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Towards an Anthropological Assessment of the Post EPRDF Reforms in Ethiopia:

The Case Study of Addis Ababa and Mekele Cities

By

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A thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies of Addis Ababa University in partial
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Declaration

I the undersigned, hereby declare that this thesis is my original work and to the best of my Knowledge and belief this thesis contains no material previously published by any other person except where proper citation and due acknowledgement has been made. I do further affirm that this thesis has not been presented or being submitted as part of the requirements of any other academic degree or publication, in English or in any other language.

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Certification

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Abbreviation and Acronyms

ADP	Amhara Democratic Party
ANDP	Afar National Democratic Party
BDP	Benishangul Gumuz Democratic Party
EPLF	Eritrean People Liberation Front
EPRDF	Ethiopian People Revolutionary Democratic Front
EPDM	Ethiopian People's Democratic Movement
EPRP	Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party
GPDM	Gambela Peoples Democratic Movement
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HNL	Harari National League
HPR	House of People Representatives
IFI	International Finance Institution
IMF	International Monetary Fund
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ODP	Oromo Democratic Party
OLF	Oromo Liberation Front
OPDO	Oromo People Democratic Organization
OPP	Oromia Prosperity Party
PM	Prime Minister
PP	Prosperity Party
SDP	Somali Democratic Party,
SEPDM	Southern Ethiopian People's Democratic Movement
TPLF	Tigray People Liberation Front
USA	United States of America

Abstract

This thesis explores the post EPRDF political reforms in Ethiopia. It draws its cases from Addis Ababa and Mekele Cities. The thesis comparatively examines perception and reflection from the perspectives of peoples who are living in the two research sites to grasp the current political reforms in Ethiopia. Methodologically this study employed the comparative approach and the extended case method, semi structured interview, group discussion, personal observations, were the methods and techniques employed. The study has analyzed that deeper division between the two parties, and media polarization, has indeed echoed on the assessment of people from respective settings. These then led for a divided understanding over the post EPRDF political reform in Ethiopia. Various factors have also caused a dismantled understanding over political reforms. For instance, contested political histories, a shift of political ideology, ethnic unitary system and nationalism with developmental state economic model to more liberal thought are among the many factors that paved the way for deeper division among ethnic groups. Alongside, the different group of political elites once they coined different policies by their policymakers tries to deliver their purpose. However, these policies by PP faced some serious questions by TPLF or even a rebuke from their compatriots or their opponents (respective settings) not to forget the reverse though. Through thematically analyzing the empirical data and after assessing the binary relation between the two, when it comes to each other PP and TPLF have extensively exploited public media and brought a deteriorated perception among people.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of the Study

Even if Ethiopia is believed to be the oldest political entity in the world dating back to three thousand years (Baharu 1991:7, Keller 2005), some written works disagree with this narrative. For instance, Merera (2003:1) notes the development of Ethiopian polity a century and a half ago. He also believes that ‘Ethiopia, which is a ‘modern multi-ethnic empire state’, was created through wars of expansion and conquest. Others also write due to incorporation, assimilation, and accommodation of different ethnic, religious, and cultural groups it is the second half of the nineteenth century that formed present-day Ethiopia, as a ‘modern multi-national empire state’ (Gebru 1996, Walelign 2016:140).

Several scholars also see Ethiopia (Clapham 2006:109-110) as a peculiar state in the African continent. This is due to the following reasons. To begin with, Ethiopia has survived the colonial era and by a long way, is the oldest and most authoritative state that Africa has produced. ‘Alongside this ‘Ethiopians are also rarely known for their modesty, the remarkable differences in levels of state capability between themselves and European powers – and later and still more ignominiously, between themselves and some other African states’. Additionally, Ethiopia for Teshale (1996:414) is a historically antique polity unlike Egypt, Mesopotamia, India, and others that were overrun later by “alien” and destructive forces; it is one of the very few places that managed to sustain an unbroken chain of historical civilization free of foreign “corruption” in which Ethiopia has maintained its brand of African civilization intact.

Ethiopia, of course, has a pedigreed political history that has had an independent state centered on the north-central provinces at least since the medieval era. Yet not succeeded in transforming into a modern political order whereby the state embraces the rule of law, the consent of the governed through an appropriate mechanism of accountability of power-holders (Berhanu 2015:1). Gebru also points out that, despite Modern Ethiopia was formed as a nation-state; it is very straightforward to claim that the nation building is yet to be completed. He further notes that ‘Ethiopian leaders have been far less successful in nation-building than in-state creation and consolidation” (Gebru 1996:29).

Whereas, according to Markakis, it is the dual process that is ‘political subjugation’ and ‘economic exploitation’ of the 19th and 20th century by Abyssinian or Christian highland rulers that have created a modern state of Ethiopia (Markakis 2003:1). On the other hand, as a trans-modern critique of the hegemonic characteristics of the modern Ethiopian state formation, Walelign (2016) noted that the asymmetrical relations and unbalanced national discourse comes from the totalizing tendency of modern Ethiopian establishment. He further argues that, “Ethiopia is formed upon the European model of nation-state. Hence, it is an extension of the European modernity project”.

Until recently as Lyons puts it in his book the ‘Puzzle of Ethiopian Politics’, despite the totalizing nature of Ethiopian polity, indeed it is legacies of war and class struggle included high levels of solidarity and leadership coherence forged during the protracted armed struggle along with the precedents and organizational structures developed by the rebels to administer the liberated territory. The mechanisms by which the TPLF¹ as an insurgent movement organized and administered areas it occupied during the war were linked to how the TPLF-led EPRDF² organized and governed as a ruling party (Lyons 2019:5).

Scholars such as Vaughan and Tronvol illustrated that since 1991 the Ethiopian government under the then TPLF led EPRDF, and now PP³ has been simultaneously engaged in three radical reform processes. In the political arena, it moved from a highly centralized single-party arrangement into a radically devolved federation of nine Regional States, supported multi-party ‘competitive election’ to the representative office. It is the formal separation of the powers of the legislature, executive, and judiciary, and accession to a raft of international legal instruments related to human, economic, civil, and political rights. Second to that, Ethiopian civil service reform has focused not only on the extensive changes in administrative and fiscal arrangements but also required to underwrite changes in the political sphere. Third, and perhaps most ambitious of all, is in the economic sphere, the Ethiopian government, with the extensive involvement of the international community and IFIs, seeking to restructure the pre-existing socialist command economy with the (gradual) introduction of market forces in many, although not all, sectors (Vaughan and Tronvol 2002:1-2).

¹ TPLF: The Tigray Peoples’ Liberation Front was the leading party of the EPRDF ruling coalition until 2018

² EPRDF: Ethiopian People Revolutionary Democratic Front, which used to be a coalition of four affiliated parties

³ Prosperity Party

In addition, Shimelis also stated that since 1991 Ethiopia has been witnessing significant political-institutional building such as human rights institutions and democratic institutions that intended for reforms (Shimelis, 2017:58). Yet after more than two decades of the political supremacy of TPLF, among the different reasons Prime Minister Abiy's reforms command such popular support is that a wide variety of different political philosophies supports an agenda of transforming institutions that seen are as corrupt, repressive, or undemocratic. Alongside this, various factors are also widely mentioned as galvanizing Abiy's coming to power. For instance, during TPLF supremacy Yonas (2019) noted that, it is the marginalization of ethnic groups and a socio-economic climate in which the population did not seem to benefit from the country's economic growth despite a continuous reminder of the then leadership, were some of the widely mentioned causes for change (Ibid: 9-10).

Although the external anger/factors arouse have played a great role for 2018 political reform to become existential and paved the way for PP to emerge though, the internal collusion within the EPRDF has also played a great role for new power relations or political change to emerge. Therefore, the interaction within the then coalition needs review here. First, long before, the four aligned parties have ignited power contestation soon after late PM Meles Zenawi's passing (passed away in 2012). The post-Meles contestation was first begun between the relatively young groups (members of EPRDF) brought to the frontier in the name of 'deep renewal' (progression with new faces) and those who reign on power long enough at least since 1991. Relatively those new faces to the party wished the old leadership to fully transfer its power, yet resisted by those who were still in power and argue that the transition should be a gradual process; done step by step. This relation within EPRDF was an age status quo for the quest for power (Brehane 2019).

Among many, another factor that caused internal pendulum within the EPRDF was labeling each other for not implementing the deep renewal process. Unlike this, the commitment by OPDO (OPP) appreciated during the various meetings between 2013 up to 2018, as the party has no issue in forwarding new faces to the frontier. Yet the concern/issue OPDO has was taking control over the highest political power considering its population majority (Ibid).

Alongside all these, personal accusations between members of the party for giving a shield for investors' interest become another point of relay for internal collusion to happen.⁴ Hence, these implicit and explicit turn-ons, have contributed a great deal for the then OPDO (now OPP) quest for a political power to become successful. Indeed, within less than a decade Prime Minister Hailemariam gave away his power 'peacefully'⁵ This decision by the EPRDF was to foster national reconciliation and widening the political space, which opposition parties have also considered as a crucial step towards democratization (Mohammed 2018).

Hence, due to the above-mentioned factors and many other reasons, in a historic display of modern politics in Ethiopia, a peaceful transfer of power was made on April 2, 2018. Dr. Abiy Ahmed was affirmed as the fourth⁶ Prime Minister of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia. His appointment as the PM was a crucial crossroad of political, social, and economic turbulence that has shocked the nation for years. His ascension to the Office was different in its kind. To mention some of them, although he is not people's choice he was the result of people's power. As stated earlier, even before Abiy's rising to power the majority particularly the young population of Oromia, Amhara, and Sidama who believed the political, economic, and social policies of the ruling party has marginalized millions from economic empowerment, have withstood police brutality and imprisonment. Not only these but rampant corruption, unfair wealth distribution, high rate of youth unemployment, and many more reasons account for the change.

After his inaugural addressed, many gave him the nickname 'the young reformist'. As he promises, it only took him months to take bold measures such as releasing detained politicians, inviting exiled politicians to return home, assigning women to higher government positions, allowing press freedom like the country had never seen before, and many more. Most of the measures taken by the reform were appreciable, but it was not as smooth as the Prime Minister promised when he comes to power was. Social, economic, and political turmoil continues as various groups of different interests emerge in the country.

⁴ A discussion with Henock and Yonas on February 2/2021, the issue is also further discussed on the third chapter.

⁵ This part is analyzed from the works of; Medhane Taddese undated (accessed on 17/9/2020), Aregawi Berehe (2001), Brehane Tigabu (2019).

⁶ It is considering Tamerat Layne as the first prime minister after the transitional government

Therefore, due to the above mentioned various factors and changes occur over the Ethiopian political reform since 2018; the study discusses the post-EPRDF political scenario in Ethiopian context.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

Scholars such as Innes (2003) puts reform from sociological, political, and economic lingo, and noted that “reform” is understood in terms of a sort of fine adjustment, or redressing serious wrongs in social structures, without altering fundamentals of the system under reform. Thus, reformists seek to improve a system as it stands, and never to radically put an end to it (Innes 2003, El Sharif. A 2015:57).

Different writers such as Tompson and Price also stated that a Reform “by stealth” has severe limits and major reforms for which governments have not previously sought public approval tend to succeed only when they generate visible benefits very rapidly, which major structural reforms generally do not. Both stated that it is a crises’ that do often create opportunities for such “reform surprises”, as governments are forced to reverse course in response to an emerging situation. Nevertheless, unless the pay-offs are very quick, the sustainability of such reforms tends to depend on the ability to reform governments to make the case for the desirability of reforms on a long term, structural grounds. Therefore, reforms justified chiefly as responses to an immediate crisis may be difficult to sustain once the crisis has passed (Tompson and Price 2009:10).

On the other hand, as an academic pursuit a great deal of researchers has dealt over the various reforms Ethiopia experiences since 1991, many of them with a specific sector and area in mind. For instance, Yirga (2011) has tried to assess key public procurement challenges in the Federal Government’s public sectors and present recent empirical shreds of evidence. In which his finding shows that insuring transparency and accountability is still in the middle of the road. Yet his study only examined the employees and selected procurement specialists angle in which he rarely sees beneficiary’s intake about the concerning subject. In addition, his research only focuses on a particular reform and remains behind in addressing the impact various institutional reforms share on one another. Another research work by Endalkachew (2014) based on a small scale survey on ‘Institutional Reform’ also assesses the impacts of institutional reform on organizational culture in Federal Transport Authority and examines the attention given for changing the attitudes and awareness level of employees.

Likewise, he does not incorporate various stakeholders' roles and assesses only the employee perception regarding the impact of institutional reform on organizational culture in Ethiopia with special reference to transport authority.

Additionally, politicians like Aregawi Berhe (2001) in his work “The EPRDF and the Crisis of the Ethiopian State”, have stressed the role where ethnic politics and ethnic mobilization had played the path to power and the pillars to maintain it, “noticeably since the Era of Princes (1769-1855)”. He stressed ethnic grounds have been the power base of Ethiopian political elites under various banners and forms. Indeed, as one who has been a member and part of the party during the seventeen years armed struggle, another work of his stressed the role land reform played so as to get public support. Having both a positive and negative incentive in mobilizing people for the war project, land, and its management was thus a crucial link between the people and the TPLF’s strategic aim especially through allotting land to the farmers of Tigray. Hence, in his dissertation about “A Political History of the Tigray People’s Liberation Front (1975-1991): Revolt, Ideology, and Mobilization in Ethiopia”; Aregawi’s (2001, 2008:287) work didn’t give much emphasis to reform issues he only addresses this issue to show the mobilizing features applied by the party. Not the lasting importance the reform had or brought for the Tigray people per se.

On the other hand, despite Aregawi’s (2001) reminder over the role ethnicity play in the quest for power and shaping peoples, groups, and societies perception, both Endalkachew (2014) and Yirga (2011) didn’t explore the impact ethnicity have in shaping people’s perception over institutional reform and the role it plays in analyzing the political dynamics of Ethiopia. Therefore, they do not usher the ideal factors that led people to articulate or shape their perception through ethnicity.

Similar to this study, recently scholars like Worku and Ephrem (2020) have also assessed the Post 2018 political reforms in Ethiopia: Its achievements and challenge, yet it was only a desk study and etic reflection.

Moreover, attune to the political situation in Ethiopia especially since 2018, scholars such as Mohamed et al. (2018), has noted in their report about the steps (PM Abiy’s) government takes. Therefore, these steps as bold as they are aims at rectifying glaring faults of the past, though these experts have distinguished that it is important to take a glance at change and continuity in Ethiopia political life ‘as who previously proclaimed change in Ethiopia, set free dissidents and other prisoners deemed unjustly victimized by their predecessors’. They have

stated that, ‘such acts did not usher though in a new dispensation where similar abuses became uncommon, much less unthinkable’ (Mohamed et al. 2018:42).

In this regard, despite the various attempts made, Badwaza (2018) stated that PM Abiy’s ‘appointment’ signaled a dramatic shift in the then EPRDF’s now PP, style of governance. While structural changes to the institutions and the legal framework that served as an instrument of repression have yet to be made, for him the Prime Minister and his teams have so far taken several bold measures that earned them strong popular support (Badwaza 2018:2). However, these accomplishments, made PM Abiy’s government faces a staggering number of demands and appeals for overnight reforms at the local, regional, and national levels. During the same period of the applauded reform, the country had faced many challenges. A sharp increase in ethnic violence, internal displacement, regional boundary disputes, intensified debate over owning the capital city, and the unhealthy relationship between the federal and Tigray regional state was among the many.

Indeed, one of the big differences between those parties came when the Prime Minister proposed the idea of merging ‘sister parties’ of EPRDF that used to be the coalition of four ethnically aligned political parties. Of the four parties, which made EPRDF, TPLF refused to merge with the other three⁷. The difference was far more than a political-ideological roadmap between the parties. The new party ‘has largely discarded the revolutionary ideology and developmental state economic model that glued the EPRDF together and favors’ more liberal thought which most applauded by the Western world. Therefore, with all these differences and implicit political unrest, mainstream media owned by the federal and regional government catalyzed the tension and has changed the issue from a fiery red to blue.

In sum, due to the above-mentioned matters and researches that are neither comparative in terms of study group nor area, this study comparatively explores Addis Ababa and Mekele to understand the post EPRDF political scenario in Ethiopian context. Here unlike the above-mentioned researches, the research aimed to look into how people analyze the various institutional reforms within the impact of deeper division and media polarization. Whereas, due to the ‘peaceful’ transfer of power, the post-2018 political transition Ethiopia experienced is unique, timely, and topical in nature that needs to be explore. Therefore, here it is better to understand or differentiate the current reform from the past ones, because what

⁷ <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2019/04/can-abiy-ahmed-continue-remodel-ethiopia> (accessed on 10/22/2020)

we have witnessed in 2018 is not a transition from one government to the other through armed force, like from monarch to socialist Derge to Marxist EPRDF, it is a radical reform within the then EPRDF now PP. The research, on the other hand, aimed to look into the various features of Ethiopian polity reasoned as a source for a dismantled perception to exist in understanding attempts made in institutionalizing some sectors of the country. Hence, the study also explores on how these factors in analyzing Ethiopian political dynamics leads people for deeper division, power struggle, swing their assessment from side to side.

1.3. Objectives of the Study

1.3.1. General Objective

The general objective of the study is to compare how the post EPRDF political scenarios are analyzed and understood by various actors.

1.3.2. Specific objectives

- To assess Ethiopian political scenarios past and recent: An overview
- To assess the various institutional reforms (especially its achievements and challenges) since 2018
- To assess the post-EPRDF political scenarios within the impact of deeper division, and media polarization;
- To assess factors those have impact/shape people's assessment.

1.4. Research Questions

1. How do people assess the Ethiopian politics in general and Post-EPRDF political scenarios in particular?
2. How do people analyze the Post-EPRDF institutional reforms?
3. How do people analyze or grasp the various views of information into articulating the reform agendas?
4. What are the factors that impact people's articulation/assessment over political reforms?

1.5. Scope of the Study

Since the study is a comparative one, it has two research settings Mekele and Addis Ababa. Though the study mainly focus on the Post-EPRDF political reforms since 2018, tried to specifically address institutional reforms within factors that shapes informants perceptions over these reforms.

