is that subjective assessment of questions like 'what?', 'how?' and 'why?' can best be answered using the method

The research is comparative-exploratory and engaged historical comparison and discourse analysis to study several key dimensions. Historical comparison conducted to explore how different systems (Imperial, Derg, EPRDF, post-2018 reform period) have administered ethnic variety and national solidarity. The centralized Ethiopianist strategies under the Derg (1974–1991) and the ethnic federalism introduced by the EPRDF in 1995 are compared and contrasted. The thesis tries to compare

how elites from both pan-Ethiopianist and Ethno-nationalist camps instrumentalized history.

This thesis used critical discourse analysis (CDA) (Fairclough, 1995 and Meyer, 2016) to search the ideological pedigree of pan-Ethiopianist and ethno-centric elites in Ethiopia's political transition since 1991. In the analysis, a due emphasis is given to political speeches; policy papers; and media narratives to reveal power relations, framing strategies, and discursive legitimization of competing ideologies (Van Dijk, 1993). By integrating historical-contextual analysis (Reisigl & Wodak, 2001), the study explores how elite discourses frame democratization processes, reinforcing or circumventing hegemonic narratives (Gramsci, 1971).

The comparative method is suitable for this study because it enables the researcher to contrast the psycho-ideological orientations and political behaviours of pan-Ethiopianist elites against ethno-nationalist elites across different historical periods. Pan-Ethiopianist elites supported civic nationalism, centralized state structure while Ethno-nationalist elites uphold ethnic nationalism, and decentralized state structure. Pan-Ethiopianists vision of statehood emphasized territorial unity; ethno-nationalists pursued multinational federalism. Pan-Ethiopianists mobilization tactics appealed shared history; ethno-nationalists exploited grievances. Both strategies fuelled cyclical conflict, undermining democracy. Pan-Ethiopianists ideology sourced from ancient Ethiopia and imperial-era centralization, while ethno-nationalists cite Walleligne Mekonnen's 1960s Marxist critique of Amhara hegemony (Tronvoll, 2021 and Abbink, 2022).

This study also contrasts the Pan-Ethiopianism thesis with ethno-nationalism antithesis to detect unsettled tensions to examine elite political narratives to assess their impact on democratic transition. It also compared the core political variances between Pan-Ethiopianist and Ethno-nationalist elites (Abiy Ahmed, 2019 and Aalen, 2011). It examines which group of elite backed or hindered democratization in the country(Tronvoll, 2021 and Abbink, 2022) and describe how elite contradictions became causes of conflicts like Tigray War 2020 - 022, Oromo protests 2014 - 2018 and guerrilla movements in Amhara region since 2023(De Waal, 2021 and Merera, 2022). The thesis explores historical context like the 1960s student movements that birthed ethno-nationalism and institutional changes like the shift from Haile Selassie's "official nationalism" to the EPRDF's ethnic federalism, including the 1995 Constitution's formation of ethno-regional states. The thesis proves why elite narratives remain polarized, as seen in information and violent conflicts.

### **1.7.1. Data Sources**

The study relies on primary and secondary data sources. Primary sources comprise archival materials like government documents, party manifestos, and political speeches; interviews with key political actors and scholars; and media reports and public statements from political elites. Secondary Sources of data for this investigation are academic literature on Ethiopian politics, elite theory, and democratization; and reports from local, continental and international organizations and the media (e.g., African Union, UN, Human Rights Watch, ICG and BBC, Aljazeera, and other NGOs).

### **1.7.2. Data Collection Tools**

The research employs key informant in-depth interviews and document review as tools of data collection from primary sources. This is because in-depth interviews are effective qualitative methods for getting people to talk about their personal outlooks, opinions, and experiences. The researcher used face-to-face interviews for those interviewees easy to find and telephone for those who are hard to find. Semi-structured and open-ended questions are presented to get qualitative data concerning the issue. Moreover, party statements, press releases and guiding documents of political parties are reviewed and utilized for the purpose of the study. The study also used different books, journal articles, declarations, government directives, and also trusted websites for deeper investigation.

A purposive sampling technique is used to select data-rich key informants for interviews, focusing on individuals with direct participation in or knowledge of Ethiopia's political processes. This includes former and current politicians, and academics. Five key informants are selected purposively. The sampling ensures representation from both Pan-Ethiopianist and ethno-centric perspectives. Purposive sampling starts with a purpose in mind and the sample is selected because he or she has better knowledge and information about the issue as compared to others. Due to their deep knowledge of the issue, key informants have good understanding about the problem and what to do in the future. Qualitative data obtained from interviews are recorded and notes are taken.

### **1.7.3. Data Analysis Method**

The study employs thematic discourse analysis to identify patterns and themes in the data. The analysis focuses on the ideological and political contradictions between Pan-Ethiopianist and ethno-centric elites, and the impact of these contradictions on democratic establishments and processes. Thematic analysis is a potent qualitative research tool that enables researchers to identify and explain patterns within data sets (Hecker and Kalpokas, 2024). Accordingly the themes are formed by

condensing two or more study questions into one unique theme. The analysis is carried out in such a way that the collected data is organized, reviewed, coded, combined into themes, and finally presented in a coherent manner. To data collected through interview are substantiated with plethora of written documents to ensure the validity and reliability.

#### **1.7.4. Ethical Considerations**

The research adheres to ethical standards, ensuring informed consent, confidentiality, and protection of participants' identities. The researcher commits to upholding moral and professional standards throughout the study, including data collection, analysis, and reporting. Truthfulness, objectivity, and relevance guide the research process. Given the focus on political perceptions and elite informants, primary data sources are prioritized, with emphasis on developing trust and rapport to ensure genuine responses. Participants are informed of the academic use of data and their right to respond freely or withdraw at any time. Confidentiality is maintained, and consent is obtained for voice recordings, with assurances that personal profiles will not be disclosed.

#### **1.8. Scope of the Study**

The study focuses only on investigating the back-and-forth between elite political contradiction and the transition to democracy in Ethiopia by considering the role of the pan-ethiopianist and ethno-nationalist elites in transition. The study period covers from 1991 up to 2024. From several factors that have a relationship with a transition to democracy, only elite politics is examined. The study focuses on the elite rather than the mass political culture having an impact on the transition to democracy in the country

#### **1.9. Limitations of the Study**

This study focuses on only elite political contradiction to investigate the politics of transition in Ethiopia. This means that it cannot represent the attitude of the mass towards transition to democracy in Ethiopia. As the study is limited to pan-ethiopianist and ethno-nationalist group of elites only, it may not give a full picture of the country's elites with different perspectives. In addition, the study has the problem of generalizability. Elites are not the only factors for transition to democracy because transition to democracy is a cumulative effort of elites, democratic institutions, the media and civic society institutions.

### **1.10. Significance of the Study**

Investigating the nexus between elite political contradiction and the transition to democracy in Ethiopia will be helpful to provide information to the politicians and policy articulators that will enable them to come up with the appropriate solution regarding how to ensure a political culture that would win popular support. It will also provide information of vital nature about politics and democracy to active citizens in the country. Furthermore, the study will also bridge the knowledge gap in the existing literature and will help broaden the contemporary knowledge pertaining to the nature and practices of elite political culture and the transition to democracy in Ethiopia.

### **1.11. Structure of the Thesis**

The thesis is organized into six chapters. The first chapter, the introductory part, provides a general overview of the study. The general information included in this chapter are the background of the study, statement of the problem, objectives of the Study, Significance of the Study, Methods, scope, and limitations of the study. The second chapter briefly discusses related literature pertinent to the topic. In this chapter literature on the relationship between elite political contest and transition to democracy from theoretical and conceptual perspectives are reviewed. The third chapter of the thesis explores historical and ideological roots of Pan-Ethiopianism and Ethnocentric Elites. In the fourth chapter, areas of contradictions and Power Struggles between Pan-Ethiopian and Ethnocentric Elites examined. Impact of Elite Contradictions on Ethiopia's Transition to Democracy is investigated in the fifth chapter. The last chapter is all about the concluding remarks and prospects of transition to democracy in Ethiopia.

## Chapter Two

### Conceptual and Theoretical Perspectives

#### 2.1. Definition of Concepts

##### 2.1.1. Political Elites

Elites as a few numbered individuals who have significant impact on the societal orientation and decision, controlled actual or potential kind of disproportionate power; and demonstrate certain distinct traits as consciousness, social status, and wealth (Pareto, 1935).

Political elites are persons or groups who grasp significant power and impact within a political system. They often shape policy, control resources, and influence the direction of political discourse (Mosca, 1939). They are the power containers and leaders of a body politic, and their recruitment can vary depending on the type of society. In democratic countries, the political elite is recruited from a broad base, while in non-democratic societies, the elite often comes from a narrow base, such as a few families (Michels, 1911).

##### 2.1.2. Ethno-centrism

Ethnocentrism is a political ideology that prioritizes the interests, culture, and autonomy of a specific ethnic group over the collective national identity. It often advocates for self-determination based on ethnic lines (Merera, 2003; Abbink, 2006).

Ethno-centric Elites argued that certain ethnic groups have historically controlled the political, economic, and cultural spheres of the country, often at the expense of other groups (Markakis, 2011). The ideology of ethnocentric elites is rooted in the conviction that ethnic identity is the primary basis for political organization and resource distribution. This ideology gained eminence following the collapse of the Derg regime in 1991 (Abbink, 2006).

##### 2.1.3. Pan-Ethiopianism

Pan-Ethiopianism is a political and ideological model that emphasizes the solidarity, and common character of all diverse groups within Ethiopia. It champions for a consolidated state configuration that surpasses ethnic divisions and promotes a collective Ethiopian identity (Tibebu, 1995; Bahru, 2002).

Pan-Ethiopianist elites have historically argued for an integrated Ethiopian identity, emphasizing common history, common culture, and sovereignty (Aalen, 2002; Tronvoll, 2009). They view Ethiopia

as a multi-ethnic state bound by a common historical narrative, often rooted in the Solomonic dynasty and Orthodox Christianity (Zewde, 2001). They promote Ethiopian nationalism as a counter to ethnic federalism, fearing disintegration (Tibebu, 1995). Politically, they advocate for centralized authority, arguing that decentralization damages national unity (Clapham, 2002). Critics, however, accuse them of sidelining ethnic factions (Merera, 2003). This debate remains central to Ethiopia's political discussion, reflecting pressures between unity and diversity.

#### **2.1.4. Contradiction**

In this context, contradictions refer to the tensions and collision in interest and opinion between the Pan-Ethiopianist and ethno-nationalist category of political elites. Disagreement in policy articulation, power struggle, and differing vision on future of Ethiopian statehood is the manifestations of this elite's contradiction (Lefort, 2010; Clapham, 2017).

#### **2.1.5. Transition to Democracy**

In politics, transition is the period of interval in between the dissolution of one political regime and the installation of another new system (Schneider, 2006). Hence transition to democracy is a shift from an undemocratic to a democratic administration that upholds democratic values and established civil rule. This process often involves the establishment of democratic institutions, free and fair elections, and the protection of civil liberties (O'Donnell & Schmitter, 1986; Linz & Stepan, 1996).

Some of the key elements influencing the shift to democracy are political culture, political institutions, and the nature of the elite and constitutional settlements. Transition to democracy requires substantive reconfiguration of basic procedural and institutional elements (Ingelhart and Welzel, 2005). This is because the fate of democracy highly depends on the ability of elites to shoulder popular agendas (Sisay, 2003). Huntington (1991) argued that though a regime exhibits the attributes of democracy, it could not be considered democratic until one party had transferred power to another following losing a national election without scandal. Ethiopia's post-1991 political trajectory, demonstrates the contradictions between *Pan-Ethiopianist* and *ethno-nationalist* elites. Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) institutionalized ethnic federalism, exacerbating elite fragmentation. While ethno-nationalists advocated for ethnic self-determination, Pan-Ethiopianists resisted, viewing it as a threat to national unity. This ideological clash hindered democratic consolidation, as elite polarization fueled recurrent crises. The post-2018 transition under Abiy Ahmed attempted reconciliation but failed to reconcile these divergent visions, perpetuating instability. Ethiopia's democratic transition remains incomplete without elite consensus on national

identity (Merara, 2003). There is a need for inclusive dialogue to resolve these contradictions.

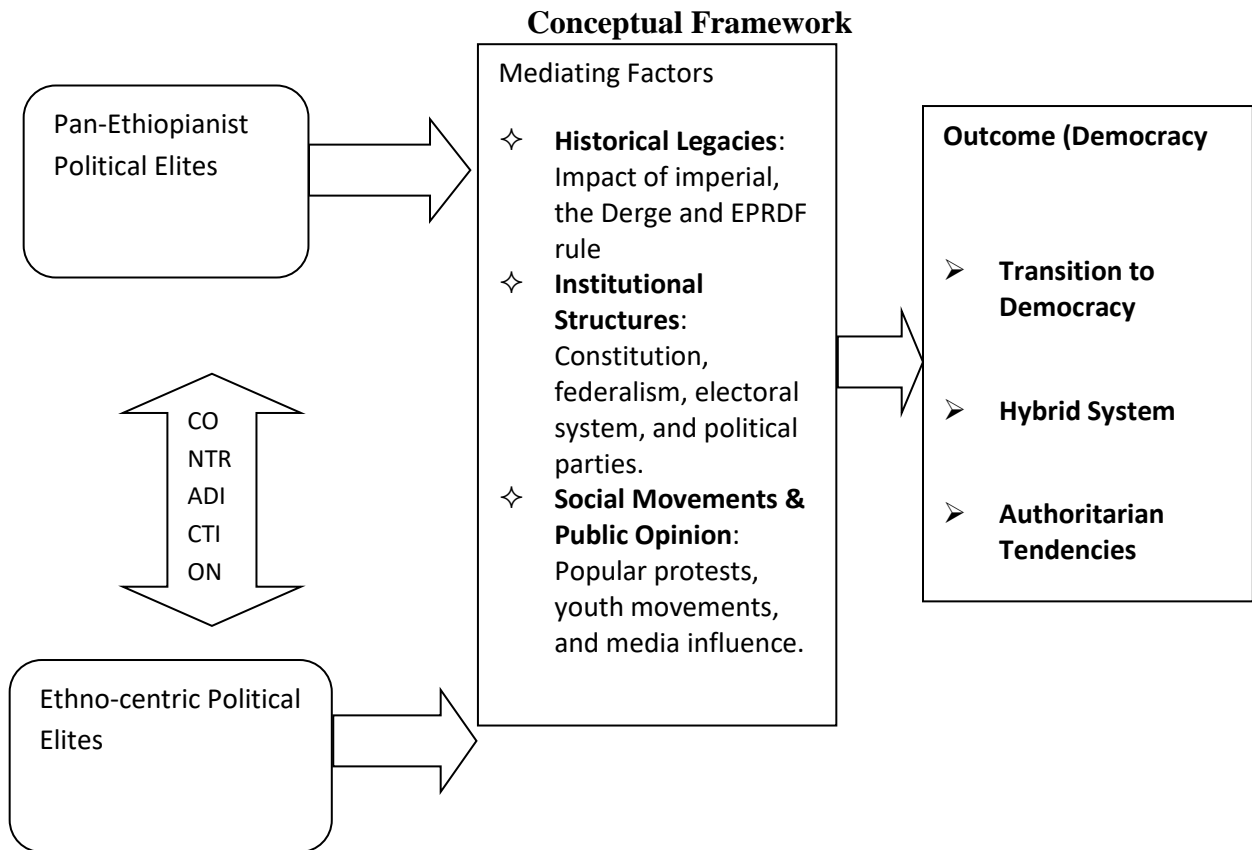


Figure 1: The Conceptual framework (own drawing)

## **2.2. Theoretical Perspectives**

In comparative politics, a few key themes are frequently explored, such as the causes of democracy and how elite power struggle and consensus shape democratization. Various factors significantly influence democratic transitions in emerging democracies. The following are the major theoretical approaches that the researcher reviewed to study elite contradiction and transition to democracy in Ethiopia.

### **2.2.1 Elite Approach**

Elite theory; advanced by scholars such as Vilfredo Pareto, Gaetano Mosca, and Robert Michels; provides a framework for understanding the dynamics of power within societies, particularly the role of elites in sustaining or transitioning political systems. Elite theory to democracy posits that community's agendas are best fixed by a small group of its members (Mills, 1956; Pareto, 1935). Thus, the core of elite theory relies in explaining elite behaviour, elite communication, elite transformation and, ultimately, the connection between those instances and state outcomes when individuals have different inclinations because different ethnicity, democratic policy outcomes are closer to the preferences of the elites, rather than the preferences of the poor majority (Pareto, 1991). Elite theory suggests that democratization often occurs when elites perceive that their interests are better served by democratic institutions than by maintaining authoritarian rule (Huntington, 1991).

