

**ADDIS ABABA UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES
COLLEGE OF SOCIAL SCIENCES, ARTS, AND HUMANITIES
DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE AND INTERNATIONAL
RELATIONS**



**POLITICAL ECONOMY OF STATE-PEASANT RELATIONS IN
ETHIOPIA UNDER EPRDF, 1991-2018: EXPERIENCES FROM
DAWO AND SULULTA, OROMIA NATIONAL REGIONAL
STATE**

**BY
GUTEMA DANIEL ELIAS**

ADDIS ABABA, ETHIOPIA

NOVEMBER 2025
POLITICAL ECONOMY OF STATE-PEASANT RELATIONS IN
ETHIOPIA UNDER EPRDF, 1991-2018: EXPERIENCES FROM
DAWO AND SULULTA, OROMIA NATIONAL REGIONAL
STATE

BY
GUTEMA DANIEL ELIAS

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE SCHOOL OF GRAD-
UATE STUDIES OF ADDIS ABABA UNIVERSITY IN PARTIAL
FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE AWARD
OF THE DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN POLITICAL SCIENCE

SUPERVISOR
SOLOMON MEBRIE (PHD, ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF PO-
LITICAL SCIENCE)

ADDIS ABABA UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES
COLLEGE OF SOCIAL SCIENCES, ARTS, AND HUMANITIES
DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE AND INTERNA-
TIONAL RELATIONS

ADDIS ABABA, ETHIOPIA
NOVEMBER 2025

ADDIS ABABA UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES
COLLEGE OF SOCIAL SCIENCES, ARTS, AND HUMANITIES
DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE AND INTERNATIONAL
RELATIONS

DISSERTATION APPROVAL
APPROVED BY BOARD OF EXAMINERS

This is to certify that the dissertation prepared by Gutema Daniel Elias, entitled "Political Economy of State-Peasant Relations in Ethiopia under EPRDF, 1991-2018: Experiences from Dawo and Sululta, Oromia National Regional State," submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy degree in Political Science, complies with the regulations of the University and meets the accepted standards for originality and quality.

Supervisor	_____	_____
	Signature	Date
Chairman of Defense Session	_____	_____
	Signature	Date
External Examiner	_____	_____
	Signature	Date
Internal Examiner	_____	_____
	Signature	Date

ADDIS ABABA, ETHIOPIA
NOVEMBER 2025

Statement of Author

I hereby declare that this dissertation is my original work. It has not been submitted to obtain an academic degree in this or any other university. All the resources used for this dissertation have been fully acknowledged.

Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

This dissertation is submitted for examination with my approval.

Name of Supervisor: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Table of Contents

Statement of Author.....	i
List of Maps	v
List of Tables	v
Acknowledgment.....	vi
Abbreviations.....	vii
Abstract.....	ix
CHAPTER ONE. INTRODUCTION	1
1.1. Background.....	1
1.2 Statement of the Problem.....	4
1.3 Central Argument	10
1.4 Objectives	11
1.5 Research Methodology	11
1.5.1 Research Design.....	11
1.5.2 Research Approach	15
1.5.3 Research Methods.....	17
1.5.4 Research Locations, Research Locations Selection and Sample Size	19
1.5.5 Method of Analysis.....	25
1.5.6 Validity, Reliability and Generalizability	27
1.6. Ethical Considerations	28
1.7 Scope of the Study	29
1.8 Significance of the Study	30
CHAPTER TWO. THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES AND LITERATURE REVIEW	32
Introduction.....	32
2.1 Theoretical Perspectives	32
2.1.1 Marxist Analysis of Peasantry	32
2.1.2. Neopopulism/Theory of Peasant Economy.....	37
2.1.3 Peasants as “Part-Societies with Part-Cultures” and “Cultural Lag” Approach	38
2.2. A Contingent Conception of State-Society Relation	42
2.3 Review of Empirical Studies	46
2.4 Analytical Framework	52
CHAPTER THREE: STATE, POLITICAL IMPERATIVES, AND AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT POLICIES OF EPRDF	54