1.6. Significance of the Study

This study tries to address reform-related studies in social science in general and anthropology in particular. In applying the extended case method and comparative approaches in this research, the findings could become a potential source of document for further research and for those who might be interested in applying this approach. The spatial assessment could also give an insightful and unbiased view of the current Ethiopian political situation. Of course, this study could also be a review for policymakers, politicians, and other interested agencies since it tries to follow a bottom-up approach and view the emic perception of a given person or society.

1.7. Limitation of the Study

Due to the dynamics nature of Ethiopian polity, the study has experienced challenges in keeping up with the political situation happening in the country. Moreover, due to the tension between regional and federal leaderships people have become suspicious one another especially having several group discussions were difficult, hence the study only had one group discussion. Apart from this during my fieldwork in Mekele, few informant thought I was sent by the federal leadership, therefore I had to show my university identification card to reduce this disputation. All in all my fieldwork in Addis Ababa, on the other hand, went well, yet since some of my interviews took place during the global pandemic COVID 19; I could not get informant willingness easily. At last but not least, recording the voices of informants were not an easy task, few reject this way of having an interview, while those recorded resort from using their names. On the other hand as a result of insecurity informants were not sometimes as open as I expected as a result the study usually avoided direct question and applied informal conversations. As also some of the informants share an office with others they were uncomfortable, so I had to change the setting from office to greenery; where the interview can be uninterrupted.

1.8. Field Work Location and Field Experience

1.8.1. Description of the Research Settings

In attempt to discuss the genesis and dynamics of the competing ethnic nationalism in Ethiopia, Merera (2003) used Addis Ababa city and Addis Ababa University as one of his point of departure, and claims that, both “in terms of the availability of archives, Addis Ababa as a city and institution have been his study’s central point indeed.

In fact, I agree a lot with the above description on the following issues. First, Addis Ababa as a city has been a mosaic of several ethnic groups resides, and mainly due to the rural-to-urban population migration, the city has registered population expansion, which makes it tempting to get unbiased perspective over politics. Second, this heterogeneity of the capital not only makes it a place where one can acquire various assessments, indeed also gives a blueprint understanding of the whole country, echoed through this particular city. Addis Ababa as a city have seen it all, especially the country’s dynamic political terrain (Yidnekachew 2015:4).

Thus taking advantage of the comparative approach and extended case method, I have acquired my data from Yeka sub city, and two of its neighboring sub city Gulele and Bole Sub Cities. Yeka has been a place where I live for the past 15 years; Bole is the place where I usually meet people for work and leisure time, Gulele on the other hand is my study area (Addis Ababa University). Thus due to my proximity to these particular areas I found it convincing to navigate these areas. Unlike any other researches that deals with people culture, language, status, gender role; this research will not try to describe a particular cultural setting, except describing the study areas in general. Therefore, within these three sub cities, Megenagna, Hayahulet, Bole Medhanialem, Bole Bridge, 6 killo are that particular areas where the field work took place. Generally, despite the above reasons Addis Ababa as a hometown, the particular selection of the city is due to its heterogeneity of its people, which pretty much avoided one sided, biased perception towards understanding the current issues.

On the other hand, since this study is a comparative study between two cities, the capital city of Tigray; Mekele is then the other research setting that I gathered my data; namely Ayder, Hawelti, Adi-Haki, Kedamay-Weyane, are the sub cities which I employed my field work. Indeed, the main reason why I selected Mekele as one research setting, is from the possession Despite this, the main reason why I selected Mekele as one research setting, is from the possession of views which I got from my mother’s families in that city who feel as if they are

pushed by the federal government, while my mother who resides here in Addis Ababa does not much fall for such claims. Such difference of ideas within the same family, have pushed me to comparatively study the two research settings, and to question myself, do the context and setting matters for people to understand reform? The answer to this is yes it does.

Hence, the study have analyzed Mekele residents assessment of the post EPRDF political scenarios, thus Hawelti, Romant Roundabout, Ayder Hospital, Adishenduhun, 16 kebele are the areas where the interview and discussion with Mekele youths took place. Thus, because of such scenarios this research intended to study the respective cities where the regional and federal governments reside.

1.8.2. Field Experience

Before collecting data in Addis Ababa I have traveled to Mekele, through Afar, Chefra, which is 970 kilometers from Addis Ababa which avoids the old gateway to Tigray, through Woldia; Amhara region. The course has changed because of insecurity as respondents from Mekele mentioned. After crossing almost 15 checkpoints in Afar, Amhara, and Tigray regions, many passengers complain about these repetitive checkpoints and find them irritating, yet few people see them as a grant for safety. I on the other hand particularly saw the checkpoints how the new power structure results conspiracy throughout the country and shows the insecurity concerns in general. The poor air cooler that broke after 350 kilometers makes the humid air condition challenging. Later on, I arrived on the 18th of February 2020, which was the eve of the commemoration ceremony ‘Lekattit 11⁸’, the city indeed looks glamorous and vibrant, decorated with lots of the regional flag, Ethiopian flag and of course the flag of the then leading party TPLF. Then we directly headed to my friend's mother's house at ‘Adishnduhn’, served with one of Ethiopian traditional food ‘Doro Wet’ with a warm welcome, later on, led to a discussion with a close relative to the host family, that is discussed later on.

After two days of observing the city, through snowball, I have employed and navigated different parts of the city. Then, my first interview in Mekele took with three instructors in Dr. Tewolde Gessese Medical College compound. Although, I clearly explained the purpose of the study, due to the political nature of it, my first informant was not as open as I expected.

⁸ It is Tigrigna local term for the date ‘February 19’

Therefore, beside me later on, my friend's friend briefly explains my purpose for the rest two informants in Tigrigna. Indeed, my ability to listen the language (Tigrigna) makes it easy for informants to explain through their mother tongue. Hence sometimes that I had to code-switch between Amharic and Tigrigna while being short of speaking my mother's dialect becomes a weakness for me.

Generally, my data collection in Mekele went well. However, I also understood that to a minimum extent people are reserved in addressing some issues, were sometimes careful in applying some terms, this is later analyzed and understood that people nowadays in Mekele are suspicious over those who come from the federal, especially like me who raises questions about the political nature and power relation of the country's polity.

On the other hand, my experience in Addis Ababa as a hometown took place with heterogenic groups, not directly asked about informant's ethnic background yet they indirectly mentioned it one way or another. For instance, informants state it in various ways such as "we as Oromo or Tigraway or Amhara have/haven't got the right answers". Similarly, both in Mekele and in Addis Ababa I wanted to have an equal number of female and male informants. Nevertheless, female informants were limited due to their rejection to talk about politics; claiming they don't have enough knowledge about the nature of political dynamics throughout the country and has less engagement on Ethiopian politics through various forms. In addition, they could not be as open as about their outlooks as their male counterparts.

1.9. Research Design

This study stems from a researcher, which is under the influence of anthropology and wants to be loyal to these anthropological thinking (let people speak for themselves and later the scientist or researcher analyze it using these anthropological methods or techniques). Therefore, this research follows the anthropological, epistemological, and comparative techniques to breakdown inductively how people respond to the in-depth interview. In sum, this study tried to understand people's attitudes towards reform through applying qualitative approaches since it can give a detailed description and explanation of the phenomenon. Hence phenomenology is employed as a designing technique, and it is also guided by interpretivist and constructivist epistemological and ontological orientations respectively.

1.10. Methodological Approach

1.10.1. Comparative Approaches

Applying a comparative approach as a methodology for this research becomes important and valid, hence not only it helps the researcher to compare relatively homogeneous views with heterogeneous ones but it also gave the study insight in distinguishing heterogeneous views within a homogeneous society. To put it simply, people with the same ethnicity could have a various understanding of reforms in these contexts, while heterogeneous societies could have the same understanding of a certain context, not to forget the reverse though; indeed the study cemented these assumptions. Generally, the comparative approach helps this research to compare and understand the various outlooks from both Addis Ababa and Mekele cities.

1.10.2. Extended Case Method

As Kairedin (2018:24) puts it, ‘one can participate in and observe several events and actions of individuals and groups through extended method for an extended period. Which the researcher then could construct his or her reality and theorize about its social phenomenon’.

Thus, the extended case method and the constructivist thinking/perspective helped me to analyze and assess my research that gears from a different angle such as political, economic, and social endeavors. Along with these, it also allows me to understand society from the bottom up, unlike the top-down approach. Therefore, the extended method gave me reform related data’s from the two cities through comparatively studying my research, and it also presented the understandings of the past experiences of societies over reforms in general and the current reform within such political dynamics of Ethiopia. It gave me fluidity in terms of study areas.

1.11. Methods of Data Collection

For Bernard ‘method’ has at least three meanings. It means epistemology, the study of how we know, and it is about strategic choices, also at the specific level, a method is about the choice of technique (Bernard 2006:3). Hence, so as to make people entitled of their assessment the study employed Semi-Structured Interviews (30 people, each setting have 15), and in order to observe symbolic representations and gestures made during discussions Personal Observation is applied, and also to assess variety of peoples reflection one Group

Discussion (4 male and 1 female) is employed. These methods are further discussed as follows.

1.11.1. Semi-Structured Interview

In the study I am optimistic enough that the guiding and making of interview question are open-ended and employed semi-structured interview as one technique, though it will be trivial to think that I went and collected my field data with a Tabula Rasa (Aristotle, C. Greetz and other used the term). Of course, I may have a belief that humankind is born with empty sly, but from the very first day, he/she have become human and start observing, hearing, tasting... indeed they will start constructing reality through socialization process (constructivist view) but their years of experience of the universe will be carried as baggage which later could result in reflexivity. Hence, my research might not be free from such assumption. Having this in mind the study employed individual interviews, rewarding interviewees entitled of their expectation and makes them free from others shadows. Thus, the study has 30 informants for interview and four for group discussion, both settings have 15 interviewees. These interviews and discussions have taken place before the federal government's decision to launch 'a law enforcement operation'. The claim made by PP leadership is that 'TPLF has made an attack on the Ethiopian army; northern command'.

1.11.2. Personal Observation

It is one of the most important sources of data gathering in qualitative research. The researcher observed several areas where people spend their leisure time (such as coffee shops in Mekele, and cafes in Addis Ababa) and observed trending gestures and attempts made, that is decorating cities with flags, coloring roundabouts, and protests, military parade, are observed. In addition, the study observed how people act with one another over the issues they have raised, especially during group discussions.

1.11.3. Group Discussion

A focus-group session is an in-depth discussion in which a small number of people (usually 8-12) from the target population, under the guidance of a facilitator discuss topics of importance for a particular study/project. The moderator, with the help of predetermined guidelines, stimulates free discussion among the participants on the subject of inquiry in a qualitative method. The order in which the topics are covered is flexible, but generally, the

discussion starts with issues that are more general and slowly flows into ones that are more specific. In the end, a few probing questions are sometimes asked to reveal more in-depth information or to clarify earlier statements or responses. Focus-group discussions also have many of the limitations of other qualitative methods. Their samples are small and purposively selected and therefore do not allow generalization to larger populations (Khan et al 1991:6).

As a result, despite the intention to undertake two discussions, due to COVID 19, this research had only one group discussion, with four male and one female participant, and it took place in Mekele with two of them traveled from Addis Ababa and the rest permanent residents of Mekele. Here, the researcher tried to reduce a female orator from repetitively shadowing others or influence through her loud expression over the others, as a result here it is attempted to manage such influences and make sure participants had an equal chance during the discussion. Due to the sensitive nature of Ethiopian polity, I sometimes had discussions with some informants so as to create openness and avoided direct formal questions.

1.12. Secondary Sources

The study, in general, relies on several articles, book reviews, thesis, document review, published and unpublished books and online electronic magazines, and also televised media discussions over Ethiopia's polity. The secondary source is one potential area, where the study navigates, gaps, and tried to fill these gaps.

1.13. Organization of the Study

The thesis research is organized in four chapters. Chapter one is an introductory part which gives background information about the argument of Ethiopia's political history, its formation, and notes the hegemonic characterization of the modern Ethiopian state; it also states the research problems in which other research's left a gap with and this study intended to fill in. This part also contains both general and specific objectives where the study try to address in, whereas scope, limitation and significant of the thesis. Furthermore, chapter one also describes the research setting, field experiences, research designs, the methodology (comparative approach), methods (extended case method) and the specific techniques to gather data. Chapter two highlights the conceptual and theoretical frameworks of the thesis, it also includes empirical literatures that synchronized with the empirical data. Chapter Three is data presentation and analysis, it tried to discuss and give an over view about the pre and post

EPRDF political scenarios, address the various institutional reforms made since 2018 Ethiopian political reform, within this reform the chapter includes media, political space, and electoral board's achievements, challenges, and reputations are discussed. This chapter also tried to address various features of Ethiopian politics that could impact people's perceptions. The last chapter is a summary of the findings and draws concluding remarks.

Chapter Two: A Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

Understanding Reform: A Conceptual Framework

2.1. Definitions of Terms and Concepts

Reform as a Concept

Even if we have various ways of delineation to word reform as a concept, Oxford's definition of the word reform, which dates back to 1663, is widely used in various disciplines. In which it defines the word reform as ‘The adjustment, or altering for the better, of some faulty state of things, especially of a corrupt or oppressive political institution or practice; the removal of some abuse or wrong’ (Oxford English dictionary 2003 in Taylor 2019). Therefore, here it is seen or associated with moving into an improved or better direction, maybe even ‘synonymous with progresses’. Similarly, Tylor (2019) on his part understands and analyzes reform as a change for the better, through outlining the positive feature of it he specifically attains reform as a change more suited for the achievement of goals outlined by decision-makers in a particular field of play.

Another similar but important concept of reform, in general, has been presented in Merriam Webster's dictionary in which it also defines reform as a not only improvement towards something yet also correcting the past. Hence, for Merriam-Webster dictionary reform is...

“...Improvement of something by removing or correcting faults, problems, etc. An action, plan, rule, etc., that is meant to improve something, to put or change into an improved form or condition, to amend or improve by change of form or removal of faults or abuse, to put an end to (an evil) by enforcing or introducing a better method or course of action, to induce or cause to abandon evil ways reform a drunkard”

Political Reform

Political reform is another important concept we particularly need to understand in this research. In which several scholars tried to conceptualize it in various ways. For instance,

Habtamu emphasizing Tadesse Madhane⁹ and his ‘Post-Meles Reform Agenda’: Quest for Logic and Relevance, postulated the concept as alterations or modifications. However, differs greatly in their extents and scopes from regime to regime, of course, agreeably largely without radically changing its fundamental pillars. Thus, here unlike the world acclaimed dictionary’s definition of the concept, Tadesse understands political reform as a concept that goes beyond such concepts like ‘renewal, rehabilitation or renovation’. Therefore for him political reform tend to be confined to “recreating and reenergizing inspirations anew in the spirit of their past zeal and commitment without any significant change, unlike reform, in some major aspects of the regime”.

Several scholars have also defined and understand political reform in various ways (Bates 2005:3) stated reform as a “transition”, from no- or one-party to competitive party systems and from military to civilian governments. He also believes that, while reform made governments more accountable, Bates concludes that, it may well have created incentives for them to adopt policies that destabilize the macro-economy (Bates 2005:1). Besides, Scholars like Salameh et al., (2018:1560) related the concept to political development and often used interchangeably with other synonymous concepts, such as political adaptation, political modernization, political development, political openness, political transition, and democracy.

Power, Political Power

The definition of power remains vague and disputable pending the perceptions of scholars. This reality makes power a contested concept with different interpretations. Scholars claimed various definitions to clarify the context of power to justify their priorities and theoretical choices (Ogun and Aslan 2014: 89).

However imprecise to grasp or analyze the idea of power generally although, so one scholar defines it as follows: Girvan (2007) expressed power as “the ability of the human agency to exercise controlling over its social and physical environment”. Further, he added power imbalances exist in an exceedingly social setting, that is, once there are asymmetrical

⁹ Tadesse Madhane and his ‘Post-Meles Reform Agenda’: Quest for Logic and Relevance <http://aigaforum.com/articles/Habtamu-response-to-post-meles-reform-agenda-> (accessed on 17/9/2020).

relations of power among persons, establishments, or states. A power imbalance exists when one has more control or influence over the behavior of the other than contrariwise. Power can be exercised by the use of superior force, or by economic means, or by control over knowledge and information (Girvan 2007:7).

Another scholar understands the construct of power in the context of political power, within which he believes power is all around [us], visible and invisible that manifested within the everyday social relations, in individuals' ideologies and their actions. Once a person seeking power, power affects the process; however once he or she wields power, power is that person then. Supported its universal presence, it is assumed that it fits within the class of the taken-for-granted-things. Yet, to understand the construct of political power, one could step on the far side the taken-for-granted-things and appearance into the method that power perpetually evolves (Shokri 2017:1).

Later Shokri additionally stresses that the idea of power includes bias; nonetheless, political power is an integrated concept that includes the idea of political 'Power'-qua authority and political 'rights'. According to him, solely with this approach, power will be appreciated because the key idea with that we can have a higher understanding of politics, political lives, organizations, and political development (Ibid 2017:1-2).

On the other hand, according to Hilary Callan (accessed on 3/19/20)¹⁰, in Anthropology, 'power' typically refers to regulation, authority, or domination, that involves the power to influence the choices and behavior of others. Nonetheless, in emphasizing the hidden, and indirect manifestations of power anthropology differs from different disciplines in such way, as it also typically sees power not solely as a repressing force however conjointly as generative of dominant ideas and institutional structures. Further, she noted, "the origins of power are not continuously or completely probe for among people who possess recognized political authority and control over suggests that of violence. Domination is seen as indivisible from ideas, from control over the knowledge that serves the interests of political power, and additionally (on occasion) of dissent and resistance thereto power"¹¹.

¹⁰ Hilary Callan (Accessed on 3/19/20)

¹¹ See more Scott, James C. (1990) *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcript*. To fully understand anthropology's and the writers intake about the hidden and public transcript to analyze power relation

Therefore, taking the assorted ideas applied during this explicit study that square measure reticulate each other, conceptually this study lays within the context of power issue, during which the new trending power relation in Ethiopia and current leadership is resulted out of anger and repression of the past TPLF led EPRDF leadership. The political reform carried by internal and external pressures through the search for brand spanking new power relevance emerge, so ensuring a fresh power baron since 2018. During this situation former OPDO currently Oromia Prosperity Party's quest for power has resulted in a new power structure. Before all these, the concentration of social power by the TPLF elites used to remain for some groups, yet it shifts when PP come and recently loses its legitimacy (TPLF) due to the law enforcement operation (Vaughan and Tronvoll 2003).