In the context of Ethiopia, the contest between Pan-Ethiopianist and ethnic-centric elites mirrors this dynamic, as both groups vie for dominance in shaping the nation's political and social trajectory. Pan-Ethiopianist elites support for a unified national character, often stressing the historical and cultural endurance of Ethiopia as a multi-ethnic state (Aalen, 2002). In contrast, ethnic-centric elites prioritize the benefits of specific ethnic sets, challenging the supremacy of the traditional elite and advocating for greater autonomy or self-determination (Merera, 2003). This elite contestation has profound implications for Ethiopia's transition to democracy, as the equilibrium of power between these groups influences the inclusivity and stability of democratic institutions (Harbeson, 2013). The elite theory framework supports to elucidate how the interaction between these competing elite factions shapes political outcomes. For instance, the dominance of Pan-Ethiopianist elites during the imperial and Derg eras disregarded ethnic-centric voices, leading to grievances that fueled ethnic armament in the post-1991 period (Tronvoll, 2000). Conversely, the rise of ethnocentric elites after the fall of the Derg regime has redefined the political setting, creating new impediments for national cohesion and democratic consolidation (Abbink, 2006). Understanding these dynamics through the lens of elite

theory provides valuable insights into the complexities of Ethiopia's political evolution.

This theory can be practical to analyze elite contradictions and the transition to democracy, as elites often play a pivotal role in either challenging or upholding democratic change. Elite theory offers a useful framework for exploring the fluctuation of power and political decision-making in Ethiopia, particularly in understanding the antagonism between Pan-Ethiopianist elites and ethnocentric elites (Aalen, 2002). The opposing visualization reflects a broader fight over the distribution of power and resources, as well as the explanation of national character. The current Ethiopian constitution, embraced in 1995, reflects the influence of ethnocentric elites, particularly the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), which governed the country until 2018 (Aalen, 2011). The rise of Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed in 2018 marked a change toward somewhat Pan-Ethiopianist approach at least in orientation, as he sought to encourage national unity and reduce ethnic tightness through initiatives such as the formation of the Prosperity Party, which aimed to excel ethnic divisions (Tadesse, 2020). In the Ethiopian context, the paradoxes between Pan-Ethiopianist and ethnocentric elites can be studied through this lens.

### **2.2.2. Ethnicity and Nationalism Theory**

This theory supports the role of ethnicity and nationalism in shaping political dynamics. It can be used to discover how ethnic-centric elites activate ethnic identities to gain political power, while Pan-Ethiopianist elites promote a broader national character. Theories of ethnicity and nationalism provide a framework for indulgent the tensions between Pan-Ethiopianism and ethno-centric ideologies. Pan-Ethiopianism aligns with civic nationalism, while ethnocentric politics reflect ethnic nationalism (Anderson, 1983; Smith, 1986).

Ethnicity and nationalism are vital concepts in political science, particularly when examining elite contradictions and transitions to democracy. These theories help clarify how ethnic identities and nationalist ideologies are manipulated by elites to maintain power or facilitate democratic transitions. Ethnicity often works as a tool for elites to consolidate power or navigate political transitions. In multi-ethnic societies, elites may exploit ethnic divisions to maintain control, creating what Horowitz (1985) describes as ethnic outbidding, where political leaders appeal to ethnic sentiments to secure support. This can lead to elite contradictions, as opposing factions within the elite class may use ethnicity to undermine rivals, often exacerbating societal divisions.

The contradiction between Pan-Ethiopianist and ethnocentric elites in Ethiopia can be understood through the lens of ethnicity and nationalism theories. Pan-Ethiopianism, which underscores a unified national identity, aligns with civic nationalism, where belonging is based on shared political values and institutions rather than ethnic ties (Smith, 1991). In contrast, ethnocentric ideologies reflect ethnic nationalism, which prioritizes cultural, linguistic, and historical ties to specific ethnic groups (Smith, 1991; Hutchinson & Smith, 1996).

In Ethiopia ethnic federalism, introduced in the 1990s, institutionalized ethnicity as a political category, reflecting primordialist and instrumentalist theories of ethnicity. Primordialists argue that ethnic identities are deeply rooted in history and culture, while instrumentalists view them as tools used by elites to mobilize support for political or economic gain (Geertz, 1963; Brass, 1991). In Ethiopia, ethnocentric elites have leveraged these identities to consolidate power, while Pan-Ethiopianist elites have sought to transcend ethnic divisions in favor of a unified national identity (Aalen, 2002; Merera, 2003). The interplay between these elite groups highlights the challenges of democratization in multi-ethnic societies. As Horowitz (1985) notes, ethnic divisions often complicate democratic transitions, as competing groups vie for power and resources. In Ethiopia, the skirmish between Pan-Ethiopianist and ethnic-centric elites has led to series of clash and negotiation, underscoring the need for inclusive political institutions that accommodate both visions of nationhood (Lijphart, 1999).

Nationalism, on the other hand, can either hinder or facilitate democratization. According to Gellner (1983), nationalism is a modern marvel tied to the rise of the nation-state, often used by elites to legitimize their rule. During democratic transitions, elites may appeal nationalist rhetoric to unify diverse populations and create a sense of shared identity, which can help stabilize the political system (Berman, 1998).

### **2.2.3. Transition Theory (Democratization Studies)**

Transition theory examines the progressions and conditions under which authoritarian regimes transition to democracy. This framework can be pragmatic to analyze how the contest between Pan-Ethiopianist and ethnocentric elites affects Ethiopia's democratization process, including the role of elite pacts, institutional design, and political inclusion (O'Donnell & Schmitter, 1986; Huntington, 1991). Transition theory, as articulated by scholars such as Guillermo O'Donnell, Philippe Schmitter, and Adam Przeworski, provides a framework for understanding the processes through which authoritarian regimes shift to democratic governance. This theory emphasizes the role of elite

negotiations, pacts, and the interplay between reformist and hardliners factions within the ruling elite, as well as the mobilization of civil society and opposition groups. In the context of Ethiopia, the dynamics between pan-Ethiopianist elites, who advocate for a unified national identity, and ethnic-centric elites, who prioritize ethnic federalism, have significantly influenced the country's political trajectory and its transition to democracy.

Transition theory postulates that democratic transitions often result from negotiations and pacts among political elites. These pacts are typically characterized by cooperation that ensures the protection of key interests of all parties involved, thereby reducing the risk of violent conflict (O'Donnell & Schmitter, 1986). In Ethiopia, the confrontation between pan-Ethiopianist and ethnocentric elites has required such negotiations, particularly during critical junctures such as the 2018 political reforms. The theory also highlights the importance of civil society and opposition groups in pushing for democratic reforms. In Ethiopia, the role of youth engagements, media, and regional opposition parties has been crucial in advocating for greater political openness and accountability (Tronvoll, 2019). Transition theory underscores the significance of institutional design in consolidating democratic evolutions. Power-sharing arrangements, electoral systems, and federal structures are critical in handling ethnic diversity and preventing the resurgence of authoritarian practices (Lijphart, 1999). Ethiopia's ethnic federalism, enshrined in the 1995 constitution, has been a double-edged sword, both accommodating ethnic diversity and exacerbating ethnic tensions.

The paradox between Pan-Ethiopianist and ethnocentric elites in Ethiopia reflects the broader dynamics of democratic transitions, as outlined by O'Donnell and Schmitter (1986). Elite pacts and bargains play a critical role in modeling the course of democratization, particularly in multi-ethnic states where contending visualizations of the nation-state coexist (Linz & Stepan, 1996). In Ethiopia, the federal system can be seen as an organized attempt to manage these elite conflicts, though its effectiveness remains contested (Merera, 2011). This has made the consolidation of democracy particularly hindering, as ethnic-centric elites often prioritize regional interests over national unity (Aalen, 2020).

Generally, transition theory offers a valuable basis for understanding the dynamics of Ethiopia's political transition, particularly the contestation between pan-Ethiopianist and ethnic-centric elites. The theory's emphasis on elite negotiations, civil society mobilization, and institutional design offers insights into the challenges and opportunities of Ethiopia's democratic transition. However, the

Ethiopian case also highlights the limitations of transition theory, particularly in contexts where ethnic identities are deeply politicized and institutional arrangements are contested.

The theoretical underpinning of this thesis is the integration of the elite, nationalism and ethnicity, and transition theories. These theoretical frameworks are used to analyze the role of elites, ethnic identities, and nationalist ideologies in shaping Ethiopia's political transitions. The elite theory is applied to examine how the two competing political elites control power, resources, and decision-making processes in Ethiopia. Second ethnicity and nationalism theory is employed to explore how ethnic identities and nationalist ideologies influence elite behavior and political mobilization. Finally, transition theory is applied to examine the processes and conditions under which Ethiopia transitions to democracy, focusing on elite negotiations, institutional reforms, and societal pressures.

In a nutshell, the theoretical foundation of the thesis is the mixture of the above three approaches because of the following reasons. First, political backwardness in Ethiopia is primarily rooted in the historic problems of institutional and policy failure and discontinuity, and the inability or the unwillingness of elites under governing regimes to learn from past experiences and to make significant political and economic reforms along democratic lines. Second, the root causes of contestation between pan-ethiopianist and ethno-nationalist group of elites in Ethiopia has ideological and adversarial orientation than institutional and consociational-based political discourses. Adversarial oriented elite faction is very much challenging to democratic transition of the nation. Then the way Ethiopia constructed and the political culture it experienced are becoming causes of contention among political elite in the country. Finally, it is mainly lack of political and development institutions, than cultural diversity, that impede Ethiopia's move towards democratic transition.

## Chapter Three

### Historical and Ideological Foundation of Pan-Ethiopianism and Ethnocentric Politics in Ethiopia

#### 3.1. Political History of Ethiopia as a Background

Although Ethiopia is an old state; its territorial integrity and political configuration changed over time. The history of elite-driven politics in Ethiopia is deeply rooted in the country's socio-political structures. The pre- 19<sup>th</sup> century Ethiopia's political system was traditionally characterized by a feudal monarchy, where power was concentrated in the hands of the emperor and the nobility. This system entrenched a hierarchical social order, with the elite maintaining power through land ownership, military strength, and religious legitimacy (Markakis, 1974).

Starting from the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards, the agenda of reunification and modernization of Ethiopia had been a matter of utmost priority. But certainly political elites of the country conceived the two agendas differently at different times (Bahru, 1991). Historians agreed that the creation of modern Ethiopia was inaugurated by Tewodros II (1855-1868), incorporated by Yohannis IV (1871-1889), consolidated by Menelik II (1889-1913) and completed by Haile Sellassie (1930-1974) (Bahru, 1991). *“Though his military command and political realm centre on the northern principalities, Tewodros II is regarded as the country's first monarch with the concepts of modernization and political reunification. Emperor Tewodros II brought about land and economic reforms to consolidate his power. The reign of Tewodros laid the foundation for national military reforms in terms of discipline, armament and organization. Yohannes IV attempted to introduce a somewhat decentralized approach of administration, permitting local rulers to exercise some sort of autonomy”* (Interview with a historian, Debre Markos, 10 May 2023).

Emperor Menelik's period was notably known for territorial expansion and modernization. During the territorial expansion Menelik's army faced mixed reaction (peaceful submission and fierce resistance). The protracted Gibe Oromo States and the kingdom of Jimma peacefully submitted to the then national army. But Arsi, Hararge, Kaffa and Walayita were conquered after bloody armed struggles. In such approach Menelik II and his vassals were able to manage the unity of Ethiopia which had been localized and protracted along semi-ethnic lines. As one historian noted, *"Menelik's conquests unified Ethiopia but also disseminated seeds of ethnic resentment. Regions like Arsi and Walayita resisted violently, while others, such as Jimma, submitted peacefully. This duality persists in today's debates over state legitimacy."* (Interview with a Historian, Debre Markos, 10 May 2023).

In addition to this work of restoring national unity of the nation, following the victory of Ethiopians over Italian invaders at Adwa in 1896, Ethiopian external sovereignty was accepted by external powers. The recognition of Ethiopia's independence manifested itself in the form of diplomatic relation and boundary demarcation. The ministerial system that Menelik II set up in 1907 appears to have been a symbol of his desire to give government an institutional basis and some degree of continuity (Bahru, 2001).

In the 20th century, Emperor Haile Selassie, who ruled from 1930 to 1974, tried to modernize and centralize Ethiopia. He aimed to strengthen his power by cutting down the influence of regional nobles and setting up a centralized government. But in doing this, he ended up creating a system where a small group of loyal supporters ran the country, which reserved politics in the hands of the elite (Clapham, 1988). A key informant discussed that the educated wing, especially those who studied abroad, really impacted Ethiopia's push for modernization. But this created some friction with the traditional nobility and the new bureaucratic class coming up (Interview with a historian, Debre Markos, 10 May 2023).

The 1974 revolution by the Marxist-Leninist Derg against Haile Selassie marked a change in who had power. The Derg, which was made up of military members, initially claimed to be a revolutionary group that wanted to topple the feudal system. Eventually, it turned into an authoritarian regime led by Mengistu Haile Mariam. The Derg pushed through policies like land reform and nationalization without really considering what ordinary people wanted or needed (Keller, 1988). The regime's reliance on coercion and repression of dissent further entrenched elite politics, albeit in a new ideological guise. As noted by a key informant II, "*The emperor's 'modernization' was Amhara-centric. Schools taught Amharic, Orthodox Christianity was promoted, and regional leaders were sidelined, fueling Tigrayan and Oromo dissent.*" (Interview with EZEMA member, Addis Ababa, May 17, 2022)

When the Derg fell in 1991, it brought in the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), which was a mix of ethnic parties mainly led by the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF). The EPRDF pushed for a system of ethnic federalism, aiming to fix old issues and share power more widely. But many critics argue that this led to power being held mostly by a small group from Tigray (Aalen, 2002). The regime's approach to development, while remarkable for its economic growth, faced criticism for being exclusive and for relying too much on decisions made from the top down. "*We framed federalism as 'liberation,' but power stayed within our clique. The system became a tool for elite control, not inclusivity.*" (Telephone interview with TPLF Executive, May 18, 2020)

Back in 2018, when Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn stepped down and Abiy Ahmed took over, it really changed the game in Ethiopian politics. Abiy made some big moves, like letting political prisoners out and allowing opposition parties to operate, which many saw as a break from the old ways of doing things. Still, there are challenges in tackling long-standing inequalities and getting more people involved in politics (Tronvoll & Vaughan, 2021). The ongoing war in Tigray and beyond highlights the fragility of Ethiopia's political order and the continued significance of elite factions.

In sum, Ethiopia's political order has been characterized by elite-led governance, whether by the monarchy, the Derg, or the EPRDF. While the composition and ideology of the elite have changed over time, concentration of power in the hands of the few has been a running theme in Ethiopian politics. Such a legacy can only be undone by not only institutional reforms but also a general commitment to inclusivity and democratization.

### **3.2. Elites during the Imperial and the Derg Era (1930-1991)**

Ethiopia went through a threatening political time under the Imperial and Derg regimes until 1991. There were many fights over power and different ideas about how the country should be run, especially between those who believed in a united Ethiopia and those focused more on ethnic identities (Interview with a Historian, Debre Markos, 10 May 2023). While Emperor Haile Selassie I ruled from 1930 to 1974, he pushed for a strong central government that emphasized unity. This approach ignored the diverse ethnic backgrounds, which led to frustration among elites (Markakis, 1987). The government wanted everyone to be equal, which stifled the wishes of different ethnic groups. This created a clash between unity and diversity proponent political elites (Clapham, 1988). The ruling class in Ethiopia, mostly made up of the Amhara aristocracy, saw the country as one united entity and considered ethnic demands as a danger to national unity. This position discounted many groups, especially in places like Eritrea, where there was a long fight for independence, and the Oromo, who wanted more self-governance. Not dealing with these issues set the stage for the downfall of the imperial government in 1974 (Interview with EZEMA member, Addis Ababa, 17 May 2022).

After Haile Selassie's rule, the Derg government talked a lot about socialism and claimed it would eliminate ethnic divisions. But strict Marxist-Leninist approach ended up leading to a crackdown on ethnic movements because it saw those movements as divisive and a threat to national unity (Keller, 1988). The land reform and the end of the feudal system didn't take ethnic feelings into account rather added tensions. The government's military actions against groups like the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) and the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) show that it's struggling to combine its socialist

ideas with Ethiopia's different ethnic groups (Young, 1997). This created more division in Ethiopian society and highlighted the conflicts between pan-Ethiopianist and ethno-centric political elites (Andargachew, 1993).