Introduction.....	54
3.1. State in Africa and Ethiopia	54
3.2. EPRDF Regime: Origins, Consolidation, Hegemony and Its Rule in Oromia	61
3.2.1 Origins	61
3.2.2 Consolidation	63
3.2.3 Hegemony	65
3.2.4. EPRDF's Rule in Oromia	68
3.3. EPRDF's Rural and Agriculture Development Policies	73
3.3.1 Agricultural Development-Led Industrialization (ADLI).....	75
3.3.2. Agriculture and Rural Development Policy and Strategies	77
3.3.3. Sustainable Development and Poverty Reduction Program (SDPRP)	80
3.3.4 Plan for Accelerated and Sustained Development to End Poverty (PASDEP).....	82
3.4. Conclusion	87
CHAPTER FOUR: ECONOMY, LAND AND PEASANTS	89
Introduction.....	89
4.1. An Overview Agricultural Products and Rural Economy of The Study Sites	90
4.1.1. Local Markets	91
4.1.2 Peasant Differentiation.....	95
4.1.3 Agrarian Labor.....	99
4.1.4 The Changing Terms of Trade	101
4.2. Land Policy and Tenure Security under EPRDF	106
4.2.1 The First Phase Rural Land Titling.....	110
4.2.2. The Second Phase Rural Land Titling	112
4.2.3. Land and “Accumulation by Dispossession” in Peri-urban Sululta	116
4.2.4. Informal Land Transfers in Dawo.....	123
4.3. Cooperatives and Microfinance in Rural Areas.....	125
4.4. Women.....	131
4.5. The Youth	134
4.6. Conclusion	137
CHAPTER FIVE: LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND PEASANTS UNDER EPRDF	141
Introduction.....	141
5.1. Local Government and Peasants	141
5.1.1 Woreda.....	146

5.1.2 Kebele and Sub Kebele Units	148
5.2. Model Farmers and Local Governance	158
5.3. Conclusion	166
CHAPTER SIX: PEASANTS AND POLITICAL CONTESTATION UNDER EPRDF	169
Introduction.....	169
6.1. Peasants and Political Contestation under EPRDF	170
6.2. The 2005 Contested National Election and Representation.....	170
6.3. Oromo Protests	178
6.3.1. Political Process Theory and Political Opportunities.....	181
6.3.2. Mobilization, Framing and Collective Identity in Oromo protest.....	182
6.3.3. Peasants and Oromo Protest.....	184
6.4. Political Action and Peasants.....	188
6.5. Conclusion	192
CHAPTER SEVEN: SYNTHESIS, CONCLUSION, AND POLICY FORESIGHT	193
7.1. Synthesis	193
7.2. Conclusion	199
7.3. Foresight and Policy Implications: Navigating the Liberalizing State	205
References.....	207
Appendix 1.....	228
Guiding Questions for Interviews/FGDs.	228
Appendix 2.....	230
List of Interviews and FGDs.....	230

List of Maps

Map 1. Location of Dawo Woreda.	22
Map 2. Agro-Ecological Zones in Dawo Woreda	23
Map 3. Location of Sululta Town Administration	24
Map 4. Agro-Ecological Zone of Sululta Town Administration	25

List of Tables

Table 1. Respondent Matrix: Breakdown of Primary Data Collection	19
Table 2. Agro-Ecological Zones in Dawo Woreda.	22
Table 3. Analytical and Causal Framework: Key Mechanisms and Outcomes	53
Table 4. Policy Mechanisms Linking Political Imperatives to Agrarian Outcomes	86
Table 5. <i>Kebele</i> Mechanisms of Control: Incentives, Sanctions, and Surveillance	157
Table 6. Dawo vs. Sululta: Differential Outcomes of State-Peasant Relations (1991–2018)	198
Table 7. Contribution to Knowledge	205

Acknowledgment

First and foremost, I would like to thank the Almighty God for all His blessings and support throughout my life. I would like to express my sincere gratitude and appreciation to all those who have contributed to the completion of my Ph.D. dissertation. Without their support, guidance, and encouragement, this achievement would not have been possible.

I am deeply indebted to my supervisor, Dr. Solomon Mebrie, for his expertise, patience, and unwavering support throughout the dissertation work. His guidance and insightful feedback have been instrumental in shaping the direction and quality of the dissertation. He was helpful in many ways from the beginning of my PhD journey, understood the difficult conditions in which this thesis was written, and for that I am grateful. I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Dawit Byazin for being a true friend and my classmate with whom I shared this journey.