Alongside the conflicts that arise currently so, OPDO's (OPP) control over the country's polity appears the explanation behind a political reform emerges or achieved through popular protest and internal power struggle. Bringing another power structure and result in a political reform through attempts made in institutionalizing various section of the country, such as media, electoral board, and political space. This then semiconductor diode for the ideas and hoping the new power structure can provide an explicit agency the predisposed aspiration or outcome. Nevertheless here during this study the new power structures' success in attempts to reform the assorted areas of the country fall for two folds, ones' group disputation over the others and largely umbrageous by several ethnic identities.

The new power relation emerging in Ethiopia must not be understood as solely dominance and oppression nevertheless in terms of power and resistance synchronal among Ethiopian state encircled by numerous decisions between federal and regional governments particularly between TPLF and Prosperity Party (Addis Ababa). Hence, this issue is expounded upon by the political elite is gradual goes down through the throat of the people per se. Thus, here the thought of power conjointly falls for Shokirs (2017) concept of power within political power; therefore, the study employed both concepts interchangeably.

Additionally, power during this study must not be thought-about as the ability to impose one over the opposite however; both agents can exercise it in an exceedingly bound means a minimum of through resistance (Foucault 1978, Scott 1990), however leading to a deeper

division between numerous ethnic teams (groups) of Ethiopia. Consequently, political reform that expressed during this study by the two groups and by their respective views had shown the new power order between TPLF and PP, in fact, with the agency inclining to ones' tendency. In sum, attempts to reform the country's polity through institutions come alongside the new power relation emerging and show where informants support fall in shaping one's perception while having an agency within the study settings. Here in this study, it is better to analyze power as a shared experience by numerous agents.

2.2. A Theoretical Framework

Before proceeding to the theoretical framework that fits into this particular research, it is important to note a key issue about Africa in general. Since, its politics, as many scholars believe (e.g. Shokri 2017) is so dynamic, filled with uncertainty and conflicts. Indeed through analyzing the work of several scholars (e.g. Mkandawire 1996, 2002; Zeleza 1997; Mamdani 1999), Olukosh (2004) also stated that, Africa as a continent has witnessed “some dramatic and significant developments on the continent's political terrain over the past few decades. Moreover, as they put it “these developments have been as varied as they have been contradictory. These developments have also constituted a major source of challenge to political theory as different schools of thought grapple with them in terms of their weight and meaning”. Then Olukosh further indicate it becomes unattainable to pose a particularly appropriate approach for Africa's political terrain to interpret the changes that are taking place in the structure, content, and dynamics of the continent's politics. Indeed, according to this scholar, efforts at conceptualizing the changes have produced a veritable “Tower of Babel”, with commentators not only speaking in different tongues but frequently past one another (Olukosh 2004:17).

Further, Shokri (2017) on the other hand try to address power both as a concept and as theory and write an article “What is Political Power? Theory of Political Consciousness and Integrated Concept of Power”, underlining a community without power is chaos. Chaos is not merely the absence of power says Shokri, but the absence of political power and political rights is merely the absence of order, mostly, the chaotic situations lead to the emergence of dictators and tyrants. Thus, according to him, then, power can be the cause of the subordinate experience, humiliation, and threat. On the other hand, power, identifies a group of people as one entity, e.g. nation, society, political community, and a state, under its umbrella while, it can also threaten the identity of some groups. He further noted that it gives security to the

political community or an institution to thrive and develop, and yet those who hold power or seek to do so, can be at odds with one another or the people whom they govern, and thus, pose a threat to their existence and others. In this sense, political power is among the most important issues as it is the most problematic one because balance is so difficult to achieve (Shokri 2017:2-3).

Political power, by that the various varieties of power relations seem, is that the basic and crucial part of the political order. What is more, political power is the primary issue for the establishment, identification, survival, and development of a state or a political institution. In line with this one can see ‘how the debates on the appropriate power relation are a contentious issue within the history of civilization’ (Ibid 2017:3).

2.2.1. Power Relation

Having discussed the nature of political power in Africa which could be a combative matter to fit into a particular theoretical framework, it is apt “Power Relation” is employed as a framework of this study. This theory is also essential to understand the power relation between regional and federal governments of Ethiopia, which shares power, task, and of course a resistance over certain issues. Indeed, among the numerous scholars who raised and dealt with the concept of power, Michel Foucault (1926-1984) has done a great deal of work and makes the power problem as his central thinking regarding the relations between society, individuals, groups, and institutions (Bălan 2010:37). In the words of Balan, “the fundamental idea emerging from all Foucault’s works is that the privileged place to look at the ability in action is that the relations between the individual and also the society, particularly its institutions.” Consequently, Foucault studies – in what he calls “the analysis of power” – how various institutions exert their power on groups and individuals, and how the latter affirm their own identity and resistance is to the consequences of power (Ibid).

Emphasizing on Foucault’s conception of power, Heizmann, and Olsson, (2015) in Brito et al. (2020:3) analyzed the conception of power as locus, fixture, and stabilization of an individual over the others is non-existential, yet proposes the notion or concept of ‘power as one thing fluid, disperse, relational and that contains not solely repressions however conjointly resistance to its action’.

While analyzing and understanding Foucault’s analysis of power relation, Gaventa (2003:3) certainly remind his readers or researchers to be careful in understanding Foucault. Since, he

is famous for “being difficult, dense or obscure”. Similarly, in the conceptualization of power relation, Balan (2010) further indicate that, Foucault’s (e.g. “Histoire de la sexualité” first volume) argues that the concept of power is not forever concerning oppression. Therefore—even in their most radical form – oppressive measures are not simply repression and censorship, however, they are additionally productive, inflicting new behaviors to emerge. (Which I have mentioned earlier those pull and push factors of power politics in African context resulting in new emerging behaviors, of course, are briefly analyzed in the following chapters) (Bălan 2010:38).

Usually, power is either termed as the capacity of an agent to impose his will over the will of the powerless, or the ability to force them to do things they do not wish to do. In this sense, power is implicit as possession, as something owned by those in power, said Balan. Here again, in Foucault's opinion, power something that can be owned, but rather “something that acts and manifests itself in a certain way; it is more a strategy than a possession: “power must be analyzed as something which circulates, or as something which only functions in the form of a chain. It is employed and exercised through a netlike organization . . . Individuals are the vehicles of power, not its points of application” (Ibid).

Similarly as Nickolas (2018) puts it, power needs to be termed as a productive network that runs through all social body, much more than as a negative instance, whose function is repression. Then, through cementing the above paragraph, James, Nickolas 2018, quoted Foucault’s argument about power.

[T]here are no relations of power without resistances; the latter are the more real and effective because they are formed right at the point where relations of power are exercised; resistance to power does not have to come from elsewhere to be real, nor is it inexorably frustrated through being the compatriot of power. It exists even more by being in the same place as power (2018:37).

In one in every of the foremost well-known quotes of Michel Foucault, he claims, “Where there is power, there is resistance”. This additionally means as Abu-Lughod observes, ‘where there is resistance, there is power’. According to Vinthagen and Johansson, still social science has been, preoccupied with exploring power as was Foucault, but has been largely isolated from an analysis of resistance (Foucault 1978:95-96, Abu-Lughod 1990:42, in Vinthagen and Johansson 2013:1-2).

Hence, despite the fact Foucault tried to associate power and resistance, he gave much emphasis on the power issue, and did not do much about resistance, yet, unlike many others, another important figure in anthropology Scott. J., on the other hand, is the one who tried to analyze resistance more than anybody else did; indeed, he has developed “Everyday resistance” as a theoretical concept, which he introduced in 1985 to cover a different kind of resistance (Scott 1985, 1989, 1990). According to Scott, ‘an Everyday resistance is quiet, dispersed, disguised or otherwise apparently invisible; something Scott interchangeably calls “infra-politics”’. He tried to show how certain common behavior of subaltern groups (for example, foot-dragging, escape, sarcasm, passivity, laziness, misunderstandings, disloyalty, slander, avoidance, or theft) is not always, what it seems to be, but instead resistance (Vinthagen and Johansson 2013:2-4).

Vinthagen and Johansson, further indicate that, the form of resistance depends on the form of power. Those who claim that “‘real resistance’ is organized, principled, and has revolutionary implications... overlook entirely the vital role of power relations in constraining forms of resistance” If we only care for “real resistance” then “all that is being measured may be the level of repression that structures the available options” (Scott 1989: 51 in Vinthagen and Johansson 2013:2-4).

Here what we particularly need to understand from the above theoretical approaches, which are also interrelated in many ways, is that resistance in any society is eminent because of power shift, a power or political power may shift from a certain party dominance to another. A simple example could be in the USA the democratic and republicans may bring policy changes even though the basic laws remaining intact. Resorting to our country Ethiopia the TPLF-EPRDF power dominance shifts to OPDO (OPP) led one. This brings about a wide ideological gap between the TPLF and the new coalition, Prosperity Party. Society as a result accepts the ideologies of these two power functions or completely rejects them, which in return brings the resistance of the rejected group. Therefore, now that the new power policies are gradually gripping power, and resulting in political and ideological divides that are coming into operation. Political groups nowadays, on the other hand, have their media to disseminate an ethnic group thought (ideology at large), a society then takes a collective outlook influences by these respective ideologies. The political parties or their respective ethnic groups may take the above-mentioned resistance a result of their new power structure.

2.2.2. State Theory

A strategic-relational perspective on the state-power nexus is another important theory employed in this study. In which Bob Jessop in Bollier (2016:8) stated that, the state should not be conceived as a unitary subject or as a thing that is capable of acting but should instead be conceptualized as a set of relations constituted through power.

Jessop in Bollier also states that:

States are not neutral terrains on which political forces struggle with equal chances to pursue their interests and objectives and with equal chances of realizing their goals whatever they might be. Instead, the organization of state apparatuses, state capacities, and state resources [...] favor some forces, some interests, some identities, some spatiotemporal horizons of action, some projects, more than others (Bollier 2016:8).

In this regard, “The idea of the state is important because it helps conceptually link the Weberian and Gramscian perspectives, said Jessop in Bollier (2016). This defines the nature and purposes of the state for the wider society and thereby involves both state institutions and social relationships and practices. The idea of the state helps clarify how the political class deliberately blends itself with civil society to establish “the state,” or how it establishes and protects its hegemony using the armor of coercion. Thus according to Jessop, it becomes clear that Gramsci does not truly attempt to define the state; he focuses on describing state powers and how they are exercised”. He indicates further that “it is clear from Jessop’s theoretical analysis, state power is a jealous, self-perpetuating force” (Ibid 10, 11, 12).

Hence, as this approach suggests up until recently in which the federal government took the law enforcement on TPLF, the party have exploited the regional state budget to finance regional election, while the mandate for conducting election goes for federal government. Not only this but also deliberately exploited regional media so as to deliver its agenda, and also enforce it “special force” through the public money. Hence it is crucial to understand some forces have exploited the state apparatus so as to deliver their purposes.

2.3. Empirical Literatures

2.3.1. Reform in Ethiopian Context

Since her experience in Ethiopian political terrain is good, I resort once again to Sarah Vaughan's conception of reform in the Ethiopian context. Thus, for Vaughan, the Ethiopian state draws on longstanding indigenous traditions of political and judicial administration in the central highlands, and civil service capacitation and reform date back a century. Given its extreme poverty in the past, she thinks Ethiopia is considered one of the more effective African states for local administration, service delivery, and security, although critics also point to problems of authoritarian governance (Vaughan 2013:430).

Due to the authoritarian governance nature, Yeshtila (2016) suggests that, historically the state-society relations in Ethiopia depiction have been as contention, contradiction, and domination. In this regard, the Ethiopian society contested the power and authority of the state through peasant rebellion in different provinces (Bale, Gojjam and Tigray), the Ethiopian student movement, the urban uprising that triggered the Ethiopian revolution in 1974, and the long civil war waged between the state and armed groups of EPLF, TPLF, OLF¹², and others. However, Yeshtila stated that the state has remained dominant and resilient, coping with resistance mainly by military and authoritarian means. Later on, with the overthrow of the Derge, the current regime has introduced ethnicity-based federalism as a way to deal with secessionist challenges, and it is claimed in the Ethiopian traditional context, state and government are not understood as separate concepts or entities (Yeshtila 2016:1-2).

After the overthrow of the Derge regime, the post-1991 political transformation can be classified under four broad phases: transition (1991–1997), consolidation (1998–2005), domination (2006–2010), and contestation (2011–present). State-Society relations unveil a new dynamic of the restructuring of state under ‘ethnic unitary system’ and entitling self and shared rights to various ethnic groups under the new ethnic-based federal state structure (Ibid 2016:16).

Focusing on post-1991 Ethiopia, the country has political parties that can be classified into three types, these are parties comprising the ruling party, the Ethiopian Peoples’ Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF); ethnically defined parties affiliated with the

¹² Oromo Liberation Front

EPRDF; and opposition political parties, which are either national or ethnically defined parties (Lie and Berouk 2018:13).

The following two scholars have written the basics to understand a given country's power relation (power shift) in context and could indeed explain the new trending power relation in the current political dynamics. Therefore, here I found it convincing to use the following argument without altering it much, or maybe not at all. Hence, according to Vaughan and Tronvoll (2003) 'the concentration of social power at certain points in this interaction (the fact that the elite 'wield power') remains a function of the whole group, and will shift as that group shifts'. Now, perhaps, we can advance our understanding of power a further step, both said. "Instead of imagining that the question of power is settled simply by deciding who 'has' it, one can instead pay more attention to the question of what kind of power is being exercised, how it is being exercised?, and how this is understood or perceived (known), and by whom?. From this point of departure, both noted that the state is neither the source of power nor simply the projection of the power of an interesting subject (a ruling group, for instance)" (Vaughan and Tronvoll 2003:5).

They further prompt that, rather than an entity 'holding' or 'exercising' power; it may be more fruitful to think of the state, political parties, and all other forms of organized associational social life, as instead forming points of relay or co-ordination and multiplication of power relations. Within this notion of 'bureaucratic state power,' the state as such is not an entity possessed of power (the jug metaphor as above) but a characteristic mode of exercise of power, a mode of power that is organized through state institutions, but which transcends them. On this view of state and power, it remains collectivities of people who influence and exercise power; and to illuminate this; thus here the analytical focus is on the relational and operational aspects of power, and the collective system (s) of knowledge which underpins them, they write (Ibid).

2.3.2. EPRDF's Formation and Phase out

TPLF's intention to stay in Ethiopia and take a leading role in the future government of the country signaled in the resolutions of the second TPLF organizational congress held in 1983. Of course, this decision had an intense disagreement among the party members and later it forces Aregawi Berhe and others to the sideline. In 1989, the call was for a "united democratic front". Such a front already formed with the Ethiopian people's democratic

movement (EPDM) that year. This party had risen from the ruins of the Ethiopian People Revolutionary Party (EPRP) that had disintegrated under attack by the TPLF in 1978, later on, they come to terms with TPLF and aligned with the EPDM. In the final offensive against the Derge in 1989-90, the EPDM fought alongside TPLF and having changed its name to the Amhara National Democratic Movement (ANDM) took control of the Amhara region in 1991. The union of these two movements named EPRDF. Later on, the Oromo Peoples Democratic Organization (OPDO) formed through those TPLF prisoners who proved amenable to political education and willing to join an ethnic party (Markakis 1990, 2012:302-311).

The aligned group that formed the EPRDF then changed its tactics from a guerrilla fight to a conventional offensive. Henceforward, with the new strategy in May 1991 the EPRDF forces bore down on Addis Ababa. Mengistu Hailemariam fled the country to exile in Zimbabwe, due to this, his army halts down its armament. Although, his exile left a vacuum and the insurgent group faced no resistance in the capital Addis Ababa, yet EPRDF moved swiftly to fill in. Hereafter, the first approach the party followed is to call out all ethnic groups to the planned conference in July to form a coalition. Yet radical left EPRP and MEISON were not invited. Of course, before everything else, EPRDF, EPLF, and OLF leaders had a meeting in London in May 1991 and agreed on the draft of a transitional charter before the national dialogue in the capital Addis Ababa. Later on, during the July conference in Addis Ababa, the EPLF made a clear notice that its only option was independence. During this time, the EPRDF and OLF commanded a comfortable majority in the meeting, which left little space for the rest of the participants (Ibid).

Afterward, the umbrella coalition organization of Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) becomes a composition of four major ethnic-based (except SEPDM) political organizations and five other affiliated ethnic-based parties up until 2018. Of course, by the time EPRDF's leader Meles Zenawi passed the fragmentation of EPRDF also followed. Since then the four parties that make up EPRDF have not been able to agree on how to share power. The latter groups (support organization) that were marginalized, by design and with party regulations, and did not have the power to decide on national matters or to hold the highest office in the country also showed their frustration for the EPRDF leadership. Indeed, 'the EPRDF leadership previously argued that these largely pastoral regions lacked the agrarian class structure that revolutionary democracy presupposed'. The

new party, Prosperity Party, is organized in a way to end what many members call, rightly, injustice in that regard.¹³

In November 2018, PM Abiy proposed merging the four-party Ethiopian People's Revolution Democratic Front (EPRDF) and the support organizations into one party. However, TPLF, a party that engineered and dominated the party now a phased out coalition, declined to join the new party. Instead of abandoning their Marxist-Leninist roots, the group's leaders tried to fuse revolutionary principles and class politics with capitalism and liberal democracy. The EPRDF's successor party — the Prosperity Party — is a radical departure from the past, in terms of ideology (i.e. developmental state and capitalism or liberalism respectively) and membership base. For instance, unlike the TPLF-EPRDF, these political organizations; Afar National Democratic Party (ANDP), Benishangul Gumuz Democratic Party (BDP), Oromo Democratic Party (ODP), Amhara Democratic Party (ADP), Southern Ethiopian Peoples' Democratic Movement (SEPDM), Somali Democratic Party Gambela Peoples Democratic Movement (GPDM), Harari National League (HNL), have equal say to their party- Prosperity Party and got equal power on the national matters¹⁴.