To sum it up, the imperial rule from 1930 to 1974 pushed the idea of Pan-Ethiopianism while leaving many ethnic groups on the side-lines. Then the Derg from 1974 to 1991 clamped down on ethnic identities with its socialist views, making tensions worse. The problems set in motion by both regimes have made it tougher for Ethiopia to move towards democracy. They suppressed ethnic aspirations, leading to long-lasting grievances that became apparent after 1991. When the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) took over in 1991, they tried to fix these issues by establishing an ethnic federal state. But this approach has drawn criticism for making ethnicity a big part of the system and not helping create a shared national identity. The tug-of-war between pan-Ethiopianist and ethno-centric political elites still shapes Ethiopian politics, and that makes it hard to build a stable and inclusive democracy. The history of strong centralized power and ethnic exclusion also continues to block efforts for national harmony and a solid democratic foundation.

### **3.3. Elites during the EPRDF and Prosperity Era (1991-2024)**

The EPRDF implemented ethnic federalism, giving power to different ethnic groups. While this approach aimed to fix past injustices, it also created a stronger focus on ethnic differences and lessened the influence of those who wanted to unite all Ethiopians (Abbink, 2006). After 1991, Ethiopia saw a big change in its political scene with the rise of the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF). This time was marked by clashes between two groups of elites: pan-Ethiopianists, who believed in a united Ethiopia and ethno-nationalist that focused on ethnic identities. The EPRDF introduced ethnic federalism, giving power to regional states based on ethnic backgrounds. While this was meant to address past inequalities among Ethiopia's diverse groups, it ended up creating tensions between the two sides and challenged the country's efforts to strengthen its democracy. A Prosperity Party (PP) leader admitted: "*Federalism was a façade. Tigrayans controlled the military, economy, and security. Others got symbolic 'autonomy' without real power.*" (Interview with PP Executive, Addis Ababa 16 May 2023). Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed took office in 2018, bringing a focus on unity and remedial for all Ethiopians. But not everyone is on board with this idea, especially folks in Tigray and Oromia who are more focused on their ethnic identities (Tronvoll & Vaughan, 2020). He became Prime Minister after years of major protests from groups like the Oromo and Amhara, pushing back against the government that was mostly run by the Tigrayan People's

Liberation Front (TPLF). Under Abiy's leadership, there were some political changes and efforts to make peace and move towards democracy. But this also revealed some serious divides between pan-Ethiopianist and ethno-centric elites, making the shift to democracy more challenging (Interview with OFC and TPLF executive committee members, Addis Ababa May 14 2023).

The EPRDF era is a tricky and debated time in Ethiopia's political history. Ethnic federalism was meant to address past inequalities, but it ended up deepening the divide between Pan-Ethiopian and ethnic-focused elites. This era shows just how tough it is to bring different ideas about national identity and governance together (Interview with a historian, Debre Markos, 10 May 2023). The era of the Prosperity Party marked a key moment in Ethiopia's politics, with a constant back-and-forth between these two ideologies. When Abiy Ahmed first came to power, there was hope for real democratic change, but clashes between pan-Ethiopianist and ethno-centric elites have slowed things down and heightened ethnic tensions. The conflict in Tigray and ongoing issues in governance show how complex Ethiopia's move towards democracy really is. To overcome these problems, the country needs to find a balance between national unity and ethnic identity, along with a commitment to politics that include everyone. An Oromo politician argued: "*Abiy's 'Medemer' rhetoric is assimilationist. He praises Menelik a figure who enslaved Oromos, while dismantling our regional rights.*"(Telephone Interview with OFC member, May 25, 2022)

### **3.4. Pan-Ethiopianism: as A Historically unifying Framework**

The Solomonic Dynasty, said to be descended from the biblical Solomon and the Queen of Sheba, played an important role in bringing together Ethiopia's diverse ethnic groups. Pan-Ethiopianists ruled from 1270 to 1974, promoting the idea that Ethiopia was a chosen nation tasked with protecting Christianity in a region mainly dominated by Islam (Levine, 1974). This story played a big role in bringing together the Ethiopian state and shaping a shared identity for its people. Ethiopia's victory in the Battle of Adwa in 1896 against the Italian colonial forces is a key moment in the history of Pan-Ethiopianism (Interview with a historian, Debre Markos, 10 May 2023). It didn't just confirm Ethiopia as an independent nation; it also stood as a symbol of African resistance to colonial rule. This win helped people see Ethiopia as a united country that rose above ethnic and regional divisions (Bahru, 2001). Orthodox Christianity has played a big role in shaping Ethiopian history (Interview with a historian, Debre Markos, 10 May 2023). The Ethiopian Orthodox *Tewahedo* Church, founded in the 4th century, helped bring people together through a common faith and culture. The church's *Ge'ez* liturgy and stories, like the *Kebra Nagast*, emphasized Ethiopia's unique place in history and its

special mission (Marcus, 1994).

Pan-Ethiopianism is tied to the idea of Ethiopian exceptionalism, which suggests that Ethiopia stands out among African nations due to its long history of independence, rich Christian traditions, and continuous culture. This belief has often been used to support stronger central authority and limit the rights of various ethnic and regional groups (Clapham, 1988).

Emperor Haile Selassie (1930-1974) was an important figure in pushing for Pan-Ethiopianism. His government focused on modernizing the country and bringing people together, but this often came at the cost of ignoring different ethnic groups. For instance, the 1955 constitution aimed to create a centralized state and downplayed ethnic identities in favour of a single Ethiopian identity (Bahru, 2001).

The Derg regime was in power from 1974 to 1991 and pushed a socialist form of Pan-Ethiopianism, focusing more on class struggles than on ethnic issues. It tried to clamp down on ethnic nationalism while also working to keep the country unified, seeing national unity as crucial for Ethiopia's survival (Keller, 1988).

In the late 20th century, after the Derg fell apart, ethnic nationalism started to rise and challenged the idea of a united Ethiopia. When the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) came to power in 1991, ethnic federal system that recognized the rights of the different ethnic groups in the country established. This changed things a lot from the earlier, more centralized approach to Pan-Ethiopianism (Aalen, 2002). Pan-Ethiopianism is still a hot topic in Ethiopian politics today. Some people see it as a way to bring everyone together, no matter their ethnic background, while others think it mainly serves to push minority groups aside. The on-going struggle between federalism and centralization really shows how Pan-Ethiopianism continues to shape the country's political views (Tronvoll, 2009). A church educated PP executive member noted: "*The Kebra Nagast and Ge'ez liturgy unified elites but excluded Muslims and pagans. Today, this narrative is weaponized against ethnic federalism.*" (Interview with PP executive member, Bahir Dar, 16 May 2023)

Pan-Ethiopianism has a long history tied to Ethiopia's unique background, including its state-building, religious identity, and fight against colonialism. While it has brought people together, some say it overlooks the country's ethnic diversity. It's important to grasp the complexities of Pan-Ethiopianism to really get how politics in Ethiopia has shaped up both in the past and now.

### **3.5. Ethnocentrism as a counter- Narration**

Ethiopian history has frequently been shaped by the Amhara ethnic group, specifically through the Solomonic Dynasty, which reigned from the 13th to the 20th century. The dynasty's alleged lineage from King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba buttressed a perception of cultural and religious superiority, since the Amhara were considered to be the guardians of Ethiopian national identity (Levine, 1974). This historical supremacy marginalized the other ethnic groups, including the Oromo, Tigray, and Somali, and created ethnocentric attitudes within the Amhara and resentment within other groups (Interview with a historian, Debre Markos, 10 May 2023). In the 19th century, the Ethiopian Empire grew a lot under Emperor Menelik II, bringing different ethnic groups into the mix. But this often meant that the expansion came through war and control, leaving out non-Amhara groups from holding power. This led to Amhara leaders gaining more control and the spread of the Amharic language, which made the power structure even more focused on ethnicity (Markakis, 2011). The Italian occupation from 1936 to 1941 shook up the power of the Amhara but also boosted Ethiopian nationalism, closely tied to Amhara identity. The fight against the Italian army, led by Emperor Haile Selassie, was seen as a battle to keep Ethiopia independent and also reinforced the idea of Amhara cultural and political prominence (Bahru, 2001).

Ethiopian nationalism really took shape under Emperor Haile Selassie from 1930 to 1974. It focused on bringing the country together through a common culture and language. Known as the One Ethiopia policy, it emphasized Amhara culture and Orthodox Christianity as key parts of what it meant to be Ethiopian, which left out other ethnic groups and their traditions (Clapham, 1988). This ideological school of thought perpetuated ethnocentric thinking in that it favoured one ethnic group above all others.

The Derg regime, which lasted from 1974 to 1991, followed a Marxist-Leninist ideology that sought to eliminate ethnic divisions by focusing on class struggle. But in reality, the government suppressed ethnic movements and identities, particularly those of the Oromo and Tigray people. This led to growing resentment and division among different groups during the Derg period (Young, 1997).

In 1991, the Derg fell, and the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) took charge, introducing ethnic federalism to try and fix past issues by giving more power to different ethnic groups. Still, many folks think this approach has just made ethnic divisions worse and tied political power too closely to ethnic backgrounds (Aalen, 2006). The Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), a ruling party within the EPRDF, was blamed for promoting Tigrayan interests at the expense of others, leading to new ethnocentric tensions.

In modern times, ethnocentrism has continued to be a major force shaping Ethiopian political processes and social formations. The rise of politically aligned parties that are ethnically oriented, such as the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) and parties promoting Amhara nationalism, illustrates the persistence of ethnocentric assumptions. The Tigray war (2020–2022) provides a stark example of how historical and ideological divisions can escalate into violent conflicts, where ethnocentrism has played a key role in fuelling the conflict (De Waal, 2021). An Oromo politician asserted: "*Ethiopia's '3,000-year history' is Amhara myth-making. The Oromo Gada system predates the Solomonic Dynasty but was erased.*" (Telephone Interview with OFC member, 25 May 2022). To sum up, the historical and ideological roots of ethnocentrism in Ethiopia are deeply intertwined with the country's political and cultural development. From the dominance of the Amhara under the Solomonic Dynasty to the ethnic federalism of the post-1991 era, ethnocentric attitudes have been shaped by historical inequalities and ideological frameworks. Addressing ethnocentrism in Ethiopia requires a nuanced understanding of these historical and ideological factors, as well as efforts to promote inclusive national identities that respect Ethiopia's ethnic diversity.

### **3.6. Tensions between Pan-Ethiopianism and Ethnocentrism**

The political and social processes in Ethiopia have, since time immemorial, been influenced by the interaction between two rival ideologies: Pan-Ethiopianism and Ethnocentrism. The two ideologies embody two different visions of national identity, the state, and the role of ethnicity in the Ethiopian state. Contrary to ethnocentrism's focus on ethnic identity and autonomy, Pan-Ethiopianism focuses on a unitary national identity above ethnic divisions, and tensions between the two often result (interview with PP members, 16 May 2023, Addis Ababa).

Pan-Ethiopianism is fundamentally based on the concept of a unified Ethiopian state that fosters a collective national identity among its various ethnic communities. The origins of this ideology can be traced back to the late 19th and early 20th centuries, especially during the periods of Emperor Menelik II and Emperor Haile Selassie, when the contemporary Ethiopian state was established. Pan-Ethiopianism focuses on the historical, cultural, and religious bonds that unify Ethiopians, frequently referencing the heritage of the Solomonic dynasty as well as the Ethiopian Orthodox Church as foundations for unity (Bahru, 2001).

Supporters of Pan-Ethiopianism argue that a strong, centralized state must be established in order to maintain national unity and counter external threats. They view Ethiopia as a heterogeneous country with diverse ethnic groups held together by a shared destiny, where ethnic differences are subordinated

to a common Ethiopian identity (Clapham, 2002). Opponents argue that this ideology has, in the past, marginalized ethnic minorities through the imposition of a homogeneous Amhara culture while suppressing unique ethnic identities (Merera, 2003). Ethnocentrism emphasizes ethnic identity and self-rule. This ideology became salient in the latter half of the 20th century, particularly under the Marxist Derg regime (1974–1991) and subsequent Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) government (1991–2018). Ethnocentrism is ingrained in Ethiopia's federal system, which is established based on the doctrine of ethnic federalism, granting extensive autonomy to ethnically defined regions (Aalen, 2002).

Ethnocentrism aims to correct historical injustices and inequalities by granting ethnic groups self-governance and the capacity to maintain their cultures. Nevertheless, it has also intensified ethnic cleavages and ignited inter-ethnic clashes, as evident in recent conflicts among the Oromo, Amhara, and Tigray communities (Abbink, 2017). According to critics, ethnocentrism is eroding national unity and resulting in a fragmented political environment.

The clash between these two ideologies is a feature of Ethiopian politics. Pan-Ethiopianism is inclined to be identified with the Amhara elite and urban intelligentsia who favour a common national identity, while ethnocentrism is advocated by ethnic-based political parties and regionalists who call for greater autonomy (Tronvoll, 2009). The clash has led to recurring political crises, such as the protests against the EPRDF regime and the current Tigray and Amhara conflict.

The Ethiopian state, under the leadership of Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, has tried to end these conflicts by advancing a vision named "Medemer" (synergy), which aims to reconcile national unity with ethnic diversity. Nevertheless, this initiative has encountered enormous challenges because entrenched ethnic grievances and competing visions of the state persist in fuelling instability (Feyissa, 2021). A PP member complained: "Referring to Addis as 'Finfinne' is separatist, but denying Oromo connections to the city encourages extremism. We must find a middle way." (Interview with PP member, Addis Ababa 16 May)

In summary, the contradictions between Pan-Ethiopianism and ethnocentrism mirror wider arguments concerning identity, statecraft, and the future of the Ethiopian state. Whereas Pan-Ethiopianism is concerned with unity and common national identity, ethnocentrism is preoccupied with ethnic autonomy and the preservation of culture. The reconciliation of these rival ideologies continues to be a unifying challenge for Ethiopia's political elite and society.

## Chapter Four

### Contradiction and Power Struggle between Pan-Ethiopianist and Ethnocentric Political Elites

This chapter is all about the battles between Pan-Ethiopian and ethnocentric political elites and how these struggles have influenced how Ethiopia is run. It looks at how these issues have made it tough to build agreement and have led to political instability. (Aalen, 2002; and Abbink, 2006). Elite politics in Ethiopia is characterized by contradiction and power struggle between pan-ethiopianist and ethno-nationalist dichotomy of elites. These contradictions and power struggles have shaped the country's political, social, and economic dynamics, particularly since the fall of the Derg regime in 1991 and the subsequent adoption of ethnic federalism under the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF).

#### 4.1. Ethiopian History as an Area of Contradiction and Power Struggle

Ethiopian history, especially the political fringe, is usually pretended by many politicians as the origin of elite political quarrels in the country. Lack of common understanding over Ethiopia's statehood history has been the source of disagreement between the pan-ethiopianist and ethno-nationalist group of elites (Interview with EZEMA Party member, Addis Ababa 17 May 2022). On the pan-ethiopianist side, it is believed that though the 16<sup>th</sup> C population movement brought about many devastation of indigenous social bonds and cultural elements of Ethiopia, it is not well documented. It is also argued that the ethno-nationalist political elites did dare to say nothing concerning the multifaceted deprecation of the movement on medieval Ethiopian culture and state. Pan-ethiopianist contend that while focusing on creating and disseminating groundless narratives on the rebuilding of modern Ethiopia, the ethno-nationalist (centrifugal forces) elites mask the *Gada*-based and *Zemen Mesafint* related historical destruction of the Ethiopian culture and identity. The origin of the ethno-nationalist forces 'political discourse is employing history for political agenda by underestimating the country as mere 19<sup>th</sup> Century creation without considering the historical role of the nations and nationalities in the nation-building processes of modern Ethiopia (Interview with EZEMA member, 17 May 2023). The political history of Ethiopia is characterized by the struggle between pan-ethiopianist Amhara and ethno-nationalist Oromo political forces (Baxter, 1978). Wondu and Olgira (2006) again argued that the historiographical debates between pan-ethiopianist and ethno-nationalist category of elites traced back to the 16<sup>th</sup> century population movements into the Central, Western, and Eastern parts of Ethiopia. This expansion served as a ground for the historiography of considering one as a state

builder and the other as a destructor (Wondu and Olgira, 2006).

On contrary, ethno-nationalist political elites hesitate to accept Ethiopian history, or at least they are disaffected in the north. They believe that the country's history is dominated by the political and social principles of the north, particularly the Amhara. They believe the cultures of the ethnic groups mainly the Oromo were assimilated into one nation and one culture. Ethiopia's history is solely based on the chronicles of the kings excluded assets of the Oromo and other people (Interview with OFC executive committee member, 25 May 2022). According to Assefa (1995) and Mohammed (2002), the historiography of Ethiopia is Northern and Orthodox centered which magnifies Amhara-Tigre superiority by excluding the Oromo values like the Gada system.

The post-1991 political narration is also source of dissent between pan-ethiopianist and ethno-nationalist political elites. In this regard, Baxter (1978) noted that "when Marxism-Leninism becomes a governing principle by the 1960's generation, the Oromo Liberation front started its colonial thesis. The post-1991 'oppress-oppressed' political narration of TPLF and the acceptance of this by the ethno-nationalist mainly the Oromo elite is another source of contradiction. The oppressor-oppressed narration is to allege the then-ruling pan-ethiopianist elites and their adherents. So the ethno-nationalist colonial thesis and oppressor-oppressed narration is groundless originally fabricated by the Italian invaders in the mid-1930s, and adopted by the terrorist TPLF as a tactic of disintegrating the people. Though forged in the 1960s, the Leninist guise of oppressor-oppressed narration is highly propagated against the Amhara since 1991(interview PP member, Addis Ababa, on 16 May 2023). Though the ethno-nationalist Oromo political elites have a colonial thesis of being politically marginalized by the pan-ethiopianist Amhara, the pan-ethiopianist Oromo elites were statesmen in modern Ethiopia. The narration of Ethiopia as an Amhara colony was originated by Italy to undermine Ethiopia's continuity. This Italian rhetoric of Ethiopia as an Amhara colony; was later taken by Tigray and Oromo liberation movement proponents (Interview with a Historian, Debre Markos, 10 May 2023).

On the other side, ethno-nationalist argues that the oppressor-oppressed narration is not simply fabricated discourses but based on existed facts. They rejected the pan-ethiopianist elites' claims that the current state difficulties are the result of false narration by saying "there would be no national question if there was no national oppression (telephone interview with OFC member, 25 May 2022). Moreover, the colonial thesis proponents like Asafa Jalata (1995) and Mekuria Bulcha (1997) wrote that "the Ethiopian empire-state colonized the Oromo, incorporate it and exploit its resources". To them Oromo resistance, which began with Oromo colonialism, evolved into the anti-colonial

movement of the 1960s and continues to this day in many forms (Assafa, 2015).

Generally, the narration and the thesis defined the key role of the pan-ethiopianist Amhara culture in the Ethiopian political system as ‘Amhara domination’ over the others mainly the Oromo people. Therefore, the collision over political narration between pan-ethiopianist and ethno-nationalist category of elites circumvented each and every move of the country to democracy.

Therefore, due to the diverged understanding of Ethiopian political history and cultural foundation the pan-ethiopianist and ethno-nationalist political forces failed to reach a political consensus. Hence democratic transition in Ethiopia is now challenged by recurrent conflicts which are orchestrated by political elites in the country.

#### **4.2. Nation-Building as an Area of Contradiction and Power Struggle**

Nation building refers to the process of developing a nation-state by organizing social groups within a defined territory under common political institutions and an effective government. The differing understanding and perception of the way the modern Ethiopian state is formed can be considered as one of the areas of disagreement between pan-ethiopianist and ethno-nationalist political elites. Donald Levine (1974) noted that the existence of modern Ethiopia is associated with the Amhara thesis and Oromo antithesis. The point is that the contentions between the pan-ethiopianist thesis and ethno-nationalist antithesis give rise to the synthesized modern state, Ethiopia (Donald, 1974).

The 19<sup>th</sup> century Menilek’s territorial expansion created divergent views on Ethiopian as a nation state between elites who advocated civic nationalist and those who opt ethnic politics. The two opposing political elites neither share a similar perspective of history nor agree on how to reconstruct Ethiopia in the future. The root cause the elite conflict in Ethiopia is lack of common ground in Ethiopian state-building (Interview with EZEMA Party member, Addis Ababa 17 May 2022). Accordingly, for ethno-nationalist elites Ethiopian state is built as a result of expansion and oppression over ethnicities mainly of Oromo whereas for the pan-ethiopianist political elites Ethiopia is a continuation of the reunification project (Telephone interview with OFC member, 25 May 2022). The pan-ethiopianist elites defined Ethiopian state-building in terms of state-based identity while the ethno-nationalist elites inclined to define the state in terms of ethnic identity like what is being done since 1991. All in all, the contention over Ethiopian state-building arises from the two opposing arguments. The first one is the Amhara-centric re-unification argument and the second one is the Oromo-centric ethnic-oppression argument (Assefa, 2015).

The tension between pan-Ethiopian and ethnocentric elites has manifested in recurring power struggles, particularly during periods of political transition. For example, the rise of Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed in 2018 marked a shift toward pan-Ethiopian rhetoric, emphasizing national unity and reconciliation. This way of doing things has faced pushback from ethno-centric groups, especially those from the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) and other local parties. They see it as a move to put more power back in the centre and push aside ethnic interests (Berhe, 2020). "*Ethnic federalism institutionalizes division. Article 39 [on secession] is a time bomb*" (Interview with EZEMA member, Addis Ababa, 17 May 2022). Conversely, ethno-nationalists argue that "*Ethnic federalism rectifies historic marginalization...the problem isn't the system, but its flawed implementation*" (Telephone Interview OFC member, 25 May 2022).

The fight between the pan-Ethiopianist and ethno-centric ideologies has also fuelled violence and instability. For example, the EPRDF's ethnocentric strategies downgraded pan-Ethiopian voices, leading to tensions and protests, particularly among the Amhara and other pro-unity groups (Berhe, 2020). This approach has faced pushback from some ethnic leaders, especially those linked to the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) and other regional groups. They see it as a way to concentrate power and overlook ethnic needs. When Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed came to power in 2018, he promoted a vision of unity called *Medemer* but this made things trickier (Telephone interview with OFC member, 25 May 2022). Abiy wanted to centralize authority and lessen ethnic federalism, but leaders from Tigray pushed back, leading to the Tigray War from 2020 to 2022 (De Waal, 2021). The Tigray War, which happened from 2020 to 2022, really shows how tensions can turn into violence. The TPLF was in charge of Ethiopian politics for many years, but they felt left out by Abiy's changes and accused his government of messing up the federal system. This all led to serious fighting, resulting in a lot of suffering for people in the region (International Crisis Group, 2021).

There's a real tension in Ethiopia between two groups: those who believe in a united national identity for all Ethiopians and those who focus more on ethnic pride and diversity. The pan-Ethiopian perspective wants everyone to share a common identity and goal, while the ethnocentric view emphasizes the importance of individual ethnic groups having their own space and recognition. This clash makes it tough to create a strong sense of what it means to be Ethiopian, since each side has a different take on it (Bahru, 2001). The conflicts between pan-Ethiopian and ethnic-focused elites show just how tough it can be to balance national and ethnic identities in a country with so many different groups.

Pan-Ethiopianism pushes for a single Ethiopian identity that goes beyond ethnic lines and supports a strong central government to keep the nation united and progressing. This idea is closely linked to the Amhara leaders and historical figures like Emperor Haile Selassie, who backed a centralized monarchy (Tibebu, 1995). In contrast, ethnocentric political elites, particularly those from regions like Oromia and Tigray, have pushed for decentralization and greater regional autonomy to address historical marginalization and ensure self-determination (Aalen, 2002). The Oromo ethno-nationalists argued that the political influence of pan-ethiopianist mainly the Amhara over Ethiopia was eliminated in 1974 while the cultural element of domination was de-constructed in 1991 and now since 2018 Ethiopia is being reconstructed( Ezkiel Gabissa interview with Walta TV). They claim that the cow and its calf are now under the hands of Oromo, as TPLF created OPDO to maintain its power; Prosperity Party is formed in a manner that suits the power and sovereignty of the Oromo(Telephone interview with OFC member, 25 May 2022). To them, ethnic federalism is still best, being the implementation of the constitution in a consistent manner the only challenge to democratic transition in the country (Shimelis Abdissa interview with OBN TV)

To pan-ethiopianist the issue is quite different from what has been said by Ezekiel and Shimelis. They argued that like many other peoples of the country, the pan-ethiopianist Amhara was also indiscriminately oppressed by the monarchical and the *Derge* systems. The Gojjam peasants' uprising against Haile Selassie in 1968 and the Ethiopian People Democratic Movement against the Dergue in the 1980s is good examples of the oppressed Amhara people (Interview with EZEMA Party member, Addis Ababa 17 May 2022). Pan-ethiopianist argue that Oromo centrifugal political forces propagate as they are now reconstructing Ethiopia in a way that suits their interest while the current system is anti-Ethiopian political culture that needs reconstruction (Interview with PP executive Committee member, 19 May 2022).

The struggle between centralization and decentralization has been a recurring theme in Ethiopian politics. The imperial and Derg governments from 1974 to 1991 focused on central control, which often pushed down ethnic identities and local freedoms (Clapham, 1988). The Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) took control in 1991 and set up ethnic federalism with the 1995 Constitution. This move shifted power to regional states based on ethnicity (Vaughan, 2003). This shift was seen as a response to the demands of ethnocentric elites but has also been criticized for exacerbating ethnic divisions and weakening national unity (Abbink, 2006).

Therefore, the power struggles between pan-Ethiopian and ethnocentric political elites over centralization and decentralization reflect deeper contradictions in Ethiopia's state-building process. While centralization aims to foster national unity, it often alienates ethnically marginalized groups. Conversely, decentralization while addressing ethnic grievances, risks fragmenting the state. These tensions continue to shape Ethiopia's political trajectory, with significant implications for its stability and development. As one EZEMA member stated: "*The ethno-nationalist discourse reduces Ethiopia to a 19th-century colonial construct, erasing the shared role of nations and nationalities in state-building*"(Interview EZEMA member, Addis Ababa, 17 May 2022). An Oromo Federalist Congress (OFC) leader countered: "*Ethiopian historiography glorifies northern rulers while erasing Oromo institutions like the Gada system. Menelik's expansion was conquest, not unity*"(Telephone interview with OFC member, 17 May 2022). In a nut shell since there is no common ground on the past, the centripetal and centrifugal political elites have no agreement on how the destiny of Ethiopia could be re-constructed. While the ethno-nationalist elites are working to nurture the current ethnic political atmosphere, the pan-ethiopianist political elites are working for the modification of the existing configuration to de-construct and then reconstruct the existed political system in another system.

#### **4.3. National Symbol Politics as an Area of Contradiction and Power Struggle**

Political symbols simplify and summarize the political structures and practices for which they stand; can connect institutions and beliefs with emotions; can help make a polity or political movement more cohesive. In this regard, Ethiopian elites have no consensus over several fundamental issues, including the national flag and the federal structure itself. There is no common deal between pan-ethiopianist and ethno-nationalist political elites over national symbols like the Flag, heroes and heroines, national holy-days and capital city (Interview with EZEMA member, 17 May 2022, Addis Ababa).

The Ethiopian flag, with its green, yellow, and red stripes has historically been a symbol of the Ethiopian state and its unity. For some ethnic groups, it can seem like a sign of Amhara dominance or a strong central government that pushes aside their identities (Aalen, 2002). This perception has led to debates and conflicts over the flag's meaning and its role in representing the diverse ethnic groups within Ethiopia.

After the Derg regime collapsed in 1991, the Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) brought in a new federal system that focused on ethnic federalism. They also made changes to national symbols, like the flag, to match the new political scene. But not everyone was on board with these changes. Some Pan-Ethiopianists argued that stressing ethnic identity hurt national unity

and diminished the flag's role as a symbol that brought people together (Tronvoll, 2009). Lately, there's been a lot of talk about the flag, especially during times of political issues and protests. Take the anti-government protests from 2015 to 2018, for example. The flag turned into a symbol that people argued about. In places like Oromia and Amhara, protesters waved it to show their anger toward the government, while others saw it as a sign of oppression (Human Rights Watch, 2016). This dichotomy highlights the ongoing struggle between those who see the flag as a unifying national symbol and those who view it as a representation of exclusionary policies. In conclusion, the contradiction between Pan-Ethiopianist and ethno-centric elites over the Ethiopian flag underscores the broader tensions between national unity and ethnic identity in Ethiopia. The flag, as a national symbol, continues to be a focal point of these debates, reflecting the complex and often contentious nature of Ethiopian politics (Telephone interview with OFC member, 25 May 2022). Ethiopia's historic national flag has three colors: green, yellow, and red. Many Ethiopians, both at home and abroad, see it as a symbol of their country's independence and fight against colonialism. However, some ethno-nationalists don't support this flag, while the current flag isn't favoured by those who advocate for unity among all Ethiopians (Interview with EZEMA Party member, Addis Ababa 17 May 2022). There's a real clash between Pan-Ethiopianists and ethnic-focused leaders about who should be celebrated as national heroes in Ethiopia. A prime example is Emperor Menelik II. On one hand, Pan-Ethiopianists honour him for his leadership in the Battle of Adwa in 1896, where he helped Ethiopia win against Italian colonizers. They see him as a key figure of national unity and resistance (Bahru, 2001). Some people, especially from the Oromo community, are critical of Menelik II because they believe his expansionist policies caused suffering and pushed many ethnic groups to the sidelines (Merera, 2003). Abune Petros, an Ethiopian Orthodox priest who was killed by Italian fascists for standing up against the occupation, is honored by Pan-Ethiopianists as a national martyr. But some stories tend to focus more on local or ethnic heroes instead of highlighting his role, which can overlook his importance in the broader struggle (Interview with EZEMA Party member, Addis Ababa 17 May 2022). The civic nationalist camp of elites saw Emperor Menelik II as a re-builder of Ethiopia. The ethnic oriented elites, on the other hand, either refused to admit this or undermined the Emperor's role (Markakis, 2011). Menelik II, who is seen as a re-unifier of Ethiopia, the national and continental hero by pan-ethiopianist elites, is now seen as a hegemonic and an invader of the South by Oromo ethno-nationalist political elites (Interview with APP, Addis Ababa 16 May 2023). Hence the two groups of elites have opposing views on national symbols and heroes. These disparities often lead to political and social friction, as seen in debates over education curricula, public monuments, and

national holidays. In conclusion, the contradiction between Pan-Ethiopianist and ethno-centric elites over national heroes underscores the ongoing contestation over Ethiopia's identity and historical memory. This dynamic continues to shape the country's political landscape and cultural discourse.

Coming to the national capital, pan-Ethiopianists emphasize the historical and symbolic significance of Addis Ababa as the political and cultural heart of Ethiopia. They believe the city should bring everyone together, reflecting the common history and identity of all Ethiopians (Interview with EZEMA Party member, Addis Ababa 17 May 2022). This view connects to the legacy of Emperor Haile Selassie and the Derg regime, which both supported a strong central government. Supporters of a united Ethiopia criticize the ethnic-focused policies from the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), saying these policies harm national unity by putting too much emphasis on ethnicity instead of a shared Ethiopian identity (Aalen, 2002; Tronvoll, 2009).

Ethno-centric elites, on the other hand, argue that Addis Ababa should reflect the principles of ethnic federalism enshrined in Ethiopia's 1995 constitution. They contend that the city, which is located within the Oromia region, should accommodate the political and cultural rights of the Oromo people, who have historically marginalized claims to the city. The Oromo protests of 2014–2018, for example, highlighted demands for greater political representation and economic inclusion in Addis Ababa, which ethno-centric elites framed as part of a broader struggle for ethnic self-determination (Jalata, 2020; Lefort, 2012).

The contradiction between these two perspectives has led to recurring political conflicts. For instance, the expansion of Addis Ababa into surrounding Oromo territories under the "Integrated Development Master Plan" in 2014 sparked widespread protests among the Oromo population, who viewed it as an encroachment on their land and rights. Pan-Ethiopianists, however, saw the protests as a threat to national stability and the city's role as a unifying symbol (Teshome, 2018). The debate over Addis Ababa reflects deeper ideological divides between Pan-Ethiopianist and ethno-centric elites. This tension continues to shape Ethiopia's political landscape and the future of its capital city.

Concerning the nomenclature and establishment, Bahru (2001) described that "*Midway through the process of Menelik II's expansion, the capital of the empire-state was born. Named Addis Ababa, New Flower, it turned out to be the third most important capital city in Ethiopian history, after Aksum and Gondar. This new political center also happened to be the geographical center of the country*" (Bahru, 2001). The name of the capital city has never been in doubt for the majority of people and residents of the city. The Oromo ethno-nationalist elites, on the other hand, think that Addis Ababa's original name

was "Finfinne." (Telephone interview with OFC member, 25 May 2022). Some Amhara elites recently devised a fresh and contentious counter-narrative to refute this assertion. According to this counter-narration, Addis Ababa was once called "Berara," and it was Emperor Dawit's city before the Oromo expansion in the 16th century (Tegegne, 2020). These competing narratives have played their roles in the growing animosities and sporadic ethnic conflicts.