¹³[TESFANEWS](https://www.tesfanews.net/eprdf-merge-prosperity-party-officially-formed-ethiopia/) (2019) <https://www.tesfanews.net/eprdf-merge-prosperity-party-officially-formed-ethiopia/> (accessed on, 12/1/2020).

¹⁴Goitom Gebreluel (2019).

2.3.3. Triggering Factors/ Driving Forces of Reform

2.3.3.1. Popular Protest

The wave of political unrest sweeping across Africa makes it tempting to believe that politics in Africa has changed so fundamentally that a reversion to military or authoritarian rule by a large number of countries is simply unthinkable, especially when the rest of the world is also moving towards greater political liberalization (Bienen and Herbst 1996:26). Yet, if one has to see particularly African political dynamics and try to see reform and African governments it is no surprise that most African governments introduce political reforms primarily in response to active demands, spontaneous and organized, from a loose, multiclass assemblage of indigenous protest groups. Explanation of reform outcomes requires reference to the resources, skills, and styles of leaders and their oppositions. Protest and reform occur in a dynamic, reiterative process of action and counteraction in which strategic actors take their cues from the behavior of adversaries. Indeed, these two sets of events are difficult to separate analytically (Bratton and De Walle 1992: 420).

As the above-mentioned scholars have put it, reform outcomes depend also on the strength of protest forces, the critical issue being whether opposition groups can forge an alternative ruling coalition. Nonetheless, the onset of political reforms at some time during 1990 or 1991, and usually after protest demands became politicized, a substantial number of African heads of state bowed to popular pressure and embarked upon a course of political liberalization (Ibid:421,425).

As mentioned earlier about the protest that forced former PM Hailemariam Dessalegn to resign, it is very much important to look into the cause of it. For instance, since the end of 2015, tens of thousands have been protesting against the compulsory purchase of land set aside for expanding the capital, Addis Ababa. According to Webber (2018), more than 700 people were killed in the subsequent crackdown and 23,000 arrested. The state of emergency imposed at the time shattered the relationship between the government and the people. A movement called “Qeerroo Bilisummaa Oromo” (Oromo Youth Movement) became a symbol of protests. Strikes were sometimes controlled via social media, including through bloggers in the diaspora.

Therefore, the government had no adequate response to the protests and tried to reassure people by consulting selected opposition parties. When this had little effect and the protests

rekindled, before ousted personally Prime Minister Hailemariam has ordered the release of several political prisoners. Which he later announced his resignation, intending to broaden the political space or as he puts it “room for political change”. However, ethnic conflicts, primarily over land, continue and more than one million people have been displaced so far (Webber 2018: 1-2). Here it must be clear that conflict resulted in displacement has exceeded more than one million marks, even after PM Abiy Ahmad came to power.

2.3.4. Institutional Reforms

“In any democratic country, a decision to launch or continue major reforms requires sufficient public support. Emphasizing the importance of political constraints in adopting and carrying out a reform program, Drazen (2000:624) claims that the political problem in transition is that for a program of reform and transition to succeed, it must have the necessary political support at crucial decision stages. Given high uncertainty regarding the success of reform and a newly created democracy, one can argue that political constraints play an extremely important role in policymaking in transition countries” (Kim and Pirttila 2003: 5-6).

2.3.4.1. Media Plurality/Freedom to what end?

It is important to note that although the media is not the place where the public sphere resides, it is not the public sphere per se, but it is a vehicle through which such a space can be created. According to Willems (2011), the liberal-pluralist perspective of media–state relation, views the mass media system as playing an intermediary or the fifth estate role between the state and citizens. According to him, this is because of the media act as a discursive space and a conduit through which both the “input” and the “output” of the political system delivered (Willems 2011 in Azeb 2019:23). This scholar further stated that, as a constitutive element of the civil society, the media is important in carrying information that enables citizens to make informed political choices as well as influencing the decisions of the state. The public appears simply as that sector of public opinion that opposed to the authorities. The state organs and the media that provide the communication considered as public organs (Azeb 2019:21).

The media, particularly free media, is characterized by its “being more participative, more oriented toward the popular, more event centered and timely, and more objective and less partisan”. Therefore, the media, as the means to political deliberation, should become a

public forum and geared towards performing these salient functions by providing accurate information (Grossberg et al. 1998:324-25 in Nigussie 2014:75-76).

Also, Nigussie (2014) have analyzed and assessed (Sussman's and Karlekar's 2002) work based on the Freedom House survey of media freedom, further indicate that while 75 countries had media systems that could be classified as free, 50 had partly free media, and 61 were not free. Whereby, 111 countries still have media systems that are partly either free or not free (Sussman and Karlekar, 2002). This survey indicates that the degree of press freedom does vary depending on the nature of political systems. A World Press Survey conducted in 1999 by Freedom House (or Sussman) reported that in many regions of the world unprofessional journalists and partisan control of the media hampered press freedom. In these countries, media are firmly monitored and controlled through overt and covert means by political or government forces (Nigussie 2014:77).

Indeed, it is important to take into account free media and free media systems are carriers of democracy, yet, is uncontroversial statement. Ask virtually anyone on the street said Färdigh about the importance of media for a democratic society and he claims no doubt that most-people would respond with the common perception that, free media is a prerequisite for an open society. He thinks the freer the media, the greater the transparency, the more informed and involved the citizens, the more responsiveness, accountability, and by its extension, the more democracy, the less corruption and abuse of power, and higher "quality of government" (Färdigh 2013:1).

The main argument for the importance of media freedom, on the other hand, is the "watchdog" role of the news media and free media as a disseminator of information that may serve to empower the citizens. By highlighting policy failures, corruption in the judiciary, exposing maladministration by public officials and scandals in the corporate sector, the news media possess this watchdog role. Thus, the media as a fourth estate can function to promote government transparency, accountability, and public scrutiny of that in power (Norris 2008:68). Besides, Färdigh (2013) have analyzed and assessed Norris (2008) work that takes a systematic look at the evidence that media freedom and more liberal media landscapes strengthen democracy, human development, and "good governance" and concludes that free media can be considered as one of the classic checks and balances in the division of powers (Norris 2008 in Färdigh 2013:1- 2).

Having discussed what a free media role should or could look like it is important to assess the features of Ethiopian media. Therefore, Stremalu (2014) particularly sees the media's role in present-day Ethiopia especially since 1991, he believes the approach to media policy that the then EPRDF /PP adopted when it first came to power allowed private newspapers to flourish. Indeed, this led to the press quickly to become a forum for elite negotiation and debates on the constitution. Opposition parties and elements of the previous regime that were defeated were particularly active in that space. While in some post-conflict countries the press may serve as a space for controlled non-violent political conflict, or the peaceful negotiation of core political ideas, in Ethiopia, Stremalu (2014) believes the press largely failed to adopt this role (Stremalu 2014:232). He also added that in theory, a liberalized media is supposed to allow opponent voices to express grievances and could provide a forum for negotiation and debate. However, the Ethiopian press did not come to function in that way. One reason was that the press from the outset has become polarized (Stremalu 2014:241).

Through analyzing, the works of (Osterhammel 2009; Tripp 2006 and Gran 1980, 1996) Richter and Gräf stated that, to understand media concerning political and economic activities in one region, it is very much important to understand that also these activities intertwined with other regions on the globe since the nineteenth century. The transition to capitalism has taken place almost everywhere on the planet since then. Therefore, it is still worth investigating the distinct relationships between the ruler and the ruled, between owners and peoples without possessions and between people with access to media and those without, in short, the 'ruler-ruled relationships' in any given environment (Richter and Gräf 2015:29).

2.3.4.2. Electoral Reform

As Leyenaar and Haza (2011) claimed, political scientists are the ones who fall for the utopia of political reforms, this is due to the fact "that both logically and rationally, electoral reform should not occur because those who are in power – and thus are in the position to change the electoral system – obtained their positions through the existing system". For these scholars, the current system is not only a winning arrangement it also creates stakes. Nonetheless, electoral reform does occur, and one can argue that based on how it is defined, it happens quite often (Leyenaar and Hazan 2011:437).

What exactly counts as an electoral reform? Said Katz (2005: 58) first showing his doubt about where to find the clear-cut definition about electoral reforms, According to him, 'very

few articles or books can define it in a given way'. In addition, argued, "Despite being 'crude', the most commonly used definition is that electoral reform is about a 'wholesale replacement of the electoral formulae of national electoral systems'". He later quoted Lijphart's (1994) definition and analyzed that Lijphart's definition is centered on the degree of proportionality and defines significant reforms as any changes that involve the electoral formula or any change of at least 20 percent in district magnitude, legal threshold or assembly size (Ibid: 440-441).

Then when we particularly assess Ethiopian politics, which could, of course, result in a huge impact on these particular institutions, it is fair to say as one of the vaunted 'third wave democracies'; the Ethiopian democratic transition is very protracted to grasp. Indeed, since 1991 the country's democracy falls in between old authoritarianism and robust democracy, 'with its checks and balances', on the other (Greenidge 2010: 221).

The country has witnessed a significant political institution building and that a public ethos of democracy emerged. But the post-1991 process used to be closely controlled by the ruling Tigray People's Liberation Front–Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (TPLF–EPRDF) until 2018, and as Abbink believes it has a high ingredient of rhetoric not backed by practice. In conditions of political insecurity and contested legitimacy, a network of political and economic control was built up by this party from its circle of trusted people, loyalists, and former comrades in the armed struggle (Abbink 2006:174).

Despite the fact, a whole group of scholars has dealt with almost all the elections that Ethiopia had since 1991 (E.g. Greenidge 2010) particularly tried to look into the three elections Ethiopia had, which are 1995, 2000, 2005. Of course, he situates his forecast for the 2010 election, which could be regarded as, largely uncontested; the one that marked a watershed in the growth of organized political opposition and an election represented a substantial change, respectively. Yet, political power remains in the hand of the ruling party EPRDF now PP.

2.3.5. Political Terrain

2.3.5.1. Political Space/ Political Arena

After addressing media in the above subtopic, it is very much important to give a glance at the political space for political organizations, elites; and anyone who has an interest in a particular country's politics in general and Ethiopian politics in particular. Because it is important to note one way of broadening the political space could be through media freedom. In an attempt to show the interrelatedness between these two, (Stremlau 2014:32) point out that the press is the central forum for the elite to express their significant reservations about the constitution and it provided space for opposition parties to project alternative visions of Ethiopia. In theory, a liberalized media is supposed to allow opponent voices to express grievances and could provide forum for negotiation and debate. However, in Stremlau's opinion, the Ethiopian press did not come to function in that way. One reason he claimed is that the press was polarized from the outset (Stremlau 2014:241).

According to Olukosh (2004), much of the attention, which has been focused on political change in Africa, has been concentrated on the formal institutions and procedures of politics because these are both more visible and measurable. However, as is the case with politics elsewhere in the world, important as institutions and procedures are, they in and of themselves do not tell the whole story. For this reason, attention must be given also to the processes that underpin and mold/remold formal institutions and procedures, including especially the actors whose actions and inactions give life to the political system. This can be done without a resort, as Chabal and Daloz (1999) said. On the other hand the stereotyping of African politics almost as a domain of 'abracadabra' where the more one sees, the more one gets mystified (Olukosh 2004:18).

The changes, which have taken place in the African political landscape over the last decade and a half, have been multidimensional. They have occurred as much at the level of formal politics as in the arena of the informal processes that underpin the political system. They have also been generated by factors internal to the political system and those external to it, necessitating close attention to the contexts within which the changes are occurring. Furthermore, while domestic, local, and national-level considerations are critical to the definition of the process of change, external factors and international actors also continue to play an important, even, at some conjunctures, determinant role in shaping outcomes (Ibid).

2.3.6. How Perception can be Constructed and Shaped?

As evidence to this particular topic, Xiao et al. (2016:294-298) who is cited in an article called Context, Perception, and Intergroup Relations by Enos. D (2016) he along with his compatriots, recognize and said that “perception can be socially constructed”, the effect of identity on perception and the influence of that perception on our behavior will vary by social and institutional context”. In a larger project, I explore the myriad of group-based behaviors that, through this perceptual link, are affected by geographic space. For example, when segregation, out-group size, and proximity increase, so do ethnically based voting and negative intergroup attitudes, whereas intergroup trust, generosity, and support for redistribution all decline, he writes. Enos (2016) further indicate that, through specifying how perception may play a role in intergroup behaviors that are temporally or spatially distant from the act of perceiving, he thinks, one may better understand the influence of perception on intergroup relations—the part of the model that Xiao et al. see as the less researched. Doing so may also help us to explain a persistent difficulty in the study of context and intergroup voting behavior, often expressed in voting for candidates perceived as favoring their group (Enos D. 2016:295-296).

In addition to the above arguments, Conover (1984) discussed that in its infancy the study of political behavior was characterized by a strong focus on the group nature of politics. Nevertheless, this perspective was to be relatively short-lived. Gradually, the focus of most research shifted from people's group memberships to their political attitudes and psychological predisposition. Having the American politics in mind she pointed out that, yet, increasingly, the inescapable conclusion of such research has been that relatively few Americans think "ideologically" in the sense that they order their political beliefs according to certain basic ideological principles. Thus, as Kinder (1982) quoted in Conover (1984) has pointed out, the key question is no longer "do people think ideologically?" but rather simply, "how do people think about politics?" writes Conover. In addressing this question, one approach is to return to "basics," to go back to those ideas that originally fueled research on political behavior. Moreover, one of the more appealing of those is the notion that people's ties to various groups help to structure their political thinking (Conover 1984:760-761).

Conover further indicated, basically because people are objective members of a group, it is often assumed that they must also have some sort of psychological tie to that group (Miller et al., 1978). Nevertheless, in many instances where objective group membership may not have

a very significant impact on political perception and attitudes, identification with the same group could affect. Thus, one relatively easy step toward a better understanding of the political significance of group identifications is to distinguish the notion of identification from that of both group membership and group consciousness, and concurrently to focus more on those processes - such as perception - that group identifications are most likely to influence (Conover 1984:762). In an attempt to show the influence of group identification, Conover (1984:778) making American politics into context further indicate that, the nature of the political environment -what is focused on and deemed important by politicians, parties, and the media -appears to leave an imprint on political perceptions. Therefore, people seem to respond to the political world in those terms in which it is presented to them.

Contrary to the ideas of political consciousness or group identifications, people's perception towards a political discussion about political participation could be in effect through social ties, thus, it is important to differentiate between strong and weak ties. Strong tie discussions are those discussions among family and close friends, which are characterized by intimacy, trust, respect, access, and mutual regard, (which could of course have a huge impact in a given country's political terrain, and could have a huge impact in this particular research to be honest. So, with whom to discuss a particular issue depends on that particular 'ties') (Kenny 1994 in Zinuga and Valenzuela 2010 in Azeb 2019:20).

Chapter Three: Data Presentation and Analysis

3.1. The Nature and Inception of Ethiopian Reform

The inception of Ethiopian political reform in 2018 resulted out of internal and external, covert and overt pressures to the then EPRDF. To tackle these internal power struggles within the party and external demonstrations and gripes, the then EPRDP now PP had a series of ‘high-stakes meetings, which acknowledges the deep-rooted leadership problems. Yet, the party was divided into ways of handling the ‘public pressure and ethnic disharmony, which have resulted later in a power struggle within the vanguard party EPRDF. “The heightened jostling for control of the party’s policy direction has brought to the fore long-suppressed questions of inequity in the EPRDF” (Ademo 2018).

Alongside the external pressure the phased out EPRDF leadership faced, as stated earlier in the first chapter, the age status quo has also a crucial weight in disrupting the wellbeing of the party. This connotation has not only existed within the EPRDF but also TPLF; for instance, after the death of Melese Zenawi TPLF have also divided into two groups between those who reside in Mekele and Addis Ababa, these groups contested the senior members of the TPLF, while the old leadership felt a disrespect by their compatriots (Brehane 2019). Indeed, within such pull and push TPLF’ supremacy until 2018 continued, also through imposing a state of emergency the army and police used as weapons of repression. Yet through internally challenging such supremacy and OPDO’s demand and quest for its share of power, the 2018 political reform or transition has paved its way for new power structure throughout the country; that is Prosperity Party currently so.

The introduction of this party and TPLF’s decisions from merging into a one party system has intensified the relationship the two have, hence except for TPLF the three founding members of the EPRDF and its affiliate regional political parties have merged to form the PP, replacing the coalition as the ruling party. Indeed, the TPLF, which strongly opposed the move, announced it has decided against joining the party; in a statement the party released on January 5/2020. TPLF claimed it is due to differences in view and direction between the PP and TPLF (Ethiopian Monitor 2020).¹⁵ However others argue that since the emerging new power relation, TPLF could not achieve its political and economic interest as it used to

¹⁵ EPRDF phase out and the interaction between EPRDF and PP is further discussed later on

manipulate during its heightened days, that is systematical favoring some forces of its own and deliberately bankrupting some companies, therefore the claim ‘difference in view and direction’ do not have much weight. Hence, such disconformity within party for quest to power has always created a vacuum in Ethiopia, as failure to control the political and economic arena have resulted a deliberate political turmoil, as those forces in which have lost their manipulative mechanism brought in their challenge into the country’s political scene.

3.2. Understanding Pre and Post-EPRDF Political Scenarios: An Overview

To understand the nature of Ethiopian politics in general and attempts to reform the country's polity in particular what the following two informants from both settings observed and analyzed are a worthwhile starting point for this discussion.

To begin with, one of my key informants¹⁶ in Addis Ababa said that the last four decades in which the different political parties participated in like the EPRP, ‘መኢሰን’¹⁷, EPSM and many ethnic affiliated parties like the TPLF, OLF can be considered or taken as progressive by some groups. Yet others contend and consider it as a retrogressive or probably as a destructive one. Out of these, the EPLF¹⁸ and TPLF (1991) came out successful out of the protracted civil war in Ethiopia. However, out and out from the beginning bringing such destructive revolution could have had been avoided had there been dialogue among the political parties. Indeed, foreign interest and support to then rebel groups such as TPLF, and internal ambush with the then parties such as EPRP which laid its attacks against Derge members, have all contributed greatly for a failed dialogue. Due to these and other factors the Derge could not sit around a table with the EPRP and EPSM to bring a solution to the then political ammunition, as a result remain behind in achieving the desired unity. Consequently, due to this inconvenience, the Derge and the TPLF led EPRDF, which were taken, as prime movers for the change per se could not bring the democratic change in Ethiopia as expected.