National holidays in Ethiopia often spark different opinions between pan-Ethiopianists and ethno-nationalist elites. Take Adwa Victory Day on March 2nd, for example. For pan-Ethiopianists, the Battle of Adwa, in 1896 stands as a powerful symbol of Ethiopian unity against colonialism and a matter of national pride. On the other hand, ethno-nationalist elites might argue that this view ignores the important roles of different ethnic groups involved in the battle (Bahru, 2001). The end of the Derg on May 28 is seen by many Pan-Ethiopianists as a win against a harsh regime. On the other hand, groups focused on ethnic issues often point out how the fight affected different communities and how some groups felt left out during the EPRDF government (Merera, 2003). *The tricolor is rejected by ethno-nationalists as "Amhara hegemony" (Aalen, 2002), while pan-Ethiopianists condemn its post-1991 redesign* (interview with PP member 16 May 2023). Menelik II is venerated by pan-Ethiopianists for Adwa but vilified by Oromo elites as "conqueror" Oromo elites demand recognition of "Finfinne" as the city's original name, while Amhara elites counter with "Berara" narratives (Tegegne, 2020). To sum up, there is no common understanding and consensus between pan-ethiopianist and ethno-nationalist elites over the national flag, the national heroes like Emperor Menelik II, and the naming and ownership of the national capital, Addis Ababa.

#### **4.4. Political Representation as an Area of Contest and Power Struggle**

The disagreement between Pan-Ethiopianists and ethno-centric elites about how political representation should work is a big deal in Ethiopia. Pan-Ethiopianists see the country as one nation with a common history and culture. On the other hand, ethnic elites want more independence for different groups, which is how the current ethnic federalism set up by the 1995 Constitution works. The conflict comes from their different ideas about how power should be shared and how the government should be organized. Pan-Ethiopianists think that focusing too much on ethnic identity creates more divisions and makes the country weaker, while ethnic elites believe that honouring these identities is key to fixing past wrongs and making sure everyone is fairly represented (Aalen, 2006; Merera, 2003).

For example, the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), which dominated Ethiopian politics until 2018, championed ethnic federalism as a means of empowering historically marginalized groups. However, critics argue that this system entrenched ethnic divisions and created a hierarchy of ethnic representation, leading to tensions between groups (Abbink, 2006). Since Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed took office in 2018, there has been a push for more Pan-Ethiopian ideas, focusing on unity and trying to reduce ethnic divides. This shift hasn't gone over well with some local leaders, especially in areas like Oromia and Tigray, who see it as a risk to their control and representation in politics. The conflict in Tigray, which began in 2020, exemplifies this contradiction. The federal government's military intervention was framed as a move to preserve national unity, while Tigrayan leaders portrayed it as an attack on their right to self-determination (International Crisis Group, 2021). This highlights the deep-seated tensions between Pan-Ethiopianist and ethno-centric visions of political representation.

Political representation is the activity of making citizens present in public policy-making processes when political actors act in the best interest of citizens. The pan-ethiopianist and ethno-nationalist group of elites have disparity over the constitutional and political representation of people in regional states (Interview with EZEMA Party member, Addis Ababa 17 May 2022 and (Telephone interview with OFC member, 25 May 2022) ). Let us review some Articles of the Amhara and Oromia National Regional States Constitutions. The phraseology of the preamble of the Amhara constitution reads as “we, the peoples of the Amhara National Regional State, while the Oromia constitution starts by stating that” we, the people of Oromo Nation. Concerning language, the Amhara constitution Article (1) stated, “all languages spoken throughout the regional state shall enjoy equal recognition on the part of the state, while the Oromo constitution says nothing regarding other languages in the region. Regarding the power, ownership and supremacy, it is pointed on the Amhara Constitution Article 8(1) that the supreme power of the national regional state resides in and belongs to the peoples of the Amhara Region, while the Oromo constitution stipulated under Article 8(a) that sovereignty power in the Regional State of Oromia reside in the people of the Oromo nation. From these one can infer that other peoples living in the Oromia region have no right to be represented in the Oromo parliament, Chaffe (the 2001 revised constitution of ANRS and the 1995 constitution of ONRS).

#### **4.5. Ethnic-Federalism and the 1995 FDRE Constitution as an Area of Contradiction**

Ethnic federalism, multi-ethnic or multi-national federalism, is a form of federal system in which the federated regional or state units are defined by ethnicity. *Ethiopian ethnic federalism* encourages political parties to organize along ethnic lines, and champions an ethicized federal state. It is learned that political orientation on ethnic politics and the 1995 constitution are also other areas of deadlock

between pan-ethiopianist and ethno-nationalist group of elites. Concerning ethnic politics in Ethiopia, Assefa (2012) argued that ethnic politics began in the 1960s, and ethnic liberation fronts institutionalized it in 1991. It is indicate that the post-1991 ethnic-based federal structure of Ethiopia has been the cause of disagreement among the political elites even after the 2018 reform. The advent of ethnic politics into the sky of Ethiopian state structure created dispute between the pan-ethiopianist and ethno-nationalist political forces.

Pan-Ethiopianists often view ethno-federalism, a system introduced by the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) in the 1990s, as a threat to national cohesion. Pan-Ethiopianists believe that ethno-federalism makes ethnic divisions worse and weakens the historical unity of Ethiopia. They point out that Ethiopia has a long history as a centralized empire and worry that ethno-federalism might lead to breaking apart or some groups wanting to secede (Aalen, 2006; Tronvoll, 2009). Ethno-centric leaders believe that ethno-federalism is the way to fix the historical neglect of various ethnic groups in Ethiopia and to give them a say in how they are governed. They argue that the centralized government, long controlled by the Amhara elite, has stifled the identities of other groups. The 1995 Constitution supports ethno-federalism by allowing ethnic groups to manage their own affairs, use their languages, and keep their cultures alive. For these leaders, this approach is a way to make up for past wrongs and encourage a more inclusive government (Merera, 2003; Abbink, 2006).

Pan-Ethiopianists argue that ethno-federalism focuses too much on ethnicity as the main way to organize politics, which they think weakens national unity. On the other hand, some ethnic leaders see moves to centralize power or reduce ethno-federalism as a step back to the bad old days. You could really sense the conflict during the debates over the Tigray crisis from 2020 to 2022. People were pushing for local autonomy tied to their ethnic identities, while the federal government was trying to keep a grip on things (Berhe, 2020). On the contrary, ethno-nationalist elites don't accept the assertion that ethnic politics is the area of contest instead they consider it as a solution to the question of nationalities in Ethiopia. To them, ethnic federalism is the best way to endure Ethiopian politics being the only impediment to the lack of willingness to accommodate diversity (Interview with OPP and OFC members, 25 May 2023 Addis Ababa). Hence, the institutionalization of ethnic politics in the Ethiopian political sphere is another arena of disagreement between the the advocates of civic nationalism and ethnic nationalism.

The 1995 Constitution of Ethiopia has been a central point of contention between Pan-Ethiopianist and ethno-centric elites, reflecting broader ideological and political divides in the country. Pan-Ethiopianists advocate for a unified Ethiopian identity that transcends ethnic divisions, emphasizing national unity and a centralized state structure. In contrast, ethno-centric elites support the ethnic federalism enshrined in the 1995 Constitution, which grants significant autonomy to Ethiopia's ethnic regions and recognizes the right of nations and nationalities to self-determination, including secession (FDRE Constitution, 1995, Article 39).

The 1995 Constitution was created by the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) after they took power in 1991, following the fall of the Derg regime. The EPRDF, led mainly by the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), aimed to tackle issues of ethnic marginalization by adopting a system of ethnic federalism. This approach was meant to give more power to Ethiopia's many ethnic groups and stop any one group, especially the Amhara, from becoming too dominant, as they had a history of centralization and trying to assimilate other groups (Aalen, 2002).

Pan-Ethiopianists believe that the 1995 Constitution weakens national unity because it puts ethnic identity before a common Ethiopian identity. They argue that focusing on ethnic federalism increases ethnic tensions, causing division and conflict instead of bringing people together (Merera, 2003). Some people worry that the part of the constitution that allows for secession (Article 39) might put the country's unity at risk and could split Ethiopia a part (Abbink, 2006).

Some ethnic elites support the constitution, saying it's important for fixing past wrongs and making sure Ethiopia's different ethnic groups are represented and can decide their own futures. They believe that the old centralized government left minority groups feeling left out, and that ethnic federalism is a better way to be fair and democratic (Assefa, 2007). For these elites, the constitution is a safeguard against the return of authoritarian centralism and a means of ensuring equitable development across Ethiopia's regions.

There has been a lot of back and forth between these two viewpoints since Ethiopia adopted its 1995 Constitution, which has really shaped the country's politics. When Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed stepped into office in 2018, he pushed a more Pan-Ethiopian agenda with his idea of Medemer, meaning synergy. This has only made the debate more heated. Abiy's reforms have been criticized by ethno-centric elites, particularly from the Tigray region, who view them as an attempt to recentralize power and undermine the federal system (Tronvoll & Vaughan, 2020).

Coming into the 1995 constitution, its preamble stated that “fully cognizant that our common destiny

can best be served by rectifying historically unjust relationships and by further promoting our shared interests”. So this constitution recognized the unjust and unequal relationship between the pan-ethiopianist Amhara and other ethnic groups like the Oromo (the EPRDF constitution, 1995). In addition to the preamble, Article 39 of the constitution is, even more important than the former as factor for elite contradiction.

Pan-ethiopianist claim to alter the constitution claiming it is derivation anti-Ethiopian forces' political programs, and its content revolves around the “oppressor-oppressed” false narration by anti-Ethiopian political elites. Territory-based federal structure and the cancellation of Article 39 of the constitution are the areas of argument for pan-ethiopianist elites. They indicate that ethnic federalism and Article 39 of the constitution are creating centrifugal tendencies that in the final analysis will disintegrate Ethiopia(Interview with EZEMA Party member, Addis Ababa 17 May 2022).Contrary to this, ethno-nationalist camp indicated that ethnic federalism is a solution to the nationalities' situation and that the 1995 FDRE constitutional provisions are its foundations. The current state problems are caused by prior uneven interactions between ethnic groups, not by ethnic federalism. Moreover, it is stated that Article 39 needs to be preserved because, unlike the pan-ethiopianist elites' assertion, it is the base for Ethiopia's “coming together” type of federalism(Telephone interview with OFC member, 25 May 2022). The 1995 Constitution’s ethnic federalism remains polarizing. *“The constitution codifies ethnic division. We need a civic, non-ethnic polity”* (Interview with EZEMA member, 17 May 2022). *“Article 39 guarantees self-determination. Amending it would return us to assimilation.”*(Telephone with OFC member, Addis Ababa 25 May 2022).

All in all the ethno-nationalist political elites value and wish to enhance the 1995 FDRE constitutional provision and ethnic federalism, but the pan-ethiopianist want the constitution amended and the sub-national divisions reconfigured based on territory. In conclusion, the contradiction between Pan-Ethiopianist and ethno-centric elites over the 1995 Constitution reflects deeper ideological and political struggles over the nature of the Ethiopian state. While Pan-Ethiopianists advocate for a unified national identity and centralized governance, ethno-centric elites emphasize the importance of ethnic autonomy and self-determination. This on-going debate is affecting Ethiopia's politics and where the country is headed (Interview with EZEMA Party member, Addis Ababa 17 May 2022).These contradictions highlight the struggle over historical narratives and the politicization of national holidays. Pan-Ethiopianists seek to reinforce a cohesive national identity, while ethno-centric elites use these occasions to assert the distinctiveness of their ethnic identities and demand greater recognition and autonomy. This dynamic underscores the on-going tension between unity and

diversity in Ethiopia's political landscape.

In conclusion, although Ethiopia an ancient center of state formation and civilization, its political life is characterized by ideological and historical contradiction among elites. Now a day there is fundamental difference between pan-ethiopianist and ethno-nationalist dichotomy of elites over nation-building, the future of Ethiopia, national symbol politics, Ethnic-federalism and the 1995 FDRE Constitution. There's a clash between Pan-Ethiopianist and ethnic-focused leaders in Ethiopia. It's all about different ideas on building the nation, how to view national symbols, the validity of the 1995 Constitution, and how the ethnic federal system is set up. These tensions are deeply rooted in Ethiopia's historical, political, and social fabric. In terms of nation building, Pan-Ethiopianists advocate for a unified Ethiopian identity, a centralized state and a shared national history, often tracing Ethiopia's origins to the ancient Aksumite Empire and the Solomonic dynasty. Ethnic-focused leaders care a lot about their ethnic identity and want a system that empowers different groups. They believe in a decentralized state that respects these identities. On the flip side, Pan-Ethiopianists see national symbols like the flag and anthem as things that bring all Ethiopians together. Ethnic-focused leaders criticize these symbols, saying they mainly reflect the interests of certain groups over others.

When it comes to the 1995 Constitution, ethnic-focused leaders back it because it acknowledges ethnic rights and self-determination, including the option to secede. Pan-Ethiopianists, however, think the constitution makes ethnic divisions worse and weakens national unity (Interview with EZEMA Party member, Addis Ababa 17 May 2022). Regarding the ethno-federal structure, ethnic-focused leaders think it's a way to fix past wrongs and ensure fair representation and resource sharing. But Pan-Ethiopianists argue that this system has divided the country, creating competition between groups and preventing real economic and political unity.

These opposing views have roots that go back to the imperial days when Emperor Haile Selassie's centralized power pushed ethnic groups aside, causing resentment. The Derg regime, from 1974 to 1991, tried to erase ethnic identities under a Marxist-Leninist approach, but this only made tensions worse. The fall of the Derg in 1991 was a key moment, as it led to the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) introducing ethnic federalism, making ethnicity a main part of how politics works in the country.

## Chapter Five

### **The Impact of Elite Contradiction on Transition to Democracy in Ethiopia**

The era of democratization in Ethiopia between 1991 and 2018 was marked by a consistent struggle between pan-Ethiopianist and ethnocentric elites. The removal of the Derg regime in 1991 led to the establishment of an ethnic federalist system ruled by the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), which cemented ethnicity as a core element of the political order (Aalen, 2006). As ethno-centric elites promoted regional autonomy and self-rule, pan-Ethiopianist forces promoted national unity and a centralized state, generating tensions that frustrated democratization. The two contending ideological camps are responsible for an unstable political ecology, institutional weakness, and political polarization and disputed leadership (Merera, 2011). Rivalry among these elites has also weakened national institutions, with political parties more likely to organize along ethnic divisions than ideological or policy issues (Aalen, 2006).

#### **5.1. Elite Contradiction and Political Instability**

The ongoing clash between Pan-Ethiopianist and ethnic-based elites has led to a tough political situation in Ethiopia, with a lot of instability and division. Since 1991, the country has faced serious political unrest mainly because of these elite conflicts, like differing interests, ideology gaps, and power struggles among both ruling and opposition groups.

The EPRDF, led by the TPLF, introduced ethnic federalism to shift power to regions, aiming for decentralization. However, instead of unity, it deepened divisions between ethnic groups (Abbink, 2011). Regions gained autonomy, but these also sparked tensions, especially between Tigrayan elites and other ethnic groups like the Amhara and Oromo, who felt sidelined (Markakis, 2011). Within the EPRDF, conflicts grew over time, notably between the TPLF and the Oromo Peoples' Democratic Organization (OPDO).

After 2018, ethnic tensions and leadership disputes became worse. Although Abiy's reforms were initially well-received, they didn't fully resolve the deep-seated ethnic and regional grievances that spurred protests and brought him to power (Interview with EZEMA Party member, Addis Ababa 17 May 2022). Instead, new issues emerged, particularly between the federal government and regional elites. The TPLF's resistance to the Prosperity Party (PP) and its conflict with the central government revealed deep divisions among Ethiopia's political elites. The Tigray conflict involved extensive violence, human rights abuses, and a humanitarian crisis, further complicating the political transition (Human Rights Watch, 2021).

As of 2023, Ethiopia is experiencing political challenges. The conflict, which began in Tigray, has spread to other regions and involves various ethnic groups. The federal government is having a tough time maintaining control over these areas. Political leaders are not united and have differing opinions, which adds to the confusion. Additionally, other countries have become involved in the conflict, making it even more difficult to achieve peace (Telephone interview with OFC member, 25 May 2022).