Besides, in an attempt to explain the Ethiopian political culture that evolves through the past decades; my key informant also stated that now it seems that the people in Ethiopia have long

¹⁶ The discussion with Key informant Samson in Addis Ababa; Yeka sub city: Megenagna took place several times; from December 2019 up to March 10/2020 and also on January 3/2021

¹⁷ ‘መላ ኢትዮጵያ ሰሻሊስት ንቅናቄ (All Ethiopian Socialist Movement)

¹⁸ Eritrean People Liberation Front

lived in ethnic politics, the regional states have become a hot spot of this ethnic politics. While these ethnic politics were taken as a tradition and as a norm, the then EPRDF and now PP took a different turn. The change and reform took shape from inside and outside pressure in response to active demands, (Bratton and De Walle 1992) toward the democratization of the country.

On the other hand, an informant¹⁹ from Mekele has also tried to assess and explain Ethiopian politics since the 1960s and fundamentally focusing on the post-1991 political change, this informant noted that, the 1991 political change emerged through the blood and bones of Ethiopian people. He disagrees with 'the intention to create Ethiopia as an object', i.e. without respecting peoples belief system, and their ethnicity. Similarly, according to this informant Ethiopians in the past had resisted the state power and authorities through peasant rebellion in different parts of Ethiopia; Bale, Gojjam and Tigray yet could not bring the expected outcome like the 1991, indeed, these struggles were class struggles instead of ethnic ones like the 1991 (Yeshtila 2016). He further indicated that, as a group who holds the upper hand in terms of armament, he stressed TPLF from the outset doesn't claim political power to itself rather through 'coalition' it disseminates to various ethnically based parties.

Apart from the recognition from the above informants about how Ethiopian politics evolve through the years through focusing on the post EPRDF, the empirical data from the study on the other considers the 2018 political reform as glamorous. Further, they indicate that 'whether one calls it since Abiy came to power or EPRDF's deep renewal (Tilk Tehadeso), their beginnings was considered promising for potentially awakening the country's polity. Hence, the post-2018 arrangements made, political openness (Salameh et al. 2018), and the decisions passed by the current government gave informants hope and consider it as a political resource for the democratization process in Ethiopia.

Although the post-EPRDF, political scenarios have brought a divided understanding among informants' (shaped by the PP and TPLF's ideology) from the two study areas; nevertheless, the empirical data from these settings had also shown a similar thought and understanding over certain issues. To mention some of them; releasing political prisoners, welcoming party elites from exile (Samuel et al. 2018), border opening with Eritrea, calling out the diaspora to

¹⁹ Interview with Tesfalem took place in Mekele around Hawelti on February 24/2020,

engage in Ethiopia's development and aspirational speeches applied by PM Abiy Ahmed are some of the widely mentioned and important decisions delivered by the current government.

Among the above-mentioned achievements, an important, dramatic, and significant development (Olukosh 2004) registered by the current leadership is the aspirational speeches delivered at the early stages of the 2018 political reform. Which almost all informants consider these speeches as a root cause for political initiation, desire, and preaches unity to bring the country and people together. In fact, during the course of the interview and discussion, the study has observed that, the Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed discourse have brought informants' attention to the country's political terrains. Due to this, both Mekele and Addis Ababa informants have given credit to PM Abiy for the initiative and bold decisions he has passed.

Nonetheless, from its inception, two informants from both settings have mentioned and raised their concern over the discourses delivered by the current leadership, not because they were wrong but due to the ambitious nature of it. For instance, an informant²⁰ from Mekele who had the privilege to attend the PM's visit and discussion in Tigray regional state has argued with people over the speech the PM delivers since its inception. In addition, calls one particular incident in which the PM praises the Tigray region as 'Ethiopian engine'. Moreover, he emphasized that such appreciation could signal a wrong impression to other regions and might think of themselves as if they are inferior to others and could bring a backfire later on.

Additionally, a key informant²¹ from Addis Ababa indicated particular decisions made by the reform. Discussing that a lot has changed ever since the 2018 Ethiopian political reform, where many politicians have the chance to function and operate within the country's political terrain. Indeed, this informant has exclusively applause for the closing down of the Prison named 'Maekelawi'. In which the informant considers during TPLF supremacy, it used to be a place where political prisoners used to experience humiliation, torture and physical abuse'. Therefore, according to this key informant, even though it is not up to the level and extent a human right asks, recently (since 2018) people are having a breath of fresh air in propagating their political beliefs or attitude.

²⁰ Interview with Teklemariam, took place on February 22/2020; Mekele.

²¹ Interview and discussion with Abduro, December 10/2019; We also mate three times in Addis Ababa from March 17/2020 up to April 13/2020.

Hence, one can say that here in Ethiopia, especially since 2018 the whole system seems to be changed and reformed mainly the ideological framework which was ‘ethnically polarized’. So, the new leadership or simply PP may get dominated by this or that ethnic group but its very name change has brought about some fresh air in the political stagnation. Although, the discourse applied by PM Abiy brought people's attention and got staggering support throughout the country, yet few critically assess politician's discourses that end up being very ambitious. Thus, while the unitary speeches are and could be an attempt to show the epic history of a certain society, however, such arguments are applied as a source for disconformities within the contentious nature (Gebru 1996) of Ethiopian politics. Therefore, one can say that with all the positive outcomes, 'Ethiopian democratic transition is a very protracted to grasp' (Greenidge 2010).

3.3. Ethiopian Reform since 2018: Achievements and Challenges

My first-day arrival in Mekele is not packed by observation only. Indeed on the night of my arrival a close relative of the host family, a young guy with a good sense of humor named Hagos who later has become my key informant came from the eve ceremony of 18th of February 2020, 'Yekatit 11' (19th of February). After a while, he started joking, which led for an informal discussion on several issues that helps me to triangulate on how informants in Mekele analyze the reform.

Therefore, since PM Abiy's coming to power the 'region' had to witness major infrastructure development, in which the PM ascension to the office directly led an impact on the “regional power TPLF” to focus on some development works; especially the road construction, and housing project that is taking place in the city. Therefore, past political constraints and emerging power relation within the country have ushered a new form of transition to happen (Kim and Pirttila 2003).

According to this key informant, Abiy's ascension to the office greatly attributed in changing and also shaping the relation informants had with the TPLF. Due to this, Mekele youths no longer have the patience for the corrupted and stagnant old governing strategies of the party. Moreover, thanks to the youths in Mekele TPLF had its chance in the region, yet could not last long as a result of the law enforcement operation on TPLF ‘due to the atrocities it committed in the northern command Ethiopian army’. Furthermore, after its departure from the federal polity, Mekele youths felt that they are the ones that pulled TPLF from its mud

and gave it a second chance knowing all its atrocities. Thus such gestures made show a trending power relation of the youths. Besides this, one experience we formally discussed and he personally encountered a week before 19th of February 2020, around a nightclub could cement the new trending power relation youths has with TPLF...

While I was passing through nightclubs that are not far from Axum hotel; Mekele, a group of young men were ramping one of the famous clubs, breaking the windows, it was due forbidden from entry to the club "they" have been- customers for so long. This was only because one member of the central committee and his compatriots for TPLF were there. As a result, the youths were chanting "we don't care whoever is inside but like to enter the club" where they have been customers for long enough, claim it as their right, question the hospitality of the management, and would not tolerate such acts of TPLF highest officials anymore.

Therefore, here one important concept one needs to understand from my key informant and some other informants in Mekele is that now the power relation that used to be asymmetrical is changing, through the one who thinks and says if it was not for them the leadership of the governing body could have been in great danger throughout the region. As a result, now decisions made without the consent of society could not take one long.²² In this regard, one can observe that the decisions by the 'TPLF' could not get a public support as it failed to mobilize Tigray people to its war project. Alongside this one can observe that people are nowadays resistant to such hostile TPLF strategies, and its evident have less interest in becoming weapons for the destructions. Thus, asymmetrical power relation is no longer existential in Mekele, because power perpetually evolves (Shokri 2017) as many Mekele informants describe and they feel politically empowered.

Having discussed what the post-EPRDF political scenario brought about in Mekele from the above key informant, the following two informants²³, both of them residents of Addis Ababa have been also looking at the reform with a positive attitude. Of course, the first with a slight

²² Despite the new trending power relation between federal and regional governments, the study also observed it also exists within a particular system, which is between TPLF and Mekele youths. Indeed, through such resistance to the old way of leadership informants in Mekele expects changes from top to bottom.

²³ Interview with Emanuel and Henock on April 3/2020 and March 27/2020 respectively: in Addis Ababa.

of the doubt for potential political 'corruptors' like the 1960s and 1970s; in which some other informants similarly share their concern, while the other enthusiastically liking the reform for its nature and valor. Indeed, in support of the reform these informants have also stated that, they have marched for two great causes of the 2018 political reform. The first one is out of optimism that the reform could lead to political democratization or simply just looking for a change in the political sphere. The second is due to its potential for awakening the 'political culture' of the Ethiopian people. Besides this, a female informant has also admires the attempts made to bring unity among Ethiopian people especially since 2018.²⁴

Alongside the widely mentioned positive development of the current leadership, informants from both settings have also discussed various challenges. To begin with, security concerns caused by ethnic-based conflicts, and that resulted in internal displacements throughout the country have become one major challenge for people to travel, work in any part of the country. Due to this and other reasons, individuals then have become victims just because they belong to a certain ethnic identity²⁵. Similarly, an informant²⁶ in Addis Ababa who studied at Welliso University during the popular protest had also discussed and raised a significant concern the reform brought in. Thus, despite the security concerns, he indicated that the failures of keeping political promises that brought a certain group at the forefront of political power are widely observed and unappreciated.

One need to observe and analyze from the above discussion is that such bold decisions are not new for Ethiopian political terrain (Samuel et al. 2019) as both TPLF led EPRDF and now PP have presented opportunities that could enhance the democratization process. However, one potentially positive attribute or achievement that separates the current leadership from the past ones is, with all the consequences people's opinion seems to be compromised and entertained.

Hence, it seems to fixing or hoping the reform for its fruits and doubting the possible failure of repeating the past reform changes are also among some of the things analyzed by the above-mentioned discussions. For instance, the Derge took political leadership and could not bring about the expected democratic rule. The EPRDF also took control of power by armed

²⁴ Interviews with Aster and Fasika, on January 12/2019 and March 2020.

²⁵ Interview with Yitebarek, Teacher took place on February 21/2020; Mekele.

²⁶ Interview with Israel took place on February 10/2020 and November 15/2019.

struggle, even though it could not bring the democratic change as expected and simply as scholars (Abbink 2006), describe (EPRDF) as with a high ingredient of rhetoric not backed by practice. Therefore with all the positive attitude informant had and attributes the 2018 reform brought, and also due to the similar decisions made by both the TPLF led EPRDF and PP, informants fear these acts can be taken as the reputation of the old pattern and to some extent can be potentially considered as historical synonymous.

3.4. Institutional Reform; Media, Political Space, and Electoral Board

3.4.1. Media in Today's Ethiopia

Ethiopian media have become one grand arena for politicians to echo their thoughts and ideas. Due to the growing number of mass media and with the growing number of mobile phones and access to the internet, information has become porous resulting in fertile ground for both evil and good thoughts. Nowadays information travels faster than any other thing on the planet of ours. This technology development has given people the power to act as independent media agents and brought a challenge in separating the fake from the real. Therefore, to reduce misleading information and negative impacts of social media, according to many informants information from mainstream media should reach people faster than fake news. Yet, as an informant²⁷ noted the concept of the right-information should be under scrutiny. Indeed, paying attention to social media as one of the media sectors is essential for addressing fact-based news outlets. Therefore, giving attention to this technology-driven gadget as much as the mainstream media gets could be a solution to avoid fake news.

The Ethiopian media boom in terms of quantity and variety especially since 2018, the current leadership has made various decisions that played their part in having a 'diversified' media outlet. Among the decisions, incorporating foreign-based media channels owned by Ethiopians, and giving license to various media channels are widely observed. Hence, the decisions passed by the prosperity party's leadership were considered as an important step or development towards media freedom. According to an informant²⁸, the reform has different scores regarding media freedom. For instance, Private media are now exercising their

²⁷ Interview with Awote took place on February 27/2020 in Mekele.

²⁸ Interview with Luel in Addis Ababa through social media on November 21/2020

freedom of expression; relatively they are now giving coverage for any political point of view, journalists are now doing their job without intimidation except few cases.

In fact, as scholars (Stremlau 2014) proposed, liberalized media thought to allow opponent voices to express grievances and could provide forum for negotiation and debate. However, according to the above informant, public media organizations are not touched by the reform, they are going the old way usually by propagating regional and federal based party's interests. 'Remain behind in entertaining opposition views'. For instance, when it comes to TPLF, Prosperity Party has used federal based public media to deconstruct TPLF's ideology, reputation and atrocities, whereas PP extensively deconstructed by TPLF up until it abolished TPLF. Hence, both of these have exploited their respective public media to the highest stake.

The growing numbers of media channels were not considered as an opportunity to the Ethiopian people, yet as informants from Mekele noted it comes with its difficulties. The fact that Ethiopia since 1991 as a state has fallen under ethnic unitary system, as a result ethnic-based thought usually shapes their outlet in various forms. Since they more or less get finance from their respective regional and federal governments, it also laid an impact on the flow and transparency of the opinions that come from these areas. Ethiopia has had a centralized media during TPLF supremacy, through its ethnic unitary systems the TPLF have looted Ethiopia, exploited and abused the flow of idea and largely disseminates political agendas so that it can extend its legitimacy with no mandate the party had whatsoever, that is through deliberately creating a vacuum within the Ethiopian people.

According to many Addis Ababa informants²⁹, during the TPLF leadership, there were government public media channels that function within the country, especially televised ones, yet the space was closed for private and critics media. Whereas, since 2018, Ethiopia currently owned many privately channels. Unlike the privately owned conventional media channels though, for informants in Addis Ababa, Henock³⁰ particularly expects public mainstream media to be transparent, because they are financed through the public money. Furthermore, for some Addis Ababa informants, the old way of using, public media for

²⁹ Fasika, Luel, Addis, and Henock

³⁰ Interview on March27/2020

political agenda in deteriorate way results a blurry image and it remained behind in playing its fourth state role³¹.

For that reason, unlike the past leadership nowadays these different conventional channels that hold great importance for freedom of speech have viable and visible improvement. The finding from the empirical data shows that only quantity by itself could not also be a guarantee for a transparent and accountable media. Because similar to the past leadership nowadays both regional and federal based public media remains behind in becoming a public voice. Still, they are not full-fledged media that function under a certain code of law. Therefore, in this case, both Mekele and Addis Ababa-based public media remain behind society's expectations, because both of these fall for the agendas of TPLF and PP respectively. As to my observation, they could not also get much viewing attention of Addis Ababa and Mekele respectively.

3.4.1.1. Media Polarization and Challenges They Encounter

3.4.1.1.1. Becoming a Polarized Media

Despite the fact the former EPRDF and now PP tries to open space for the democratization of different institutions like the media and electoral board, it seems that the media has taken a different turn and become ethnically polarized, it has also become a source of ethnically affiliated propaganda outlet. Recently, the media owned by individuals, not by corporates like somewhere else in the world results such polarity. Moreover, of course in our country's case, this polarization is now liable to be the pitfall rather than an outlet for fresh breath.

Any media regardless of the country of interest propagates its interest but it may open space for media freedom so that others may participate in watchdogging. The main argument for the importance of media freedom is the 'watchdog' role of the news media and free media as a disseminator of information that may serve to empower the citizens (Norris 2008). However, Ethiopian media seems to fall short of incorporating the interests of various groups rather they tend to focus on their interest. According to informants from both settings such as hostilities, polarity, and pulling string comes from various divided media channels, these are,

³¹ This is a reflection from Aster, Henock, Alex, Fasika, and key informant Hagos.

Palace, Critics, and Entertainment channels³². Unlike the variety that becomes concrete and likely since 2018, Ethiopia in the past had a limited number of televised channels that only focus on the good deeds of the then TPLF leadership, and remains behind in becoming people voice. Ideally, now more or less Ethiopian mainstream media have freedom of speech, but the right way of broadcasting and providing accurate information (Grossberg et al. 1998 in Nigussie 2014) remains in the hand of these divided Ethiopian media.

Besides this, another characteristic of media in Ethiopia's past and present leadership is producing a documentary, and it is one way of disseminating one's political predisposition. For example, through documentaries TPLF's leadership used to made hostile propaganda over various issues about OLF, Arbegnoch Genbot 7, and so forth the current leadership is not far from doing that 'it's like fire with fire'. Hence, through politically driven media, PP and TPLF used to attack each other and question their respective legitimacy one another.³³

For instance, Addis Ababa informants have raised and traced the fertile ground for media polarization, and have associated the genesis of this polarity with the past TPLF-EPRDF leadership's way of managing this area. As these informants mentioned; silencing people's expression, giving a political agenda for the media, focusing only on the good deeds of the then leadership, were the habits of TPLF leadership and most of the things rose as a root cause for media to have become polarized. This then has become a culture in which the current leadership seems to inherit in some way.

Contrary to this, Mekele informants stated that at least in the past the documentaries produced, the accusation made over a certain group were 'harmless', because they have only focused on the individuals or groups, not on their ethnic identity. Yet, they accused the current leadership as the one who labels wrong deeds to a particular ethnic identity and this could have resulted in ethnic-based conflicts and have become one in various part of the country. Therefore, through cementing this point Kiday an informant from Mekele states the following...

³² Zekarias particularly understand these media as follows; 'Palace Media ', 'Critic Media ', and Entertainment Channels, in which some lost their legitimacy because, they have become and remain the tools for the agendas of the current regional and federal governments, some tend to fall for critics without delivering solutions, yet very few remain far from polarization focusing only on the entertainment. Interview with him took place on February 24/2020

³³ A discussion with Kiday on February 21/2020, He is a teacher at Dr. Tewelde Gesesse medical college.

Instead of holding accountable the agent who does what is done, saying 'Tigrigna speaker' is like holding the whole ethnic identity accountable or responsible for these deeds and gave a blurry image for the rest of Ethiopian people.