The conflict between different political groups in Ethiopia has often led to violence and instability. There are two main groups: one supports a united Ethiopia, while the other supports ethnic-based politics. Those in favor of a united Ethiopia believe that focusing on ethnic regions could weaken the country's unity (Clapham, 2017). In contrast, those supporting ethnic politics oppose concentrating all power in a central government. These opposing views have led to election disputes, the suppression of oppositions, and violent conflicts, slowing down Ethiopia's democratic progress (Merera, 2011). Since 2018, Ethiopia has faced increasing security issues, including ethnic conflicts, political violence, and instability. A significant event was the conflict in the Tigray region, starting in November 2020. This involved the federal government and the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), resulting in widespread violence, people being displaced, and humanitarian crises. People from the Tigray and Amhara regions agree that disagreements among leaders have worsened the conflict (Human Rights Watch, 2021). A Tigrayan leader stated that the TPLF defied the federal authorities due to years of being "ignored and excluded." An Amhara leader claimed that Tigrayan leaders used ethnic federalism to maintain power. Abiy Ahmed's changes merely shifted power struggles to Oromo and Amhara groups, causing further instability (Telephone interview with TPLF member, 18 May 2020). Additionally, the conflict spread into nearby regions like Amhara and Afar, worsening insecurity and destabilizing the country further (International Crisis Group, 2021).

In Ethiopia, apart from the Tigray conflict, there have been clashes between different communities in areas like Oromia, Benishangul-Gumuz, and the Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples' Region (SNNPR). These conflicts usually stem from old disagreements, competition for important resources, and tensions between ethnic groups. This situation makes it harder to manage and improve security in the country (BBC, 2021). During the Tigray war and other conflicts, reports have shown various human rights abuses. These abuses include extrajudicial killings, where people are killed without any legal process, instances of sexual violence, and cases of arbitrary detentions, where people are held without a fair reason or trial. These reports highlight serious issues concerning the treatment of

individuals in these conflict areas (Amnesty International, 2021).

The government has also been accused of using anti-terrorism laws to suppress dissent and target political opponents. For instance, journalists, activists, and opposition leaders have faced harassment, arrest, and prosecution under the guise of maintaining national security (Telephone interview with OFC member, 25 May 2022). People are worried about the decline of civil rights and the limited opportunities to get involved in politics. The way politics has mixed with the legal system has made many lose faith in the law, especially with the on-going conflicts and human rights issues. (Amnesty International, 2021). Ethiopia is facing some serious setbacks, especially when it comes to security and democracy. The situation is getting worse with rising militant ethnic nationalism and violence between communities.

The intensifying inter-communal violence resulted in millions displaced, thousands died and ten thousands wounded as well as ten thousands orphaned in 2018-2020 (Telephone interview with OFC member, 25 May 2022). Instead of actually dealing with the issues of insecurity through a solid plan that combines control and discussion, those in power are trying to justify it by pointing to the newly opened democratic space after years of the EPRDF dictatorship. While Abiy's government has shown some commitment to peace and working towards democracy, it feels pretty ineffective when it comes to security (Human Rights Watch, 2019).

Since 2018, Ethiopia has been struggling with many political issues, ethnic conflicts, and acts of violence, including politically driven killings. When Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed gained power in April 2018, he started making significant changes in politics to address longstanding issues and unite the nation. However, these changes also revealed deep ethnic and political differences, resulting in widespread violence and targeted killings.

The assassination of high-profile political figures, such as the national security chief General Saere Mekonnen, Amhara regional president Doctor Ambachew Mekonnen, and the security chief of the region, General Asaminew Tsigie in June 2019, highlighted the volatile political climate. These killings were part of a broader wave of violence that included attacks on government officials and civilians, often motivated by ethnic and political rivalries (BBC, 2019). The post-2018 period also saw an increase in the targeting of journalists, and opposition figures. For instance, the killing of prominent Oromo activist Hachalu Hundessa in June 2020 sparked widespread unrest and further violence, including retaliatory attacks and politically motivated killings (Al Jazeera, 2020). Inter-ethnic violence happens when different ethnic groups fight. This is often because of political speeches that stir tension and because people are competing for resources like land or money. Such violence has led to many

deaths for political reasons. For instance, there have been conflicts between the Oromo and Amhara communities. These conflicts have included targeted attacks and even massacres. Political leaders and local militias are sometimes involved in these acts of violence (International Crisis Group, 2020).

To sum it up, Ethiopia's political instability since 1991 has been influenced by conflicts among elites, including ethnic tensions, ideological differences, and struggles for power. Even with efforts to reform, divisions among the elite keep causing problems. Since 2018, significant changes have occurred, especially with Abiy Ahmed coming to power, the end of the EPRDF, and the conflict in Tigray. These shifts have changed the political scene but also revealed ongoing issues like ethnic divides, competition among leaders, and the challenges that come with trying to establish a democracy.

## **5.2. Elite Contradiction and War Political Culture**

Ethiopia's complex political landscape has been shaped by the fundamental tension between Pan-Ethiopianist visions of national unity and ethno-centric elite projects that emphasize ethnic autonomy and self-determination. This contradiction has led to a constant state of political strife, where conflicts often turn violent and military responses are favored over talking things out (Interview with EZEMA Party member, Addis Ababa 17 May 2022). In Ethiopia, this has been a long-standing issue, with ongoing fights since the 1960s. The Tigray war is the latest and most severe example of this.

The entrenched war political culture in Ethiopia has been a significant hindrance to the transition to democracy in the post-2018 period. War Political Culture is a form of conflict between different social groups who struggle to politically impose their own ideology (moral beliefs, humane virtues, and religious practices) upon mainstream society, or upon the other. Since the 1960s, authoritarian regimes and guerrilla groups have been brought about by Marxist-Leninist ideology (Abbink, 2015 and Clapham, 2007). This insurgent tendency grew a political culture that valued coercion above negotiation.

Ethiopia's politics have been influenced by years of fighting, especially during the time the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) was in charge for almost 30 years. Their rule involved a tight grip on power, silencing opposition, and using the military to keep things under control (Abbink, 2017). This legacy has created a political culture where power is often contested through violence rather than democratic processes, making the transition to a more inclusive and participatory political system challenging.

Since 2018, we've seen a rise in ethnic tensions and conflicts that make it harder for Ethiopia to move toward democracy. The Tigray conflict, which kicked off in November 2020, shows just how deep the issues run in the country. This fighting has created serious humanitarian problems and has messed with efforts to create a democratic system. Instead of talking things out, the government often turns to military force to settle disputes, showing a political culture that favours power over finding common ground (International Crisis Group, 2021).

In the recent Tigray war, there was tension because the government decided to delay the election without consulting others. This decision upset opposition groups who then questioned whether the government was still legitimate, as the parliament's term had expired in October 2020. These groups called for a different kind of government, either transitional or technocratic, during this uncertain time. Meanwhile, the government rejected these ideas, claiming that those suggesting them were only interested in seizing power, regardless of the impact on the citizens.

The TPLF disagreed with what the central government wanted and decided to hold its own regional election. They opposed Prime Minister Abiy's "*medemer*" idea because they saw it as bringing back a stronger central government, similar to past regimes. A leader from Tigray said the constitution allows regions to govern themselves, but the central government in Addis Ababa views this self-governance as rebellion. Meanwhile, a member of the Prosperity Party (PP) portrayed the situation as TPLF's final attempt to maintain its power, highlighting the fierce competition for control. TPLF officials accused the new central government of weakening the constitution, which grants ethnic groups the right to self-determination. To assert this right, Tigray's State Council declared they would proceed with an election scheduled for 9 September 2020. TPLF argues it is Tigray's constitutional right to conduct elections, claiming the central government's move to extend regional government's terms was illegal. They maintain that the right to self-rule, as outlined in article 39(1) of the constitution, ensures every group in Ethiopia has the unconditional right to determine its own future, including the option to separate from the country (Government communication Minister Statement released 2021).

Federal officials criticized Tigray's interpretation of the constitution, saying it was against the law. They believe the law supports their position, referring to article 55(2) of the constitution. This article gives the federal parliament the power to manage 'political rights established by the constitution and electoral laws and procedures,' allowing the central government to make decisions on election-related issues. In response, the central government warned the TPLF to halt its actions or face consequences, including the possible use of force to prevent the elections. This warning led to a conflict between the

Ethiopian federal government, backed by Eritrean forces and Amhara regional militias, and the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), the ruling party in the Tigray region. The TPLF had been a powerful force in Ethiopian politics for many years but lost its influence after Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed introduced reforms and formed the Prosperity Party, which the TPLF chose not to join. (International Crisis Group, 2020). Interviews PP member revealed *that the TPLF's decision to hold elections was a calculated rejection of Abiy's "medemer" ideology, which they viewed as a return to imperial centralization.* A Tigrayan elite stated, *"The constitution guarantees self-rule, but Addis Ababa sees it as rebellion* (Interview with TPLF members, May 25 2023 and May 18 2020)

The immediate trigger for the war was an attack by the TPLF on a federal military base in Tigray, which the Ethiopian government described as a "treasonous" act (BBC, 2020). Prime Minister Abiy started a military attack, describing it as a way to restore government authority in Tigray. He called it a "law enforcement operation." However, the situation soon turned into a large-scale war. There was widespread violence and many human rights were violated. It also caused a severe humanitarian crisis affecting many people (Human Rights Watch, 2021).

Significant conflict and violence have occurred in Ethiopia's Oromia region in the years since 2018, especially in the wake of the political reforms implemented by Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed after he assumed office in April 2018. With the release of political prisoners and the legalization of opposition groups that had been outlawed, Abiy's administration offered hope for peace and democracy. However, armed insurgencies, political grievances, and ethnic tensions have kept the Oromia region unstable.

One of the key drivers of conflict in Oromia has been the ongoing insurgency led by the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA), a breakaway faction of the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF). Citing marginalization and the Oromo people's lack of political and economic rights, the OLA, which the Ethiopian government had previously classified as a terrorist organization, has been fighting the federal government with military force (Human Rights Watch, 2021). Widespread violence has been caused by the conflict, including attacks on people, forced relocation, and claims of human rights violations by both the OLA and government forces (Amnesty International, 2022).

The Oromo political movement's division and the federal government's lack of trust in Oromo political leaders have hampered efforts to end the war in Oromia. Despite Prime Minister Abiy's attempts to start a discussion with the OLF and other opposition organizations, these attempts have mostly failed to bring about a sustainable peace (Telephone interview with OFC member, 25 May 2022). Ethiopia's

long-standing political and ethnic conflicts are reflected in the war in Oromia in the years after 2018. Even though there was initial hope for Abiy Ahmed's reforms, violence and instability are nevertheless common in the area. It will need consistent political discourse and inclusive government to address the conflict's underlying roots, such as historical grievances and aspirations for increased autonomy.

The Amhara region in Ethiopia is experiencing significant conflict and instability in the post-2018 period, particularly following the political reforms initiated by Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed. The tensions in Amhara are deeply rooted in historical grievances, ethnic federalism, and competition over land and resources. The Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) built an ethnic federalism structure that has long made the Amhara people feel excluded (Aalen & Tronvoll, 2021). The Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), which controlled Ethiopian politics for many years, has also drawn criticism from the Amhara elite. Land disputes have centred on the Amhara region, especially in locations like Wolkait and Raya that are claimed by both Amhara and Tigrayan communities. These disagreements have exacerbated violence between ethnic groups and added to the region's overall conflict (International Crisis Group, 2020). Post-2018, there has been a resurgence of Amhara nationalism, with groups like the National Movement of Amhara (NAMA) advocating for greater autonomy and protection of Amhara interests. This has often put them at odds with the federal government and other ethnic groups (BBC, 2021). Conflicts between regional forces and the military prompted the federal government to proclaim a state of emergency in Amhara in 2023. The federal administration saw the dissolution of the Amhara Special Forces as a danger to national unity, which set this off (Reuters, 2023). An important armed resistance force against the federal authority is the Fano militia, a loosely structured Amhara nationalist organization. Their actions have made attempts to bring about peace more difficult and further destabilized the area (Africa News, 2023). Significant humanitarian issues brought on by the Amhara conflict include widespread displacement, food insecurity, and violations of human rights. Due to continuous conflict and constraints, the region has also had difficulty getting humanitarian aid (UN OCHA, 2023). Political instability, ethnic nationalism, and old grievances are the main causes of the complicated and multidimensional Amhara war. The deep-rooted nature of the problems indicates that resolving the main causes of the conflict, such as land disputes, ethnic marginalization, and the need for inclusive governance, will be necessary for a durable peace, notwithstanding the federal government's efforts to restore order (Interview with PP member, Addis Ababa, 16 May 2023).

In conclusion, the post-2018 period in Ethiopia has been characterized by the breakdown of regional security structures and the rise of armed resistance against the federal government. The Amhara region, in particular, has become a flashpoint for these tensions, with significant implications for Ethiopia's future stability and governance. A major barrier to Ethiopia's post-2018 democratic transition has been the country's deeply ingrained war political culture, which is marked by a history of armed struggle, authoritarian rule, and ethnic tensions. Although there have been attempts to implement political reforms, these initiatives have been hampered by the continuation of a repressive and military political culture. It will need a fundamental change in political culture to address these ingrained problems, moving away from violence and toward inclusiveness, discourse, and democratic governance. Therefore, these deeply ingrained political cultures of conflict and dominance through violence are impeding Ethiopia's transition to democracy.

### **5.3. Elite Contradiction and Contested Leadership**

The 1995 constitution's implementation of ethnic federalism by the TPLF-dominated EPRDF was perceived by Pan-Ethiopianists as undermining national unity (Merera, 2003). Other groups became resentful since power was centralized within the TPLF, despite assurances of ethnic representation (Vaughan, 2011). In its attempt to recentralize power, Abiy Ahmed's Prosperity Party (PP) alienated ethno-nationalist groups while appealing to Pan-Ethiopianists (Fiseha, 2020). The TPLF's resistance to Abiy's attempts at centralization during the 2020–2022 Tigray War served as an example of this contradiction (Berhe, 2023). Jawar Mohammed and other Oromo nationalists backed Abiy at first but ultimately turned against him, claiming that he was repressing ethnic rights (Arriola & Lyons, 2023).

The transition to democracy in Ethiopia post-2018 has been significantly hindered by contested elite leadership, which has created political instability and undermined efforts to establish inclusive governance. Intense power battles between political elites have plagued the transition process, both inside the ruling Prosperity Party (PP) and between regional leaders and the central administration. Competing ideological ideas define Ethiopia's political environment, especially between supporters of a more centralized, pan-Ethiopian state and ethno-nationalist movements. Following the disintegration of the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), the ruling Prosperity Party (PP) has worked to consolidate power and advance a national identity that cuts beyond ethnic boundaries. Ethno-nationalist organizations that support further regional autonomy and ethnic self-determination, such the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) and the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), have opposed this idea (Aalen & Tronvoll, 2021). These ideological contestations have fuelled political

instability, violent conflicts, and a lack of consensus on the foundational principles of the democratic transition.

One of the key challenges has been the fragmentation of the ruling coalition and the lack of consensus among elites on the direction of political reforms. Abiy Ahmed's leadership has faced resistance from factions within the PP, as well as from regional leaders who perceive his centralization efforts as a threat to their autonomy (Feyissa, 2020). An Oromo politician accused Abiy of "betraying ethno-federalism" by marginalizing Oromo nationalists like Jawar Mohammed, while a pan-Ethiopianist politician praised his efforts to "transcend tribal politics." Notably, a Tigrayan leader claimed Abiy's Prosperity Party "recycled EPRDF's authoritarianism under a new brand," underscoring elite distrust in institutional reforms (Interview with OFC, EZEMA and TPLF members, 25 May 2022, 17 May 2022 and 18 May 2022 respectively). Lack of trust and cooperation among political elites has hindered the establishment of inclusive institutions necessary for a democratic transition. The lack of a common vision for the nation's future has led to zero-sum politics, in which elites put their personal interests before of democratic consolidation and national reconciliation (Abbink, 2021). Furthermore, there are worries that federalism, a pillar of Ethiopia's democratic system, is being undermined as a result of Abiy Ahmed's consolidation of power. The transition process has become more complex as a result of tensions and conflicts caused by regional leaders, especially those from Oromia and Amhara, accusing the federal administration of weakening their autonomy (Merera, 2021). In a multi-ethnic state like Ethiopia, these conflicts underscore the difficulties in striking a balance between regional autonomy and central authority. The uneven application of democratic reforms has also been a manifestation of the ideological difference. Even while Abiy's administration has implemented policies to increase political freedom, like giving opposition parties greater latitude, the legitimacy and efficacy of these changes have been called into question by the continued fracturing of the elite (Telephone interview with OFC member, 25 May 2022). For example, the COVID-19 pandemic-induced postponement of the 2020 general elections increased tensions between regional leaders and the federal government, especially in Tigray, where the TPLF held its own regional elections in defiance of the federal government (International Crisis Group, 2020). In November 2020, this disobedience turned into a full-fledged conflict, further destabilizing the nation and stalling the process of democratization.