However, an informant from Addis Ababa had totally deconstructs such assumptions and argued with many Mekele informants claim, and underlining that anyone with a different ethnic background can speak a certain language, so such labeling could reduce ethnic-based conflict instead of being a source for conflict. Despite this argument, all Addis Ababa informants have criticized the past leadership for silencing people's expression. Nowadays as the empirical data from the study shows people tend to see the growing number of media channels as one way of broadening freedom of speech. Though doubtful either it is managed in the right manner or not, because they have become polarized and are posing a challenge for people to analyze and grasp the authentic news or pieces of information. Indeed, it also becomes difficult to grasp what is happening throughout the country. Thus, despite the various understanding both Addis Ababa and Mekele informants had over the source of media polarization, yet currently, both stressed that the media is polarized.

Moreover, alongside the conventional media (televised media) one important issue raised in this study is the influence of social media, of course, it is obvious enough that in this globalized world of us it is believed or feasible that these days borders have become permeable, and information almost reaching to a particular area with a blink of an eye. Indeed, currently one area that works as a conduit for information to flourish, social media seems to be the case. As Senayit³⁴ puts it because of the growing Facebook users, activists and people are busy in these social media, results in a diversity of voices do emerge. Although, this area is wide open for abuse through fake accounts, yet it played a great role for the 2018 political reform to emerge through youth mobilization.

Here in this study, the two groups i.e. Addis Ababa and Mekele informants label regional government and federal leaderships as polarized and consider them as the source of this polarity. Therefore, both the empirical data and Stremlau (2014) have also analyzed that these media channels should provide a forum for discussion and debate among citizens; instead,

³⁴ Interview with Senayit took place inside Tigray Civil Service Bureau, around Hawelti. On February 25/2020

according to Stremlau 'the Ethiopian press did not come to function in that way. One reason he claimed is that from the outset the press is polarized'.

Generally, the study also analyzed that informants have also pushed media accountability to a certain periphery. For instance, when informants from both settings regard one as accountable, it is all relative and pushing the trouble to the other end i.e. Mekele informants holding federal-based media accountable, whereas Addis Ababa informants instead lay their critics on ethnic-based media in general. Hence, both Nigussie (2014) and the findings from the empirical data have underlined Ethiopian media seems to be firmly monitored and controlled through overt and covert means by political or government forces. Whereas, this study also identified another factor in which individuals with a certain economic or social interest have also controlled the media, which is through owning media and extensively engaging in social media.

3.4.1.1.2. Influencing Ethiopian Media

Basically despite the growing number of media channels in the country that are presenting opportunities, all informants have discussed that any media people having political debates on have become under influence by a certain group directly or indirectly. Yet currently media is far from the centralization days of TPLF leadership way of managing this area. In which an informant³⁵ understood, as very much centralized not only in terms of quantity but also in variation. Nowadays it is clear that media is influenced, and due to this it becomes challenging to find a media that stands with societies opinion, instead they tend to give a shield of protection for suspected criminals especially regional based (for instance Tigray public media), and are busy facilitating a discourse of political 'elite'; concerning this an informant has reflected as follows...

*I rather like to see people with crimes against humanity called their names and brought to justice, but what I have witnessed is the opposite, labeling each other so as to deconstruct respective legitimacies.'*³⁶

An abyss within the current and former coalition party that is mentioned usually informants wasting their time to be through documentary and untamed political discourses. For instance,

³⁵ Interview with Israel took place on January 13/2020

³⁶ Interview with Genet took place on February 25/2020 in Mekele, Tigray Civil Service Bureau

Mekele informants have discussed and accused the current federal based leadership as the one that tries to put pressure on federal based public media and more importantly on its leadership. Similarly, informants also stressed that streaming a documentary at the same time in different federal based public media channels is considered one way of manipulation. Claiming it could have been better if it was broadcasted in different times in different channels.

Instead of focusing on the agent that manipulates the media, Addis Ababa informants tend to focus on the solutions and challenges it could bring. For instance, as an informant³⁷ from Addis Ababa states it, the various documentaries that have been broadcasting during neither the TPLF nor the post-EPRDF could not bring unity. She considers these documentaries as divisive and traumatic to watch and show how the TPLF inhumanly abused human rights based on people's ethnicity. Despite this, she further indicate that 'freedom is coasting Ethiopia' because it becomes a source for conflicts instead of a resource for the country's future. Similarly, another informant shares his concern and suggested news channels sometimes should leave violent news so as to prevent woe. Other contend and argue that reality have to be faced no matter its cost so that one can learn from past wrongdoing and move into idea driven political culture.

Therefore, here in this study, it is understood that the media has fallen into the hands of a few political entrepreneurs, and have become a voice or a tool for politician's agenda. It is also clear that during both pre and post TPLF led EPRDF leadership the media faces both internal and external pressure from various groups. The internal pressure comes from individuals or groups with a certain political interest owning a media, while the external pressure comes from those politicians, elites becoming a guest and propagating their untamed interest on various regional and federal financed media. Overall, since 2018 the number of televised media channels is growing and variety has brought a diversity of voices to echo. However, most of them are still under the influence of their respective groups' opinions in a deteriorated way. Hence with all these gaps Ethiopian media has, informants from both settings, especially Mekele informants do still buy and fall for TPLF propaganda knowing the fact that their regional media is polarized and full of rhetoric (Tsfati and Cohen 2013: 4). Therefore, at

³⁷ Interview with Fasika took place on February 04, 2020

a time of deeper division among ethnic groups is at its hike, the media should be far from causing problems and need to create a space for public opinions.

3.4.1.1.3. Group Discussion on Media

A discussion³⁸ with five groups of people two of them who traveled from Addis Ababa and I know closely, and the rest three permanent residents in Mekele, took place in a café called Ki Ki's at the center of Mekele city, very near to 'Romanat roundabout'. I could say in coincidence my travel to the region 'Tigray' was at the eve of 'Yekatit 11; the commemoration of the armed struggle TPLF had. Due to this, all of the region's media were busy with the ceremonial preparations and past historical encounters. This then led to a discussion in one of the days about Ethiopian Media in general. Since one female informant was from a federal-based news agency and work as a news anchor she indeed particularly cement the ideas that most of my Mekele informants raise. As we were discussing, all of them help me to understand how their respective press organizes the various news outlets.

As the news anchor helps me to grasp how their news agency started their daily news, she specifically stressed the following...

If there is any news from Prime Minister Office, it will be presented first; in fact even if there are news's with high magnitude such as GERD, will not get the headline as it is expected. I suggest that 'you' (those who are in the informal discussion)' to particularly see our agency's first four daily news. A piece of news should be prioritized in terms of its importance to the viewers. Imagine not giving coverage for anything that is going on some parts of the country.

On the other hand, the permanent residents of Mekele, both male, have also stated that neither regional nor federal based media agencies are free from affinity to a particular individual, groups or organizations. Further, they stated that instead of discussing political issues and claiming one's particular allegiance as a certain savior for the country's future. These informants thought it would have been better, to investigate the hindrances of development, corruption and try to navigate the bottleneck problems a given society faces. Whereas, both

³⁸ A discussion with Yonas, Eden, Hayelom, and Alex took place on 23th of February 2020. During this discussion due to the sensitive nature of Ethiopian polity, I sometimes foreword a point for discussion and disappear.

argued that media since 2018 have been found in abundance, yet their style of streaming poses a challenge to the country's future and the current leadership.

In fact, during the group discussion interchangeably speaking both informants noted, those in comparison to the past leadership, nowadays media in Ethiopian especially 'radio and televised' have the freedom to express their point of departure. Apart from the conventional media, the study also shows that nowadays firsthand-information comes from social media. Indeed, as one of the driving forces of the change that had happened in 2018, social media presents a huge potential to reach the mass. However, a great deal of challenges to the 'nation-building processes' comes from this area. This comes through the authenticity of the ideas and tips of this social network remains on the hands of whoever wants to post something fake. Fake news has become one huge headache to the founders of social networks in general, Facebook in particular.

Generally speaking, the empirical data shows that at the moment no one needed political interpretation and analysis from a third party, in fact, people had become political analysts and peel every piece of information they could get in a way that suits their political thinking or maybe through their 'political consciousness'. However, what contradicts the most is that people will claim their doubt over media trustworthiness and later heard them being provoked by this media. The point is if one believes Ethiopian media are the reason for conflicts to arise and are biased, so why later accuse them of the things they already are and believe in? Thus, despite the critics, informants do still buy the information they get from these media channels, either polarized or not.

3.4.2. Ethiopian Political Terrain Since 2018

3.4.2.1. Political Space: Achievements and Challenges

To begin with, the study has analyzed that there is increasing recognition for the current leadership since it tried to broaden the political landscape. Whereas, almost all informants stressed one thing in common and emphasized that a political space should be evaluated in terms of its value for the nation. Indeed, many stressed that it is very early to evaluate its value for the nation especially since the 2018 political reform. Alongside, here informants underlined that the space has become a source of conflict throughout the country affiliated by ethnic-based parties and catalyzed by ethnic and regional based media. Since this space has presented opportunities for both groups with a certain ideology at large and political analyst

to propagate their ideas or discourses, it seems though these groups or individuals are exploiting this space and taking advantage of it, as a result, informants from both research settings have discussed these issues as follows.

For instance, as an informant³⁹ from Addis Ababa states that, at the beginning of the reform, the political landscape was comfortable for political parties but through time, the landscape narrowed because of different factors. According to him, those factors are informal ethnic youth groups like 'Kero and Fano', which are not ready to entertain ideas outside of their ethnic base. Indeed the root cause these groups are only looking or seeing things through their own ideological glass resulted out of a three decades of marginalization not only in terms of economic but also through a failed education policies and unemployment frustration that exacerbates during the TPLF supremacy. Alongside this, this informant further indicates that government executive bodies (police) are also favoring the ruling party when a challenge comes from opposition parties, for example, the 'Baldaras case'. Regional administration officials also create unfavorable conditions for opposition parties at the Woreda level.

It is also further argue by informants and through observation that, it is worth noting that regional based parties especially in Tigray have been also experiencing intimidation and imprisonment from the then TPLF, these parties are Tigray Democratic Party and Arena. Therefore the then regional state apparatus have been favoring the TPLF, as the police were part of the intimidation process.

Therefore, as much as Ethiopian political terrain since 2018 has brought opportunities, in which many informants applause for the current leadership for its commitment to widening the space. Nonetheless, an informant from Mekele insists that the challenge rests on the way it is functioning, its principles, resulting in contradictions among its agents. This informant then stated the following...

One day you free dissidents, and impression the next day, brought in politicians from exile and let imprison those who were in Addis Ababa and has association with the past leadership and release them later. It is all part of the political game to get time from our protracted political limbo and I don't think it will take one for so long, because nowadays people here (Mekele) critically

³⁹ Interview with Luel on November 23/2020

see your actions, thoughts, and speeches; so such a way of governing could not lead long both regional and federal governments.

Besides the above issues, a suggestion given by almost all informants from Addis Ababa is that political space should be ruled and governed through ideas. However, according to Eyob⁴⁰ here in Ethiopia, it seems that the tendency revolves around ‘I belong to a particular ethnic group, so why not I formulate a party based on such claims’. Additionally, for him, those who were in exile and tried to serge through Eritrea are now acting as if they were heavenly thinking about Ethiopia. Further, he indicated there are parties with no clear agenda and does not analyze the binary opposition that is, losing and winning, in which it is always a possibility and either of them can emerge. Hence, according to Addis Ababa informants', these political parties especially having an ethnic sentiment look only ambitious and are far from ready to accept the result if they lose during the upcoming Ethiopian election.

One emphasis that I got from an informant from Addis Ababa Emanuel is presented as follows ...

What I find it hard to take in is that the relationship between political space and the rule of law, which seems to be confused and becomes confusing for me, since the rule of law should be above anyone or anybody. Thus, widening the space should not be a peril for the rule of law.

Furthermore, the above informant stated that, it is evident that widening of the political space; in fact, will give people options of policies and ideas in general. However, for this informant, the handling over the entrée of several parties from exile was bad and far from presenting new ideology and policies. Especially, opposition parties in which the reform gave ample right seems to disrupt the country's welfare. Here in this case, while an initiation in terms of broadening the political space has its importance through cooperating with various sectors, yet such claims could not guaranty a healthy, idea-driven competition. Thus, the political space is not functioning as informants expect and remain behind society's expectation, this is since, in Ethiopia, there is no well-established democratic institution rather everything highly relies on and is determined by few political elites (Worku and Ephrem 2020: 443).

⁴⁰ Interview with Eyob in Addis Ababa, took place on March 21/2020.

3.4.2.2. The Emerging Interaction between Prosperity Party and TPLF in Current Ethiopian Political Terrain

The first finding is that through the interviews there is a tendency to pull and push of both parties, TPLF claiming that it is the legitimate power in Tigray, until late 2020. There is a tendency of people gathering behind the ideologies of these two. In fact, from its inception, TPLF as an insurgent group came to power through armed struggle; this happened through youth mobilization in Tigray and coalition with the rest movements. For instance, among many reasons the substantial factor that paved the way for TPLF to hold power in 1991, the following point gain weight. To begin with, an informant⁴¹ in Mekele stated that Ethiopian people, especially youths, and regional based rebel groups had challenged the Derge's way of exercising power. Later on, due to immense pressure from various sectors, the Derge with the Socialism ideology lost its power in 1991.⁴²

According to Luel⁴³ an informant in Addis Ababa and as many scholarly books and articles puts it; TPLF-EPRDF comes to power in 1991 through coalition and paved the way for different ethnic-based parties to take part in the political arena. Through the ideology of 'ethnic federalism but from end to end practicing ethnic unitary system', the party had ruled the people of Ethiopia for the last three decades. However, after 27 years in power, the party had to shift both its ideology and leadership due to external and internally ambushed pressures. This becomes possible through youth mobilization in parts of Oromia and Amhara. Indeed, the change that brought Abiy to power had to ship its ideology and become a single party, in which TPLF refused to be part of it. Hence, Henock stressed that since then the relation between the two has never been the same. Here, as a group that has been in power for more than two decades, TPLF support got a backlash utmost part of the country.

While Abiy's choice as coalition leader and prime minister in 2018 initially created hope and took impressive measures to open up the political room, indicating that the country was finally on the road to democracy. According to Hassen (2021), however, the "Prime Minister failed to reconcile and reintegrate the political, defense, and economic elites of Tigray" into the governing structure, whereas others (e.g. Abbink 2021) contend and argue that, it is not

⁴¹ Interview with Alex took place on February 2020 Mekele

⁴² A discussion with Addis took place in Addis Ababa, on 29/12/2020.

⁴³ A discussion on December 29/2020

because the PM does not want to incorporate such interests, yet there was ‘willful lack of cooperation’ of the TPLF with the reformist federal government in Addis Ababa. As TPLF elites have been deliberately echoing a grievances mode due to their loss of power, and economic interest and manipulations. Not only these but as it was observed TPLF elite refused the indigenous way of solving tensions, as it dismissed the call for peace by elders, and religious leaders of the country’s so as to calm the then tensions.

Abbink (2021) further illustrated that, having gone totally sour – via sabotage and subversion’ TPLF elite with the federal government, went ahead with their own elections, knowing the delay of the 2020 parliamentary elections, ordered by the federal government was because of the global pandemic; COVID-19. However the election had little credibility and had not allowed any opposition parties to campaign and also having only a single foreign observer that had affinities with the party in many ways. The election was a ‘shanty’ one as the PM Abiy Ahmed called it. In cementing Abbink’s argument, few informants, particularly from Addis Ababa, have pointed out; the federal government should have taken an intensive measure on TPLF for conducting election, in which regional powers do not have the right to do so. Therefore, the protracted relations between the two and the control of the public media, has intensified the tension. In fact up until the ‘law enforcement operation’; the ‘TPLF with huge economic interests have been rejecting all federal rules and policies and, started to behave like a ‘state in the state – not in the federal-constitutional sense but in the mafia sense’ especially in the past two years (Ibid).

On the other hand, Luel also stressed here again that, due to the previous failure of the TPLF to offer the Ethiopians social, economic, and political justice, the party no longer becomes credential. As this informant puts it, 'TPLF's doom days are coming,' he stressed that people were with the party in the past and gave their willingness for its strength, but the party could not have people supporting its agenda after years of political ammunition. The finding from Addis Ababa also shows a diminishing interest in incorporating the philosophy of TPLF.

3.4.3. Ethiopian Electoral Board through Past and Present; Legitimacy and Reputation

The former EPRDF and now PP tries to open space for the democratization of different institutions, like the media and electoral board. Indeed, before all, it is apt to understand election to become fair and free and lead for political liberalization, media plays a great role. Therefore according to Ward (2014), the "media has an essential watchdog functions that increases the transparency and accountability of the election process. Its messages can shape public opinion and set agendas. This makes the media a very influential actor and a powerful communications tool. A media that is responsible and appropriately used will help strengthen the democratic process and contribute to a more credible and inclusive election".

For Ethiopia to have an inclusive election informants of this study have identified several factors in a way that could give both credits for structural changes since 2018 and also criticism over the past held elections. Whilst the transparencies of the board during the pre-2018 periods have been questioned, yet still informants show their fear in the upcoming elections due to the reputations of the past electoral board and elections. Indeed, these informants had critically assessed the Ethiopian elections in general and the electoral board in particular. Thus, the legitimacy of the board and the past Ethiopian elections has come to fall in question. For instance, an informant Henock⁴⁴ says 'Election is not a theatre', and paying attention to such gestures many Addis Ababa informants stressed that an election needs parties affiliated with ideas and also questions the country's political agents or politicians. Insisting one way or another elections are competitions with all parties having an equal platform to perform, not the other way around i.e. one having the upper hand in manifesting ones political conviction. Instead, it is about getting both the attention and support of its citizens through ideas and ideologies only. Yet, Enos stated that, in a country where ethnic-based election prevail people tend to give value to their identity which later results in ethnically based voting, and due to ethnic-based voting people tend to give their voice for their respective identity that could abide fact-based or idea-driven voting (Enos D. 2016).

⁴⁴ On March 27 and 28, 2020

Alongside this, Addis Ababa informants⁴⁵ further indicate that Ethiopia seems to be far from conducting a free and fair election soon due to the following reasons. First, an Election needs a 'task force' and a system that can live up to its promises and respect the voice of the constituents. Second, the board needs to improve its contested name about the way it is organized and the questions raised about its legitimacy; i.e. for the way the electoral board elects its board officials especially its head by the ruling party. Third, the board should create awareness about the importance of free and fair election through various media outlets, brochures or by any other means and later the media should do its check and balance (Färdigh 2013). Therefore, informants argue that electing board officials and administration workers need to be through competition; based on merit, their commitment to civic organizations, and later through people's opinion, maybe poll. Indeed, both during the former or current leadership, the leading party is the one that brought nominees for the House of Peoples Representatives; as many informants stressed this procedure has reduced the transparency of the board. Nonetheless, here it is apt that structural and ideological changes are taking place (Leyenaar and Hazan 2011) within the board and looks committed to change its contested name.

Changes or attempts made by the Electoral board should pave the way to conduct a free and fair election and indeed no one can argue with that, yet the emphasis should be on how a nation can have a free and fair election? Therefore, the first mandatory issue raised by all informants of the study is about conducting an election on the period because it restricts untimely power exercise. However, Addis Ababa informants' particularly stated that the periodic election alone could not be a guarantee for unwavering election. It could not also become an asset for the country's citizens, instead; politicians could use it as a shield and could pave the way for authoritarians to emerge in the name of 'timed election' like that of TPLF held elections. Such situations later result in a conflicting power relation within and along with many other interested groups, for instance, the conflicting interest between PP and TPLF can be an example. Here unlike Mekele informants, Addis Ababa informants reasoned that only periodic election could not guarantee a determined election.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ This is a reflection from Key informant Samson, informants Luel, Henock, and Addis

⁴⁶ A reflection from Henock, Samson, and Luel

Still, through appreciating the past leadership for keeping the period, a female informant from Mekele reminds me to note that, despite its contested nature February 2020 should be a time for political parties' discussions. In addition, she suspiciously argues and thinks the board has violated its amendment in licensing the current prosperity party, which for her took an advantage of getting legitimacy in a very short period than the rest of the new upcoming parties and how it altered the board amendments and discuss as follows...

The board should see every party or individual participants equally, and everyone who used to live abroad and have dual citizenship should be screened equally; such negligence and the biased process will reduce the transparency and accountability of the board and attempts made to reform it.

Additionally, the other issue raised by Mekele informants is about the electoral board's head 'Birtukan Mideksa' in which two informants from this setting found themselves in opposite strings. One completely rejects the other. For instance, a female informant notes paying much appreciation to her political disposition it that the board head has the agency to conduct and deliver free and fair elections. However, contrary to Genet, another informant from Mekele lays his basis of argument and said the following

'I think that her inner instinct gives her a good feeling about the EPRDF 's phase-out , a party which used to imprisoned her for so long, thus I think she will enjoy the freedom that one 'wolf pack' is gone'.

This particular informant further indicate that, since the board is also getting massive support from abroad and is restructuring based on the premises of foreign development and governments, 'it is understood that it could be under influence'. Hence, for this informant alongside the 'domestic, local and national-level considerations are critical to the definition of the process of change, external factors and international actors are playing determinant role in shaping outcomes' (Olukosh 2004). However, according to an informant in Addis Ababa, the reestablished electoral board is trusted to conduct free and fair elections because of its chairperson. She is the right person for the position to defend any pressure from the government/ ruling party. According to him, the appointment of her shows the government's willingness for a democratic election.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ Interview with Luel through Facebook on November 21/2020 at 10:50am

On the other hand, the empirical data from the respective settings have also revealed that, both parties that are PP and TPLF has fallen for Bob Jessop concept of 'the state favoring some forces'. In which until recently TPLF had the privileges over PP in Mekele, through holds an election, while PP has the upper hand in the federal and regional levels through extending its legitimacy (by House of Federations) time until the global pandemic COVID-19 sorted out, or probably mid-2021. Once again resorting to Jessop's approach in Bollier (2016:8) noted that, "states are not neutral terrains on which political forces struggle with equal chances to pursue their interests and objectives and with equal chances of realizing their goals whatever they might be. Instead, the organization of state apparatuses, state capacities and state resources [...] favor some forces, some interests, some identities, some spatiotemporal horizons of action, some projects, more than others,". Therefore, both the regional and federal governments are favored in their respective settings and are resisting the respective decisions passed by these two entities, now such push and pull have led to armed conflict between the federal and regional government (Jessop in Bollier 2016:8).

Furthermore, the current political situation has abolished TPLF as a party, particularly by the PP leadership, the state apparatus no longer favors TPLF rather PP. For instance, many members of the parliament have asked the HPR to label it as a terrorist group yet PP leadership has refused to do so. Indeed the HPR November 2020 have lifted the immunity of 39 House members, including Debretsion Gebremichael, former President of the Tigray Regional State, among others. Representatives of the Ethiopian People for Social Justice, the Prosperity Party, and the Tigray Democratic Party (TDP) spoke at a panel discussion organized by the Ethiopian News Agency, saying the 'decision to remove the immunity of criminals accused of treason and terrorism was praise worthy, although long overdue' (Ethiopian News Agency 2020)⁴⁸.

As it is earlier discussed on how the TPLF abandoned the mandate to conduct election from the constitution and federal government, the party as Abbink (2021) puts it "over the past 26 years, has been willfully created mistrust, isolation, resentment and animosity between the people of Tigray and other Ethiopians", and now go ahead and conducted a regional election that exacerbate tensions. During that time, TPLF has also claimed all the seats, yet not only

⁴⁸ <https://www.ena.et/en/?p=18502>

the federal government discarded the election but opposition parties have showed their muted criticisms as there were ballot irregularities and fraud.

Generally, it is also important to note here, the two groups (interviewees in Mekele and Addis Ababa) express their view through the respective outlooks by their response to the study. Although, informants from Mekele tend to resist decisions made to extend Ethiopian election, yet those from Addis Ababa tend to give more emphasis to the importance of conducting a free and fair election.

3.5. Assessing the Features of Ethiopian Polity That Shapes' One's Outlook

3.5.1. Factors That Influence Peoples Outlook

Informants' in this particular study has stated and identified the ideal factors that force people to think, analyze the reform and later resort to their ethnicity. Since this ethnic ideology has shaped people perception, nowadays it also has had an influence on people to value most their ethnic background and neglect fact-based ideas, as Fareed⁴⁹ states it "if people value something most, then fact have no place". Therefore, the following factors are among the main reasons that had an impact on people's articulation and the root cause for the way people think and act accordingly. These issues also led to a deeper division among ethnic groups. Therefore, Ethiopian History, Change in Political Ideology, Ethnic Unitary Systems, Government's style of Exercising Power, Human Nature, and Privileges, are in discussion consequently.⁵⁰

Narrating Ethiopian History (The way we narrate history?): The two interrelated political thinking in Ethiopia are nationalism and ethnocentrism. These two thinking led for groups to depict their definition of Ethiopia as a nation the way they see it right. For instance, the nationalists have seen the country as a nation that has come on the historical scene fully formed, while the ethnic centered thoughts describe the nation as 'a heterogeneous with diverse ethnic, linguistic, cultural and religious groups brought together and largely dominated by force' (Maimire Mennasema 2005:9). Therefore, such

⁴⁹ A CNN global journalist

⁵⁰ All these are the factor that shapes people's perception and later on result a divided understanding over a certain issues, in this case over Ethiopian political reform.

argumentative depiction of Ethiopia as a nation led to a divided articulation of Ethiopia as a state and later led to a dismantled understanding of Ethiopian political culture or reform.

Therefore, the narration of Ethiopian political history seems to be one great deal of challenge to the country's political certainty. This later becomes the genesis of splitting any given information based on one's ethnic identity. According to few informants⁵¹ from both study settings, such dissection of understanding over a certain issue started to occur since a modern 'Multi-Ethnic Ethiopia' emerged, especially since 1991. Alongside, due to lack of discussion and failure to have a healthy political culture, Ethiopia as a nation fails to sort out the wrongdoings from the past historical encounters and move on towards the democratization process. This then led to a polarized narration of the country's prominent leaders. For instance, one informant (Addis Ababa) clearly stated that when one deals with King Menelik's 'heroism', talk about Hileselase, Derge, and Meles's EPRDF, one also has to put the wrongdoings into context⁵².

The alienated narration, on the other hand, seems deliberate and catalyzed through time by ethnic sentiment ideology. It appears for few informants that, the idea of victim and victimizer have deliberately become part of the nation's history. "For instance, TPLF holds Derge responsible for killing and a wrongdoing says Kiday (Mekele), such accusations later become complicated and politicians nurture it later on. Indeed, both TPLF have used it, and now Prosperity Party is taking it as a tradition. He further indicate that, a solution to such push, pulls, accusations is through looking at facts, major events and later assessing both the strength and weakness respectively. Thus, here one needs to understand that one that used to consider 'itself' a victim is now labeled and accounted as responsible for wrong deeds. Hence, since the power relation and concentration of social power (Vaughan and Tronvoll 2003) shifts in the current political terrain of Ethiopia; especially in 2018, it appears TPLF is now facing the same fate Derge faced; and have been criticized with the same techniques; it applied during its leadership. Of course, this time not as a victim but a victimizer of the past 27 years of political supremacy. Indeed, in an array, the new power relation that resulted from PP is pushing it to such one ends i.e. accusing TPLF and resulting in resistance from TPLF, both of them making it as an everyday resistance and having both the public and hidden transcript in it (Scott 1990).

⁵¹ Kiday (Mekele) and Israel (Addis Ababa)

⁵² A reflection by Israel and Kiday; informants from Addis Ababa and Mekele respectively

In fact, as a major source, individuals or groups tend to apply history as a way of articulating any given information, ideas, or concepts through ethnically affiliated thinking. Individuals or groups have been arguing that they have been the victims of the past historical encounters explicitly or implicitly and regarding/raising one were/is advantageous over the other. Furthermore, here one informant⁵³ (Addis Ababa) states that, indeed Ethiopians need to stop listening to these political entrepreneurs and critically assess what is fact and what is fiction, and questions the action vis-à-vis the thoughts of these groups. Therefore, for these informants through comparing these two elements one could understand the reality on the ground. Besides this, the struggle to have a common acclaimed Ethiopian history has become quarrelsome, while the termination of the subject from higher education and the failures of the Minister of Education in developing a relative arguable historic book signify what the above informants argue.

A Shift in Political Ideologies: It is assumed that how individuals identify on the political spectrum—whether liberal, conservative, or moderate—has a universal meaning when it comes to policy stances and voting behavior (Feinberg et al. 2017). In this regard, informants of this study lay on political ideologies and argue that whether PP’s ideology or EPRDF’s fits into Ethiopia political terrain.

To begin with the very idea of political ideology and professional life or statehood in Ethiopia is (were) confused by confused people or intentionally confusing it says one informant from Addis Ababa. The current reform may fall in this peril knowingly or unknowingly. There are many emotions everywhere, which are also blurring the agendas of hate /love relationships of communist thought. According to key informant Samson, indeed some “good” people in and out of the government circle or else in the ethnic politics are good at abusing opportunities like everywhere else in the world. The fact that the ideologies since the inception were imported ideologies and are far from incorporating with the indigenous knowledge, they remain behind in achieving the democratization process. Earlier, somewhere in the text, it is mentioned that among various reasons TPLF phase out from PP come after these two parties had different ideological approaches, i.e. developmental state and liberal or capitalist thought. This then later has resulted in a divided perception of the two research settings of the study.

⁵³ Interview with Emanuel took place on April 5, 2020

For instance, contrary to the emerging PP's ideological shift to liberalism or capitalism and appreciating or being loyal to the past EPRDF's leadership ideology i.e. developmental democratic state, an informant⁵⁴ from Mekele indeed resists the new ideology and incline to the past ideologies. She further indicates through going by the ideologies of TPLF she thought their region is far from the conflicts which are caused here and there.. Nonetheless, more than half of the informants in this study especially from Addis Ababa emphasized that the new ideology stemmed from new power relation could become one major source for people with mixed (hybrid) identities, so that they can rely on 'Ethiopianism'.

Here the emphasis from the two settings have fallen for contrasting forms, almost all informants from Mekele and very few from Addis Ababa idealize that the new ideology as 'Ahadawi (Unitary)' that could pose a challenge to their being (ethnicity). However, a great deal of Addis Ababa informant considers the new emerging ideas as a step forward and a source for people in dealing with the moral issues first. Therefore the right wing or centralist system by PP gain weight for many informants in Addis Ababa, while the other camp 'federalist have been applauded by TPLF in Mekele (Hassen 2021). Yet such applause only short lived as the 'treason on the Ethiopian army' resulted in a strip of legitimacy from TPLF through the law enforcement operations. Moreover, informants insist that despite the positive developmental changes the past leadership (TPLF- EPRDF) brought, these informants argue that it forgot to work on the "soft power⁵⁵". Indeed, they have become the source of conflict and led people to fall for the things they value (i.e. ethnicity) most, not the fact on the ground. For instance, an informant from Addis Ababa has argued with people who label the current leadership as unitary. Accordingly, this informant stated that the past TPLF-EPRDF have two contrasting forms i.e. developmental state and ethnic federalism, one that needs a centralized leadership, while the other fall for a divided administration (Zekarias 2019). Therefore, since its inception developmental state political ideology has shadowed the regional powers and has paved the way for authoritarian rule, which were unitary since decisions flow from top to bottom immensely⁵⁶.

⁵⁴ Interview with Genet took place on February 25/2020

⁵⁵ According to informants reflection, Soft power here refers to, education, critical thinking, it is more of a moral issue

⁵⁶ Interview with Emanuel took place in Addis Ababa, Yeka Sub City on April/2020

In cementing the above point, scholars such as Zekarias Beshah (2019) stated that,

Ethiopia's experiment of pursuing a developmental state in a decentralized form of governance not only deviates from the prevalent pattern but also perceived to be inherently incompatible due to the competing approaches that characterize the two systems.

Hence, the new ideology of PP seems to get weight in Addis Ababa and far from reach in Mekele, nevertheless, TPLF's ideology is no longer existential for Addis Ababa informants. As a result, those informants that are inclined to the current new emerging ideology have their way of understanding the current political scenario, while those opposed or inclined to the past leadership have also their way of understanding a certain context. At this point appreciating the past or current leadership ideologies particularly show one's resistance for either of them.

Ethnic Unitary System: The third and basic issue mentioned by more than half of the informants in this study is federalism. Even though federalism gave a contested bright future and ample rights, according to these informants yet also poses a challenge. To begin with scholars emphasis ethnic federalism driven from Soviet-Union which, in any case, have collapsed (Kymlicka 2006 in Vick Lukwago⁵⁷), and yet ethnic federalism in Ethiopia have recognizes the “reality of minority nationalism” through some territorial autonomy, through avoiding “horizontal inequalities” and other ethnic problems (Vick Lukwago). Alongside this for informants of this study, the idea behind that the concept of ethnic federalism gave ample right for the formation of regional or ethnic-based media is existential here. Thus people’s perceptions of other people and social groups that they favor tend to be favorably biased (Hastorf and Cantril 1954 in Tsfati and Cohen 2013) due to such ethnic based media. Then a group of individuals seems to exploit these areas, which of course led to given information to have a different meaning and understanding emanating from these areas. Therefore, since Ethiopia is structured under ethnic federalism or we shall call it ‘ethnic unitary system’, individuals' opinions tend to fall for the concept of ethnicity, as a result, any idea that emanates from individuals is regarded as if it emanates from their respective groups and also as if directed to the other corner. Hence, in this sense objective group memberships may not

⁵⁷ Accesses on January 3/2021

have a very significant impact on political perception and attitudes, identification with the same group could affect (Conover 1984:762).

In cementing the above point, some informants indicate that ethnic federalism has no clear demarcation between ethnicity and individuals. Thus, when an individual- single-handedly regarded or caught red-handed, it becomes puzzling to his particular ethnic group and raises questions; Does he or she did it by him or herself? How a person could do what is done without the group's involvement? Later on, people will start to ask about that particular ethnic group's identity and triangulate it to the current leadership. Further, as one informant from Mekele states it...

'Due to repetitive agendas of media's, people started to think as if things are deliberate'.⁵⁸

Alongside this, another challenge indeed is the lack of clear demarcation between parties and their respective ethnicity, as a result when a certain individual or groups criticized, then the pains later felt by that ethnic population. This later paves the way for people to vote for candidates perceived as favoring their group (Enos D. 2016). This further indicates that, how the political class deliberately blends itself with civil society to establish "the state," (Weberian and Gramscian perspectives, reflected by Jessop in Bollier 2016). Generally, ethnic-based media that emerged since 1991 and found in abundance since 2018 because of the reform and democratization process has become/becoming a source for the way people articulate their understanding over a certain issue.

Governments Style of Exercising Power: This concept usually emanates or drives from a certain government's political ideology. Noting the above reasons, for most informants, due to the hesitations the current leadership shows on reducing conflicts and due to the lack of an immediate solution to certain things, individual or groups tend to speak and does whatever they like. Especially lack of coherence within the higher government officials led people to analyze any given situation within one's political consciousness. So, according to an informant⁵⁹ in Mekele the way in dealing with things could be affiliated with ethnicity or religion sometimes, yet, the killings over a particular ethnic identity becomes mystifying

⁵⁸ A reflection from Zekarias on February 24, 2020

⁵⁹ Interview with Awote took place on February 27, 2020

on what issues people deal with. So in the context of Tigray, the above mentioned informant stated that 'let PM Abiy reign for 100 years (hidden transcript, Scott 1990)', with a belief that the current federal government's leadership formerly gave a 'lesson for TPLF or other upcoming parties, not to forget its 'home soil' that gave it legitimacy. Further, suggests Ethiopian people to analyze and assess every situation critically so that they could not fall into the hands of 'Ethiopian political entrepreneurs'. Therefore, the inconsistency in the leader's speech is leading people to confusions and becomes a problem in having at least a similar thought or information on basic issues. For such reasons the question should be on how people think and deal with politics, rather whether people think ideologically or not (Kinder 1982 in Conover 1984).