In conclusion, contested elite leadership has been a significant obstacle to Ethiopia's transition to democracy in the post-2018 period. The lack of consensus among political elites, coupled with the centralization of power and regional resistance, has created a volatile political environment that

undermines efforts to build inclusive and democratic institutions. Addressing these challenges requires a commitment to dialogue, compromise, and the establishment of mechanisms to ensure power-sharing and accountability. Power battles have supplanted nation-building and democratic consolidation in a zero-sum political culture brought about by the absence of trust and collaboration between rival factions. Therefore, Ethiopia's post-2018 ideologically divided elite leadership has been a serious obstacle to the country's democratic transition. The long-standing differences between ethno-nationalist and pan-Ethiopian ideologies have fueled political unrest, thwarted reform initiatives, and sustained a conflict-ridden and exclusive culture. It will need a concentrated effort to overcome these ideological differences and promote a more welcoming and cooperative political climate if Ethiopia is to undergo a durable democratic transition.

#### **5.4. Elite Contradiction and Fragile Institutions**

The contradiction between pan-Ethiopianist (nationalist) and ethno-centric elites has significantly shaped Ethiopia's political landscape since 1991, often undermining democratic institutions. This conflict, which has led to democratic regression, is the result of conflicting ideas about statehood, unitary nationalism vs ethnic federalism (Interview with EZEMA Party member, Addis Ababa 17 May 2022). While ethno-nationalist elites (such as the Tigray People's Liberation Front and the Oromo Liberation Front) considered ethnic federalism as necessary for self-determination, pan-Ethiopianist elites, who supported a centralized state, saw it as a danger to national unity (Merera, 2003). This division marginalized resistance and politicized ethnicity, undermining democratic institutions. Instead of being battles over policy, elections became ethnic censuses (Hagmann & Abbink, 2011). Due to the exclusion of non-ethnic parties, the EPRDF established an authoritarian one-party system (Tronvoll, 2009).

Democracy was eroded during the post 1991 period. Election authoritarianism, weak institutions, and limited political space were the results of the domination of ethnocentric elites, especially the TPLF. There was repression of opposition parties, particularly pan-Ethiopianist organizations (Lyons, 2016). The ruling party had control over the judiciary and parliament (Aalen & Tronvoll, 2009). Repression plagued the 2005, 2010 and 2015 elections (Telephone interview with OFC member, 25 May 2022). The elite paradox persisted after 2018. The ascent of Abiy Ahmed in 2018 exposed deeper conflicts despite earlier promises of democratic changes. Ethno-nationalists were incensed by Abiy's Prosperity Party's attempt to recentralize power (Feyissa, 2020). Elite power disputes led to the escalation of the Oromo-Amhara hostilities and the Tigray War (ICG, 2021). Democratic setbacks resulted from this.

Major opposition organizations boycotted the 2021 elections in spite of improvements, undermining their validity (EU Election Observer Mission, 2021).

Ethnic federalism in Ethiopia gave regions the right to self-determination and formalized ethno-nationalist politics (Vaughan, 2003). Critics claim that it erodes national unity and strengthens ethnic tensions, while supporters claim that it empowers neglected groups (Aalen, 2011). The extent of political plurality has been constrained by the prevalence of ethnocentric parties in the federal system, which frequently results in the marginalization of pan-Ethiopianist viewpoints (Abbink, 2011). Institutions that are inclusive and can tolerate a range of political beliefs are necessary for a stable democracy. However, at various points in history, either Pan-Ethiopianist or ethno-nationalist factions have frequently controlled Ethiopia's political system (Teshome, 2008). A cycle of political repression and resistance results from one group's exclusion from another, which hinders the development of a fully democratic society.

The transition to democracy in Ethiopia post-2018 has faced significant challenges, with weak democratic institutions being a major hindrance. Despite the initial optimism following the appointment of Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed in 2018, who introduced sweeping political reforms, the institutional framework necessary to sustain a democratic transition remains fragile (Aalen & Tronvoll, 2020). Weak institutions, including the judiciary, electoral bodies, and legislative structures, have struggled to uphold the rule of law, ensure accountability, and foster inclusive political participation (Abbink, 2021).

One of the critical issues is the lack of institutional capacity to manage political competition and resolve conflicts. The 2020 general elections, for example, were tainted by claims of irregularities and the exclusion of important opposition organizations, despite being viewed as a step toward democratization. This underscored the shortcomings of the electoral commission and the larger political system (International Crisis Group, 2021). Additionally, attempts to create a unified democratic state have been hampered by the return of political violence and ethnic tensions due to the lack of robust, independent institutions (Tadesse, 2022). The chances of a true democratic transition have been further undermined by the concentration of power inside the Ethiopian government and the supremacy of the ruling Prosperity Party.

The political environment remains skewed in favour of the ruling elite, leaving little room for opposition and civil society in the absence of strong institutions to check executive power and

maintain a balance of power (Aalen & Tronvoll, 2020). Public confidence in the democratic process has been damaged, and a cycle of political instability has been sustained.

Civic society is meant to be a multifaceted factor that facilitates the shift from authoritarian control to an election system, therefore enabling democratic transitions (Diamond, 1999). It is generally acknowledged that strong civil societies play a crucial role in maintaining stable democracies. A critical analysis of the state and role of civil society (groups known as CSOs) in the governance process has also been a defining feature of democracy discourse since the early 1990s, when the continent of Africa began its political transition from one-party to multiparty rule (Interview with EZEMA Party member, Addis Ababa 17 May 2022). The foundation for the defence of government power is provided by civic society, which also generates political consent. According to Fink-Hafner and Hafner-Fink (2009), civil society reforms that exert pressure on the established elite thus supply resources and create the conditions for negotiations between the established political elite and the newly formed political elite.

Ethiopia's civil society is underdeveloped, weak, and misinterpreted. But by any measure, a lot has changed since 1991, and civil society is becoming more and more involved in the nation's political and economic renaissance (Clark, 2000). However, after the 2005 national election, the EPRDF administration enacted tight laws, which diminished the power of civic groups (Aalen and Tronvoll, 2009). Charities and Societies Proclamation 621/2009, which forbade CSO involvement in the country's political arena, was therefore adopted by the EPRDF administration in 2009 (Tewodros, 2018).

However, once Ethiopia's new government took office in April 2018, reforms to the legislation governing charitable organizations and civic society were implemented, and proclamation No. 1113/2019 was issued (Federal *Negarit Gazetta*, 2019). However, a major issue facing civil society groups is a lack of institutional capability (Meffe, 2019). Therefore, the political transition to democracy in Ethiopia may have been influenced by the lack of effective civic groups there. Key informants from both pan-Ethiopianist and ethno-centric elites emphasized that *Ethiopia's institutions are "hostages to elite vendettas."* (Interview with OFC and APP members May 25 2022 and may 16 2023 respectively).

To sum it up, the tension between pan-Ethiopianist and ethnic-focused leaders has kept things unstable in the government, making it hard to build a solid democracy. Ethnic federalism was supposed to fix old issues but ended up causing more division instead of bringing people together. For a democracy to

work, we need a government that includes everyone's voice while still respecting ethnic rights.

The battle between these two groups has caused many political problems. Pan-Ethiopianists felt left out by the EPRDF's focus on ethnic policies, while groups like the Oromo and Amhara saw Tigrayan leadership as unfair. The protests from 2015 to 2018 were a response to this perceived favoritism and a call for a fairer government. The split between Pan-Ethiopianists and ethnic oriented elites really shook things up in Ethiopia from 1991 to 2018. Ethnic federalism aimed to fix some old wrongs, but it ended up making divisions worse. This sparked protests, crackdowns, and eventually led to the fall of the EPRDF in 2018. We're still dealing with the fallout from that today. Since 2018, moving toward democracy has been tough because the democratic institutions aren't strong enough. Making these institutions better is key for keeping leaders in check, getting everyone involved, and making democracy last. Without these changes, it's hard to see a stable and democratic future for Ethiopia.

### **5.5. Elite Contradiction and Political Polarization**

The Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) dominated the EPRDF coalition, implementing ethnic federalism while centralizing power. Pan-Ethiopianists criticized this as "ethnic apartheid," while ethno-centric elites saw it as necessary for inclusivity (Lefort, 2010). Ethno-nationalist organizations such as the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) and Tigrayan elites reacted negatively to Abiy's Prosperity Party's (PP) promotion of Pan-Ethiopianism (Berhe, 2020). This polarization was demonstrated during the Tigray War (2020–2022), when Pan-Ethiopianists saw the TPLF as secessionist and Tigrayan leaders accused Abiy of recentralizing authority (ICG, 2021). This ideological war is also reflected in on-going conflicts in the Amhara and Oromia regions (Human Rights Watch, 2023).

The ideological divide has created deep polarization, undermining efforts to establish inclusive democratic institutions (Gebremeskel, 2021). The difference between the ruling party and its opponents is exemplified by elite polarization. One of the major obstacles to Ethiopia's democratic transition since Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's 2018 political changes is the politicization of polarization. By deepening political and ethnic divides and undermining attempts to create a unified and inclusive democratic system, this issue has become a significant obstacle to the democratization process.

Polarization in Ethiopia is deeply rooted in its historical, ethnic, and political fabric. The 1995 constitution's establishment of ethnic federalism has made ethnic identity the main tenet of political structure and resource distribution in the nation (Aalen, 2006). Although Ethiopia's many ethnic groups were intended to be accommodated by this system, it has instead strengthened divisions and

encouraged competition among ethnic elites for resources and political power (Abbink, 2011). These divisions have become even more politicized since 2018, as political players have used ethnic identities to rally support and bolster their positions of authority (Interview with EZEMA Party member, Addis Ababa 17 May 2022). In the years following 2018, ethnic tensions and the emergence of ethno-nationalist groups have been especially noticeable. For instance, it has been alleged that the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), which controlled Ethiopian politics for almost thirty years, encouraged ethnic tensions in order to hold onto power (Berhe, 2020). Comparably, regional groups such as the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) have come under fire for putting ethnic interests ahead of national cohesion, which has led to a divided political environment (Telephone interview with OFC member, 25 May 2022)

The politicization of polarization has had several detrimental effects on Ethiopia's transition to democracy. According to Linz and Stepan (1996), it has first weakened the growth of a common national identity, which is essential for the strengthening of democratic institutions. Political actors have prioritized ethnic distinctions over a feeling of shared citizenship, creating a zero-sum mentality in which the success of one group is seen as the failure of another (Horowitz, 1985). Second, the process of democratization has been made more difficult by the politicization of polarization, which has fuelled instability and bloodshed. A clear illustration of how ethnic division can turn into a full-fledged conflict with catastrophic humanitarian repercussions is the violence in the Tigray region, which started in November 2020 (International Crisis Group, 2021).

In addition to thwarting the democratic transition, this conflict has highlighted the vulnerabilities of Ethiopia's federal structure and the dangers of ethnic identity politicization. Third, the development of inclusive political processes and institutions has been impeded by polarization. A litmus test for Ethiopia's democratic transition: the general elections of 2021 were tainted by violence, boycotts, and claims of irregularities (European Union Election Observation Mission, 2021). Important political players like the TPLF were excluded from the election process, which widened rifts and called into question the validity of the results.

The Prosperity Party was established towards the end of 2019 in order to solve previous socioeconomic and political difficulties, recognize historical successes, and forge a common future of peace, democracy, national unity, respect for citizens, and prosperity (PP Program, 2020). political issues, policies, well-known people, or other citizens are distinctly divided along party lines.

Between the pan-Ethiopianism and ethnic centrism factions, there is polarization. Although the Pan-Ethiopianists embrace the synergy or "medemer" ideals, there are many others who violently disagree

with them out of concern about assimilation and propaganda. The ethno-nationalists who rejected the concept of "medemer" usually asserted that "medemer" sought to unify Ethiopia without considering the variety of Ethiopian society. This Unitarianism, which seeks to restore the ancient imperial system, is considered as posing a danger to the current Ethiopian Federalism. It rejects shared governance, regional autonomy, multi-ethnic federalism, and calls for the unification of Ethiopia under a common language, culture, and religion. It is also anti-Oromo in nature. Supporters of "medemer" argue that it is the exact same as Mandela's Ubuntu. Collaboration, giving and receiving in partnerships, forging alliances, cooperation, and creating synergy for the common good are all central to Medemer (Alemayehu, 2018). Interviews with PP member revealed internal tensions, as some Oromo elites viewed "medemer" as a smokescreen for Amhara dominance. An Amhara Leader retorted that "Oromo nationalists equate unity with assimilation." Polarization was further illustrated by a Tigrayan leader who dismissed "medemer" as "neoliberal nostalgia for empire," contrasting with Abiy's framing of it as "synergy." The socioeconomic and political idea known as Medemer, which provides a platform for inclusive political involvement for all Ethiopians, served as the foundation for the Prosperity Party. The idea of medemer also places a strong emphasis on avoiding binary oppositions such as "enemy" and "friend," and it promotes drawing upon past accomplishments to right wrongs and work together for the common good. Most significantly, Medemer attempted to find a balance between ethnic nationalism and national unity and create true multi-ethnic federalism rather than downplaying the reality of ethnic politics today.

The disagreement between Pan-Ethiopianist and ethno-centric leaders is a major reason for Ethiopia's political divide. On one side, Pan-Ethiopianists are pushing for unity among all Ethiopians. On the other, ethno-centric groups are asking for more independence to govern themselves. This makes it hard to find common ground or agree on how to move forward. Since 2018, this division has become a big problem for Ethiopia's move toward democracy. It has made the existing differences between ethnic and political groups even worse. As a result, the country has seen more violence and instability. This situation also makes it difficult to set up systems that support democracy. To tackle this challenge, there needs to be a major effort to bring people together for national unity. Encouraging conversations between different groups can help heal divisions. Moreover, creating political processes that involve everyone and look beyond ethnic differences is crucial.

## **5.6. Pathways for resolving elite contradictions and facilitating democratic transition in Ethiopia**

### **5.6.1. Inclusive Political Dialogue and Negotiation as a Pathway**

Establishing inclusive forums for discussion among civil society, political leaders, and ethnic groups in order to resolve disputes and forge agreement on matters of national importance. The political landscape of Ethiopia is sharply split along regional and ethnic lines. To resolve elite oriented conflicts and create a long-lasting democratic system, inclusive discussion and negotiation are crucial (Interview with EZEMA Party member, Addis Ababa 17 May 2022).

Addressing these elite contradictions and promoting a feeling of collective ownership over the political process require inclusive political discourse. Representatives from various political, ethnic, and regional groups are brought together for this type of discussion in order to discuss power-sharing plans, constitutional amendments, and dispute resolution procedures. Elites must be prepared to make concessions and put national interests ahead of partisan or ethnic objectives if this strategy is to succeed (Abbink, 2020).

One step in the direction of inclusive discourse is the National Dialogue Commission, which was founded in Ethiopia in 2021. However, the lack of trust between rival factions and the absence of important players, such the TPLF, have restricted its efficacy (International Crisis Group, 2022). The discussion process needs to be truly inclusive, open, and backed by reliable mediators in it to succeed.

### **5.6.2. Institutional Reforms and Decentralization as a Pathway**

The federal structure of Ethiopia has frequently caused conflict. Elite competitiveness can be lessened by reorganizing institutions to guarantee fair power distribution (Fiseha, 2017). In a nation that has historically been marked by centralized authoritarian authority and ethnic tensions, these reforms have been intended to resolve elite contradictions and facilitate a transition to democracy. In order to investigate how these reforms have influenced Ethiopia's political scene, this analysis consults academic publications and reports.

Implementing institutional reforms to address ethnic grievances and decentralize authority has been one of the Abiy administration's primary tactics. In an effort to strengthen regional states and lessen the concentration of power at the federal level, decentralization has been a major topic in Ethiopian politics (Fiseha, 2017). The EPRDF was succeeded in 2019 by the Prosperity Party, which aimed to establish a more inclusive political system that cuts across ethnic boundaries (BBC, 2019). By promoting a sense of national unity and lessening the power of ethnically oriented factions, this

strategy was seen as an effort to resolve disagreements within the elite. To satisfy the aspirations of marginalized ethnic groups, for example, the government has taken action to support local administration and improve regional autonomy (Interview with PP member, Addis Ababa, 16 May 2023).

Facilitating the transition to democracy has also been a goal of the post-2018 changes. Press freedom, legalization of opposition parties, and the release of political prisoners are among of the policies implemented by Abiy's administration (Interview with PP member, Addis Ababa, 16 May 2023). Many people have hailed these actions as important democracy moves.