According to Mekele informant⁶⁰ on the other hand, any given information or idea nowadays has become under the scrutiny of ethnic articulation. Because the inconsistency in the speeches delivered led people to become cautious and started to analyze within one's identity. Then again, the current leadership's lack of composure in terms of presenting plans, such as promising a sign of cooperation on one hand followed by accusations on the other seems to pose one great deal of challenge for trustworthiness. So, within this push and pull, people tend to fall into their ethnic identity. As a result, according to these informants and most Addis Ababa informants echoed that a homegrown solution to the country's problem is the right way to averting the challenges the country faces. Additionally, labeling one as accountable and the other as a victim will not bring any solution or unity for future generations to come.⁶¹

On the other hand, the empirical data from both settings shows similarity in forwarding the solutions to solve biased ways of presenting plans to a given society, i.e. leaving rhetoric for discussion and followed by a comprehensive plan for the country's wellbeing. However, focusing more on the cause, an informant from Mekele stated that, despite the applause for the current government he has at early stages, lately through continuous 'hate' speeches his expectation 'fall into the ground'. It appears for Mekele informants in particular everything has become to where it is now due to the above-mentioned style of exercising power. Therefore, these hate speeches, resulting in curiosity between regions in general and

⁶⁰ Interview with Simur took place on February 24, 2020, in Tigray Civil Service Bureau

⁶¹ A reflection from Addis, Luel, Fasika and Key informant Samson

becoming the source for untamed argument. That is, one trying to show and exercise its power over the other, the other group with its counter-argument through abiding the other.

Yet, contrary to almost all informants of Mekele though, and very similar to a great deal of informants reflection from Addis Ababa; Luel⁶² through informal conversation discusses the issues about the current reform and the events that took place throughout the country. He states that...

You see people protesting in mass organized by parties about respecting the constitution. It sometimes left me speechless because if they care about the constitution and rule of law, where were they when many Addis Ababa youths die in the wake of the 2005 election (1997E.C)? So, for me nowadays people are talking about things not basically about the rule of law whereas they are saying what they are saying because of a power shift in the country's polity and based on the things they value most. That is their ethnicity and only when a certain challenge heads into their way or else, as power slips from their hands...

According to Luel, TPLF-EPRDF had no choice but to put an end to it, insisting that it was approaching a dead end and for him now at least people have a group and individual rights, especially the group rights were unimaginable in the past EPRDF leadership. Additionally, he stated that 'TPLF leadership was a party with a group mentality, yet with restrictions on group rights'. Though at the moment instead of criticizing and handing over prisoners, people have become a shield for suspected criminals, the fact that people being criminals has no value for a certain society anymore, so for this informant the society have become the ones that applause for wrong deeds.

Furthermore, Luel also added that to blame the current leadership will be a great danger by itself because for him the things we have been witnessing through these two years are the result of the past leadership. So for people to have a good future "we" need to focus on building institutions and need to be careful not to create an authoritarian leadership once again. He further stated that...

⁶² The interview with Leul took place on May 1/2020; in Bole Sub City

I believe we need strong political parties that function based on ideologies only. It amuses me when I see some parties' way of distorted acting. I feel sorry to such acts because when you have the chance to function you need to use it effectively unless otherwise, you want the current government to repeat the past authoritarian leadership.

Hence, having understood the contrasting views from the above informants' one need to analyze that when one is a higher government official, a public figure, or a philanthropic, people critically sees these speeches. Due when people's speech (hate) delivered without censures, it will later result a misunderstanding over a certain issues. As a result, what one needs to analyze from the above discussions is that 'political elites' remaining behind in echoing people's voices for the two or three past decades.

Security Concern within The Country: Here not only with relation to this chapter but also throughout data collection of the study almost all informants directly or indirectly raise their concern about insecurity issues in Ethiopia, repetitively intruding it with the rest specific objectives of the study. Indeed, all of them are apprehensive about the country's security issues. However, their reflection falls for two pleats over the source of these issues the country experiencing since 2018, and termed it as a major source and reason that leads individuals to believe opinions that emanate from their respective ethnic group only.

As informants discussed, the government has become so "weak"⁶³ or does not apply the right measures in terms of security, this led to the killing of the country's highest military generals, regional leaders, celebrities. Whereas a suggestion that is given is that the country security or intelligence sector need to retaliate in a manner that could reduce such planned chaos. Otherwise the hesitation could become are becoming for individuals to split a certain topic into various ways. Overall, curiosity over one another is leading to splitting any given concept or idea within the context of ethnicity, later resulting in insecurity.

Another informant⁶⁴, on the other hand, also reflects insecurity as major inception of articulation through ethnic affiliation, this female informant hold men accountable for it. For

⁶³ "Weak" here refers to the lack of appropriate measures and handling over the insecurity issues the country faces and sprung since 2018

⁶⁴ Interview with Genet (Mekele) took place on February 25, 2020

her it is mainly because media's fall into the hands of 'irresponsible'⁶⁵. In fact focusing on the solution for all the troubles the country going through, she suggested that 'women who are half of the Ethiopian population and are not part of this problem, could become the solution for the trouble the country encountered', thus she thinks giving them the opportunity is not atrophy rather their right. According to her, bringing those (females) into leadership is one good initiative of the current government. Despite this though, 'those women' need to get a shield or protection from the law to support them in their way of building corruption-free institutions, which she thinks; they are best at and could become a source for flourishing peace and the rule of law throughout the country.

Human Nature and Privileged Status: As key informant⁶⁶ in Addis Ababa, stated that it is quite natural that people view any concept from different angles, but as we are keen on ethnic politics, it might be quite normal to different policy changes by the reform government through the eyes of their respective ethnic groups. Furthermore, he noted that a certain person may get political and economic privileges based on the ideological inclination he or she is inclined or possess. The political reform change has not brought major disappointments for the party leaders so far, so a particular person, therefore, may calculate his or her benefits and losses based on the political appointment and his political, economic, and social goal.

Alongside ethnicity, individuals could fall for certain group identification, in such kind of identifying individuals from different ethnic backgrounds could become in the same front to achieve their economic or political goal. Here again, the USA could be another good example; far from their identity Latinos, Black and White Americans has fallen for candidates that could alter their economic, political, and social wellbeing. To recall, in some context Ethiopian leadership's in the past is not far from such claims, in which the late Pm Meles Zenawi have said Genet Zewde's (the then Minister of Education) loyalty to her party is much important than her educational background⁶⁷. As a result, such comments of the higher official or leadership could send an impression to the rest and could make them think their group identification is more important than their ethnicity; hence, people's ties to

⁶⁵ Informants apply irresponsible for 'unethical broadcasting'

⁶⁶ During the course of this study a discussion with Samson took place on several occasions

⁶⁷ Interview with Addis, in Addis Ababa took place on December 10, 2020

various groups help to structure their political thinking. Indeed, such ties can indeed privilege one with political positioning, economic benefits, and result in a new form of status to emerge (Conover 1984).

Reform in Ethiopia, in general, may or may not be viewed by some groups who usually associate with their respective ethnic group. Here again, this may be or due to associate with their political positions resulting in their economic and political (Abbink 2006), as well as their social life. Along with these people from different ethnic groups may articulate their views based on social and economic status. It is this habit of the world and African politics to abuse power for political social and economic benefits, says Emanuel⁶⁸. As a result, those who tend to be far from these arenas will challenge these attempts made and bring their resistance mechanisms in a group and individually when their benefit becomes at stake.

⁶⁸ Interviewed on March 2020

Chapter Four: Conclusion and Summary

Based on the literatures applied in the above paragraphs and the empirical data generated the study has concluded that two groups in this study are interviewed in analyzing the Ethiopian political reform. The first of these groups are resistant of the political and its associated changes about the post EPRDF political scenarios since 2018, through expressing their opinion clearly; opposing the changes made by PP or by the other form of doing it; through applauding the past political leadership. On the other hand, challenging the TPLF led EPRDF form of coalition, for instance, giving credit for the current leadership PP. Of course, there are individuals from both study settings that compromise; these individuals does not push the achievement and challenges of the reform to a certain periphery, rather they tend to see through the lens of comparativeness, as both EPRDF and PP leadership usher strength and weakness.

Through the findings, I have concluded as follows, during the course of the study the discourse of Ethiopian PM usually carried away Interviewees perception. Many consider his speeches as a point of departure for every discussion we had. It is summarized further that, comparatively the reflection from informants indicate that, the current leadership entertained people's opinion more than any other leaderships of the country. Alongside, since 2018, human rights are improved but some groups challenge it (through mob justice). Despite appreciated for keeping the country's wellbeing in terms of security, past TPLF led EPRDF leadership fails in building institutions. Institutionalizing by PP yet to be accomplish, since the process takes years for a well establish system to exist, it could not become possible with overnight decisions. Nonetheless, the attempt made by PP in institutionalizing some sections of the country's sectors is appreciated.

Despite their respective strength and weakness forwarded by informants from the respective settings, the study on the other hand, has also tried to understand the interaction and power relation between PP and TPLF. Indeed their relation is not only a contested matter, it becomes problematic to differentiate who has the power at most or having it does not mean one can exercise or apply it without facing resistance. For instance, the federal government has the power to put people in jury but it becomes problematic to bring and imprison those who hide themselves in their respective regions or ethnicity. Thus, power and resistance are interrelated and could not exist one without the other (Lughod 1990 in Vinthagen and Johansson 2013). On the other hand, from the findings analyzed in the above sections, that

Ethiopian political power relation is in a binary opposition. For instance for almost every federal government decisions or speech, one will hear a contrasting view from regional government which was of course TPLF up until recently. Of course, best example that suits this dilemma, TPLF and Prosperity Party has dominated the past three-year's political space in such way.

Additionally, the empirical data on the other hand, has seen that; nowadays people are no longer the destinations for power are rather the agents that disseminate these powers. Hence, it looks in the study the power relation between party elites and members of a society seems to be broken and a certain people or groups are abiding it (such as the ramping of nightclub windows in Mekele). Due to such acts or manifestation, party elites relation with a society their govern is not functioning through a net like organization, rather individuals have started to make their own new net organization, that resist the former power relations, paving the way for new ones to emerge (Balan 2010:38).

The reflections from the interview and group discussion also indicate that, the media nowadays have become a space for individuals to discuss political issues. However, those who own the media directly and indirectly have influenced people's perceptions in terms of articulating the post EPRDF political scenarios. Recently the media have paved the way for politicians or for those who have a political interest to echo their thoughts. Whereby some specifically throw their spear against one another, as they have also become a mouthpiece for regional polity. Alongside, the cover and overt means of controlling the media by the political elites or their affinity to a certain government, the Ethiopian televised press is also controlled by those individuals/groups that have a certain economic or social interest; that is through owning media and extensively engaging in social media. This academic research, on the other hand, wants its audience to understand the post EPRDF Ethiopian media, especially televised ones as follows. Nowadays freedom of speech does exist but the right way of using it is abused, in fact variety have brought diversity of voices to echo, yet each side usually presents its own political agenda. Generally, public and privately owned conventional Ethiopian media nowadays have the freedom to disseminate their interest, yet public media only forward their respective interest and fall behind in entertaining opposition views. Furthermore, the impact of media polarization, lack of checks and balance between media, political space, and electoral board exists in the current Ethiopian polity. For instance, the media should create a forum (Stremlau 2014) for public opinions, yet Ethiopian media remain behind in giving this forum, rather it usually entertains political elite' reflections.

Whereas, the media is so conceived by the political space it is now responsible for shaping people's perception in assessing Ethiopian political dynamics in a deteriorate way. On the other hand, the perception into the various institutional reforms indicates that, the lack of transparency, check and balance between the media and the political space have resulted a biased fallacies of thoughts to emerge in the country. In this regard, the media have become a point of relay for conflicts to arise within these three years, especially through social media. Such technology driven gadgets have been in use as a weapon to disseminate political hate or love discourse or rhetoric.

Since 2018, Abiy Ahmed (PM) led government reforms or bold measures in some cases have exceeded society's expectation and are becoming unmanageable resulting signs of conflicts. However, based on the empirical data from Addis Ababa the study has revealed that generalizing and pushing these uncertainties only to the current (PP) leadership is a hasty generalization. Indeed, close to a third year of the reform PP faces various encounters in almost unexpected and undetermined way. For instance ethnic based conflicts, mob justice, and sequential figurative killings are among the many challenges experienced by the current Ethiopian leadership. Such political dynamics and security concerns have also troubled peoples navigation throughout the country. Additionally, the empirical data from Mekele shows, the current leadership's hesitation is causing all those insecurity issues. However, the empirical data from Addis Ababa says another; the security system in which TPLF people used to be dominating has created vacuums as the party leaves the capital. In this regard, it is the TPLF led EPRDF leadership adherence to build institutions becomes the main source of political abyss resulting suspicions one another. Thus, when a certain government or country build any system based on individuals (authoritarian), that system will no longer functions as soon as that person or group vanish. Hence, the adherence to build institutionalized system that will function whoever comes along is existential (Zekaria F. 2018).

Furthermore, the issues addressed and discussed in chapter four, which expounded upon by the political elite's gradually go down through the throat of the people per se. The different group of political elites once they coined different policies by their policymakers tries to deliver their purpose. However, these policies face some serious questions or even a rebuke from their compatriots or their opponents. This may be quite normal for a politician in Western Europe or the USA but this has caused a serious trouble in African politics in general and Ethiopian in particular. Therefore, a contested history; imported and not synchronized political ideology to the Ethiopian scene, inconsistency in political ideology

and fragmented leadership, and political entrepreneurships for one's privilege, have created a vacuum in people's perception and also makes the Ethiopian polity so dynamic.

Generally, the study has explored two words that could at least show what is happening throughout the country. That is the Good, and Bad face of Ethiopia's 2018 political reform. Hence, the good thing about the reform is it at least gives a place for politicians, experts, and media freedom and entertains people's idea, like no other leadership or governments of Ethiopia does. The bad thing about it is it could not bring the country to aspired unity as expected; the media have become untamed and polarized causing people to resort to their ethnic identity results a group mentality. Hence, the Ethiopia's political culture needs to be criticized.

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List of Informants

No	Names of informants	Date and Places of Interview	Remarks
1	Addis	A discussion with Addis took place in Addis Ababa, Bole Sub City; in Barista Coffee House near to Bole Medihanialem Church; on 29/12/2020.	
2	Addis	Interview with him took place in Addis Ababa on April 11 2020	
3	Abduro Hadero (key informant)	Interview and discussion with Abduro took place in our travel to Sidama; Southern Ethiopia on December 10/2019. We also mate three times in Addis Ababa from March 21/2020 up to April 13/2020.	The purpose of our travel was for Sidama Referendum.
4	Alex	A discussion with Alex in Mekele took place at Asey café on February 26/2020 and the next day February 27/2020 early morning Mekele; 16 Kebele.	Alex was also part of the group discussion in Mekele ki ki's café
5	Aster	Aster, lives in Addis Ababa; Gerji, met her in Sidama; Safa Kebele, had interview with her both in Sidama and Addis Ababa, on January 12/2019 and March 2020.	
6	Awote	Interview with Awote took place on February 27/2020 in Mekele, around Kedamae Weyane square, also known as a place where Agazi operation undertaken. Currently, the area holds Mekele city Administration office.	
7	Eden	She was part of group discussion on 23 rd February 2020, in Mekele; Ki Ki's	Formerly work in one of the federal

		yet residence in Addis Ababa	based public media
8	Emanuel	Interview with Emanuel took place in Addis Ababa; Megenagna on April 3/2020 and also on April 5/2020	
9	Eyob	Interview with Eyob in Addis Ababa, Bole Sub City took place on March 21/2020	
10	Fasika	Fasika lives in 6killo (Menen area), met her in Sidama; Safa Kebele, had interview with her both in Sidama and Addis Ababa, on January 12/2019 and March 2020 respectively.	
11	Genet	Interview with Genet took place on February 25/2020 in Mekele city, near to Hawelti	
12	Hayelom	He was part of the group discussion on 23 rd February 2020, in Mekele; Ki Ki's café	He is a friend to my friend and he was very supportive in making possible the interview that took place inside Dr. Tewolde Gesesse Medical College
13	Haylay	Interview with him took place on February 21/2020 in Mekele.	
14	Henock	Interview with Henock also took place on March 27/2020 in Addis Ababa, Bole Ragle café.	

15	Hagos (key informant)	A discussion with Key informant Hagos and his relatives took place in my host home on February 18/2020, late night; Mekele, Adishindhun.	We also discussed several time during my one month stay in Mekele city; from February 18 up to March 2020
16	Israel	Interview with Israel took place in Addis Ababa University main campus and during our meeting in Sidama February 10/2020 and November 15/2019 respectively	
17	Kiday	A discussion with Kiday on February 21/2020, He is a teacher at Dr. Tewelde Gesesse Medical College	
18	Luel	Interview with Luel in Addis Ababa through social media on November 21/2020 at 10:50am and formal interview took place on May 1/2020; in Bole Sub City	
19	Masho	Interview with Masho in Mekele	
20	Senayit	Interview with Senayit took place inside Tigray Civil Service Bureau, around Hawelti. On February 25/2020	
21	Samson (key informant)	The discussion with Key informant Samson in Addis Ababa; Yeka sub city: Megenagna took place several times; from December 2019 up to March 2020 and also on January 3/2021	he was very helpful and insightful
22	Simur	Interview with Simur took place on February 24/2020, in Tigray Civil Service Bureau Mekele	
23	Tesfalem	Interview took place in Mekele around Hawelti	

		on February 24/2020,	
24	Teklemariam	Interview with Teklemariam (Mekele) took place inside the compound Dr. Tewolde Gessess Medical collage on February 22/2020.	
25	Yonas	He was part of the group discussion that took place in Mekele Ki Ki's café, yet he reside in Addis Ababa	He was very supportive during my stay, also his mother host me very warmly
26	Yusuf	Interview with him took place in Addis Ababa	
27	Yoni	A discussion in Addis Ababa, bole Rigel café	
28	Yitebarek	Interview with Yitebarek, Teacher took place on February 21/2020; Mekele; around King Yohannes iv Castel	
29	Zerihun	Interview with him in Addis Ababa; megenagna	
30	Zekarias	A reflection from Zekarias on February 24/2020	

List of Informants in Group Discussion

No	Names	Date and place of Discussion	Remarks
	Alex	He was part of the group discussion that took place in Mekele Ki Ki's café, yet he reside in Addis Ababa	

	Eden	She was part of the group discussion	Helps me to triangulate the various public media outlets whether regional or federal based.
	Hayelom	He was part of the group discussion on 23 rd February 2020, in Mekele; Ki Ki's café	
	Yonas	<<< <<< <<< <<<	

❖ All the names mentioned or used here in the study are pseudo names.