### **5.6.3. Electoral Reforms and Free Elections as a Pathway**

Holding free, fair, and transparent elections in order to lessen elite power struggles and validate political leadership. Competitive elections can offer a nonviolent means of settling disputes among the elite and guaranteeing accountability. Ethnic federalism, power conflicts, and the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), the country's ruling coalition, have long been the sources of elite contradictions in Ethiopia. Protests, violence, and political instability have frequently resulted from these contradictions. In order to solve these problems, election reforms were implemented after 2018 with the goal of fostering a more competitive and inclusive political environment.\

The expansion of political space, which permits opposition groups that were previously prohibited from operating lawfully and taking part in elections, has been one of the major developments. For example, the administration has encouraged exiled groups to return to the nation and freed political prisoners, including well-known opposition figures (Interview with PP member, Addis Ababa, 16 May 2023). Furthermore, a major step in guaranteeing free and fair elections has been the creation of the National Electoral Board of Ethiopia (NEBE), an independent electoral institution. Voter registration, candidate nomination, and election monitoring are among the electoral procedures that the NEBE is responsible for supervising (Abbink, 2020). By depoliticizing the electoral process, the NEBE aims to build trust among political elites and the broader public, thereby reducing the potential for conflict.

Because they give people the chance to choose their representatives and hold leaders accountable, free and fair elections are essential to democratic administration. Compared to the EPRDF era, when elections were frequently plagued by pervasive fraud and intimidation, this represented a considerable shift. By offering a peaceful method of transferring power, the 2021 elections' smooth conduct has contributed to the government's legitimacy and the reduction of elite conflicts (Interview with PP member, Addis Ababa, 16 May 2023). Ensuring accountability and transparency in the electoral

process also requires strengthening institutions like the media and the judiciary. Furthermore, maintaining Ethiopia's democratic transition may depend heavily on international oversight and assistance. In conclusion, open elections and electoral reforms are crucial for settling disputes among the elite and easing Ethiopia's democratic transition beyond 2018.

#### **5.6.4. Addressing Historical Grievances as a Pathway**

Putting in place transitional justice procedures to remedy historical violations of human rights and advance peace. Elite contradictions are fuelled by historical grudges, especially among marginalized populations. National unity and trust can be fostered via transitional justice (Tronvoll, 2021). In order to remedy historical injustices, the Ethiopian Reconciliation Commission was established in 2018 (Al Jazeera, 2018). Resolving elite tensions and easing Ethiopia's transition to democracy in the years following 2018 have depended heavily on addressing historical grievances. Ethiopia has experienced substantial political reforms since Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed took office in April 2018 with the goal of resolving long-standing political and ethnic problems.

By encouraging inclusivity and decentralization, the post-2018 reforms aimed to allay these complaints. These included the creation of a government that was more ethnically balanced and the opening of communication with opposition parties (Fiseha, 2021). But there have been many difficulties with the shift, such as a resurgence of ethnic violence and political unrest.

For example, the Tigray conflict, which started in November 2020, highlights how deeply ingrained historical grievances are and how challenging it is to balance conflicting elite interests (International Crisis Group, 2021).

Ethiopia must embrace a holistic approach to reconciliation that incorporates justice, truth-telling, and institutional reforms in order to support a smooth transition to democracy. Other post-conflict societies' experiences, like those of South Africa and Rwanda, highlight how crucial it is to correct historical injustices using tools like inclusive political discourse and truth and reconciliation commissions (Gibson, 2020). Such initiatives could contribute to the development of interethnic trust and lay the groundwork for a more democratic and inclusive political structure in Ethiopia. In conclusion, resolving elite tensions and easing Ethiopia's transition to democracy in the years following 2018 depend on resolving past grievances.

### **5.6.5. Strengthening Civil Society and Media as a Pathway**

Encouraging the growth of an independent civil society and media to hold elites accountable and promote democratic values. A thriving civil society can support democratic changes and serve as a check on elite power (Cheeseman, 2019). Although there are still issues, the 2018 release of political prisoners and the reopening of exiled media outlets were encouraging developments (Human Rights Watch, 2019).

After 2018, bolstering Ethiopia's media and civil society can be a vital step in resolving conflicts among the elite and easing the country's democratic transition. Ongoing power conflicts and elite fragmentation have impeded advancement. By encouraging accountability, stimulating discourse, and elevating the voices of citizens, civil society and independent media can be crucial in tackling these issues.

Government crackdowns and restrictive policies have historically limited Ethiopia's civil society organizations (CSOs). These limitations have, however, somewhat relaxed since 2018, giving CSOs more freedom to practice campaigning, civic education, and dispute mediation (Aalen & Tronvoll, 2020). To hold elites accountable, for example, groups like the Ethiopian Human Rights Council (EHRCO) have played a crucial role in exposing violations of human rights and promoting institutional changes.

Addressing disagreements within the elite requires the same importance of independent media. The media was severely restricted under the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front's (EPRDF) authoritarian rule, which suppressed dissent and maintained elite domination. More media independence has been made possible by the reforms implemented during 2018, which have given journalists the ability to look into corruption, reveal elite wrongdoing, and give a forum to a range of political viewpoints. For instance, publications such as Ethiopia Insight and Addis Standard have been crucial in promoting public discourse and examining the activities of political leaders.

For democratic transitions to be anchored in institutional and cultural change rather than being purely surface-level, a strong civil society and independent media are crucial. These players can contribute to the consolidation of democratic norms and practices by giving citizens the ability to engage in government and hold leaders responsible (Tronvoll, 2020). In conclusion, bolstering Ethiopia's media and civil society beyond 2018 presents a workable solution to address elite inconsistencies and promote the democratic transition.

## Chapter Six

### Conclusion and Prospects

#### 6.1. Conclusion

The change to democracy in Ethiopia from 1991 to 2024 has been really affected by a fight between two groups: those who advocate a united Ethiopia and those who focus on ethnic identities. This study demonstrates how difficult it has been to create a stable and inclusive democratic government because of the continuous conflicts between different factions. Every group has a different definition of what it means to be Ethiopian; ethno-nationalists advocate for greater ethnic autonomy, while pan-Ethiopianists seek a strong national identity. Instability, shoddy institutions, and continuous confrontations are the results of this struggle.

The divisions between these two groups date back to the Marxist and Ethiopian imperial periods, when a centralized strategy disregarded ethnic demands and led to instability. A divided political scene resulted from the EPRDF's implementation of ethnic federalism in 1991, which attempted to right historical wrongs but also exacerbated ethnic divisions.

While ethno-nationalists view it as a means of repressing diverse identities, pan-Ethiopianists contend for Ethiopia's historical unity. There is much controversy surrounding national symbols like the flag and famous people like Emperor Menelik II. Ethno-nationalists believe the 1995 constitution's ethnic federalism is essential for self-rule, while many pan-Ethiopianists believe it fuels divisiveness.

These two organizations formed various short-term coalitions to overthrow the EPRDF after 2018, however these agreements broke down and hostilities returned. The political climate in Ethiopia is still hostile, and the spread of violence in areas like Tigray, Oromia, and Amhara makes it more difficult for democracy to establish itself. There is no consensus on how to govern, which results in brittle governmental structures and poor leadership. Ethnic politics, government control over elections, and low public participation all contribute to the difficulties faced by political institutions. Finding common ground becomes more difficult as the gap between ethno-nationalists and pan-Ethiopianists deepens social divisions.

In order to negotiate power-sharing and constitutional amendments, elite bargaining including all political factions, civil society, and regional actors is crucial. A few crucial areas must be prioritized in order to fortify Ethiopia's democracy: ensuring the independence of the legal system, maintaining a

healthy balance between regional and national interests, and holding free and fair elections where all opinions are heard. This can lessen disputes brought on by influential groups. Reparations and addressing historical injustices can also greatly aid in fostering unity. In order to reduce rivalry for resources, it is crucial to make sure that everyone gains from economic progress. Holding influential people responsible and advancing democratic values can be facilitated by a robust media and vibrant civil society organizations.

The continuous disputes among elites are the reason Ethiopia is still having difficulty achieving complete democracy. There is a difference between individuals who prioritize ethnic identities and those who favour a united nation. Although Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's 2018 reforms gave some people hope, the political climate is still precarious due to ethnic tensions and leader rivalries.

Ethiopia's elites must learn to compromise and abandon all-or-nothing politics if they hope to find a viable democratic path. Finding a political solution that upholds ethnic rights and national unity while bolstering institutions and encouraging inclusive government is crucial. Without these adjustments, elite-led disputes would continue to erode Ethiopia's aspirations for democracy.

Ethiopia's democratic future ultimately rests on its elites' ability to put aside their dogmatic views and consider the needs of all people, not just their own. Ethiopia can strive for a stable democracy with constant dialogue, robust institutions, and an emphasis on inclusive politics. One important issue is the 1995 Constitution, particularly Article 39, which permits ethnic groups to secede. Those who fear a return to a centralized approach oppose the concept of some parties changing it to promote a more unified federalism and lessen divides. Violence has resulted from this dispute, as seen in the Tigray conflict and the battles between Amhara and Oromo factions.

The power struggle between the two sides isn't just about ideas but about the future of Ethiopia—whether it stays unified or breaks into separate ethnic regions. Until these elites can move past a zero-sum mindset and embrace a vision where unity and diversity coexist, Ethiopia will continue to face political challenges and instability. The choice is clear: engage in dialogue and find common ground, or risk further division and decline.

## 6.2. Prospects

Ethiopia's transition to democracy hinges on how it resolves the significant gap between those who prioritize ethnic problems and those who seek a single Ethiopian identity. Managing these tensions will be a difficult task for the Ethiopian National Dialogue Commission and any eventual Reconciliation Committee. Pan-Ethiopianists, who favour a powerful central government, are on one side, while ethno-nationalists, who favour ethnic federalism and even secession, as demonstrated in Tigray and Oromia, are on the other. Serious wars like the Tigray War and hostilities between Oromo and Amhara communities have resulted from this confrontation, and it may cause further splits.

These ethnic divisions have been exacerbated by the ethnic federalism system established by the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), and they remain under the Prosperity Party. Ethnic conflicts are being used by some influential people to seize power, which is detrimental to national cohesion. The ENDC's independence from the Prosperity Party is questioned, and hardliners on both sides may be more inclined to maintain their positions than to compromise. Reconciliation is further complicated by insurgent organizations such as *Fano* in Amhara and OLA in Oromia, as well as instability in neighbouring regions like Sudan and Somalia. Ethiopian events are also shaped by external factors from nations like the United States, China, and Egypt.

The ENDC must ensure that all organizations are truly involved, including civil society, various opposition parties, and armed groups like the Amhara *Fano*, TPLF and OLA. Its legitimacy was damaged by previous exclusions, such as the imprisonment of politicians. It must strike a balance between local and centralized authority while upholding ethnic rights and promoting national unity, maybe through constitutional amendments. If a committee is established for truth and reconciliation, it should address present war crimes as well as historical wrongs, such as atrocities during the TPLF and Derg periods. It could be beneficial to learn from South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, but Ethiopia's ethnic problems require a unique strategy.

Lastly, for elections and reforms, credible elections after the 2021 crisis need a fair electoral body and a de-militarized political scene. It's important to strengthen the courts, media, and civic spaces to keep away from sliding back into authoritarianism.

## **6.2.1. Possible Scenarios for Transition to Democracy in the Future**

### **A. Successful Inclusive Dialogue Leading to a Hybrid Federal Model (Positive Scenario)**

The NDC manages to gain broad participation, including opposition parties, armed factions (e.g., Amhara Fano, OLF), and regional leaders, by addressing legitimacy concerns through prisoner releases, ceasefire agreements, and decentralized agenda-setting. A revised federal system that strikes a balance between national institutions and ethnic autonomy possibly through constitutional amendments is the result of the dialogue.

By including civil society, elders (such as the Gadaa and Shengo systems), and international mediators, the NDC would dispels claims of government bias. Ethno-nationalist and pan-Ethiopianist elites would concur on power-sharing arrangements like dual citizenship rights or rotational leadership. In order to resolve issues that are causing conflict, the administration would pledges to implement economic reforms and transitional justice, such as holding war criminals accountable.

The outcome would be stabilized Ethiopia. Ethiopia has stabilized and is gradually becoming more democratic, although conflicts still exist. The legitimacy of regional elections increases, and a multi-party system replaces the Prosperity Party's hegemony.

### **B. Elite Stalemate (Current Scenario)**

The NDC is a top-down process controlled by the Prosperity Party since it moves forward while excluding important opponents (such as Tigrayan leaders and imprisoned Amhara academics). Surface-level reforms like symbolic decentralization are the result of the conversation, while Abiy's government tightens control in the name of "national unity."

As seen by Amhara's agenda-gathering activities, the NDC's agenda mirrors the priorities of the ruling party, and opposition party's boycott. The state co-opts some ethnocentric elites, while others become radicalized (for example, the OLF reverting to violent conflict). Western donors support the conversation in spite of its shortcomings because they value stability, which allows authoritarian drift.

The outcome would be a "democratic façade" that is nevertheless unstable. Amhara/Oromia conflicts intensify, and Ethiopia continues to be mired in cyclical violence that is similar to that which existed before to the EPRDF's leadership in 2018.

### **C. Dialogue Collapse and State Fragmentation (Negative Scenario)**

Due to public disenchantment, elite intransigence, or persistent conflicts (like the Amhara insurgency), the NDC completely fails. Ethiopia breaks up along ethnic lines, with the central government using militaristic repression while areas like Tigray or Oromia want more autonomy or secession.

Trust in the NDC is weakened by the government's use of drones and widespread arrests in Amhara. Ethno-nationalists, like Oromo/Tigrayan leaders, and pan-Ethiopianists, like Amhara nationalists, refuse compromise because they see each other as existential dangers. Drought and hyperinflation intensify complaints, igniting uprisings and humanitarian emergencies.

The possible outcome would be disintegration like to that of Yugoslavia, with Ethiopia dividing into areas under warlord control or disputed territory. While required, international involvement (such as AU forces) is insufficient.

Generally, the NDC's capacity to handle elite inconsistencies and public confidence will determine Ethiopia's democratic future. The most sustainable course is provided by scenario 1, but it necessitates previously unheard-of compromises. While Scenario 3 jeopardizes the survival of the state, Scenario 2 runs the risk of sustaining authoritarianism. The next 12 to 18 months will be pivotal, and the opportunity for inclusive elite bargaining is closing.

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## Appendixes

### Appendix I: Interview Guide for a Thesis

This interview guide is designed to gather insights from key stakeholders, including political elites, scholars, activists, and policymakers, on the dynamics of Pan-Ethiopianist and ethno-centric political elites' contradictions and their impact on Ethiopia's transition to democracy. The guide is structured to explore historical, ideological, and practical dimensions of the topic.

- **Introduction and Context**

1. Can you briefly describe your role or involvement in Ethiopian politics or academia?
2. How would you characterize the political dynamics in Ethiopia between 1991 and 2024?
3. What are your views on the ideological divide between Pan-Ethiopianist and ethno-centric political elites?

- **Historical Context and Evolution of Political Elites**

4. How did the ideological divide between Pan-Ethiopianist and ethno-centric elites emerge in Ethiopia's political history?
5. What role did the EPRDF (Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front) play in shaping these ideological contradictions?
6. How have these ideologies evolved since 1991, particularly after the 2018 political reforms?

- **Ideological Contradictions and power struggle**

7. How do you define Pan-Ethiopianism and ethno-centric ideologies in the Ethiopian context?
8. What are the key areas of conflict between these two ideologies, and how have they influenced policy-making?
9. How have these contradictions affected Ethiopia's transition to democracy?

- **Challenges to Democratic Transition**

10. What are the main obstacles to achieving a democratic transition in Ethiopia?
11. How do ethnic federalism and centralized nationalism contribute to these challenges?
12. Can you provide examples of how these contradictions have led to political instability or conflict?

- **Future Prospects and Recommendations**

13. What steps can be taken to reconcile the ideological divide between Pan-Ethiopianist and ethno-centric elites?
14. How can Ethiopia achieve a more inclusive and democratic political system?

- **Conclusion**

15. Is there anything else you would like to add about the dynamics of political elites in Ethiopia?
16. What message would you like to convey to policymakers and the public regarding Ethiopia's democratic transition?

## Appendix II- Key Informants Profile

No	Key Informant Code	Place of Interview	Date Of Interview	Remark
1	KI-I	Debre Markos	May 10 2023	Ph.D. in History, Debre-Markos University
2.	KI-II	Addis Ababa	May 17 2022	EZEMA Party member
3.	KI-III	Telephone Interview	May18 2020	TPLF member
4	KI-IV	Addis Ababa	May 16 2023	PP member
5	KI-V	Telephone interview	May 25 2022	OFC member