I want to thank my family—my wife, Birhane Taye and my kids, Leensaa and Eebbaa, for their constant support and joy you gave me during my long study. Their love, encouragement, and confidence in me have given me the strength and drive to keep going and reach my goals. Last, but not least, I would like to acknowledge the participants who generously gave their time and participated in the research that resulted in this dissertation. Without their cooperation, this study would not have been possible. Their contributions have enriched the findings and added depth to my research.

Abbreviations

ABD- Accumulation by Dispossession

ADLI- Agricultural Development-Led Industrialization

ANDM- Amhara National Democratic Movement

CALM- Climate Action through Landscape Management

CPE- Critical Political Economy

CSOs- Civil Society Organizations

CSRP- Civil Service Reform Program

CUD- Coalition for Unity and Democracy

DAs- Development Agents

DFID- Department of International Development

DLDP- District Level Decentralization Program

EDU- Ethiopian Democratic Union

EFFORT- Endowment Fund for the Rehabilitation of Tigray

ELAP- Ethiopia Land Administration Program

ELTAP- Ethiopia Land Tenure Administration Program

EPDM- Ethiopian People Democratic Movement

EPRDF- Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front

EPRP- Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party

FDRE- Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia

FGDs- Focus Group Discussions

GTP I- Growth and Transformation Plan I

GTP II- Growth and Transformation Plan II

LIFT- Land Investment for Transformation

MDGs- Millennium Development Goals

MoA-Ministry of Agriculture

MOFED- Ministry of Finance and Economic Development

NRLAIS- National Rural Land Administration Information System

OCSSC- Oromia Credit and Saving Share Company

ODP- Oromo Democratic Party

OFDM- Oromo Federalist Democratic Movement

OLF- Oromo Liberation Front

OMN- Oromia Media Network

ONC- Oromo National Congress

OPDO- Oromo People's Democratic Organization

PAs- Peasant Associations

PASDEP- Plan for Accelerated and Sustainable Development to End Poverty

PDOs- People Democratic Organizations

PP- Prosperity Party

PRSP- Poverty Reduction Strategy Program

SDPRP- Sustainable Development and Poverty Reduction Programme

SEZs- Special Economic Zones

SLMP- Sustainable Land Management Program

SM- Social movement

SMEs- Small and Medium Enterprises

SMOs- Social Movement Organizations

SNNPRS- Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples' Regional State

TNO- Tigray National Organization

TPLF- Tigray People's Liberation Front

UEDF- United Ethiopian Democratic Forces

USAID- U.S. Agency for International Development

Abstract

Studies of state-society relations in the post-1991 period have been dominated by interactions between the new federal state structure and various ethno-national groups in the country. Some argued that the benefit of the new dispensation outweighs its negative impacts, while others held the contrary view. Thus, little scholarly attention was paid to another social group, peasantry, that was at the heart of state-society relations, crossing across ethno-national lines, even as the Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) put peasants at the heart of its governance strategy. The study attempts to fill this gap by focusing on the theme of state-peasant relations under EPRDF. The study applied a critical political economy approach to investigate state-peasant relations under EPRDF regime. It applied insights from Marxist, neopopulist and modernization theories to understand the world of peasants. The research adopted a critical social science (critical political economy) approach. The study sites were Dawo Woreda, a rural area and Sululta town, a peri-urban area close to Addis Ababa, that was found Oromia regional state. Data was collected through 28 key informant interviews with experts based at Ministry of Agriculture, Dawo Woreda and Sululta town, Kebele officials, development agents and peasants, and 11 FGDs held with different segments of peasants. The study found that the relation between state and peasants under EPRDF was largely shaped by neopatrimonialism and hegemonic drive of the regime. And the relation was characterized by state domination of peasants through ownership and control over land; local government tentacles that reached and brought every rural household within the purview of the state; constant surveillance and meting out of harsh punishment on peasants that did not tip toe the state-party line. However, peasants were cognizant of their political domination and lack of economic autonomy under EPRDF in spite of the regimes rhetoric that it was the only party that represented the interest of peasants. Thus, when the opportunity presented itself, they showed themselves to be ready to oppose the regime as in 2005 national election and the Oromo protest (2014-2018) that ultimately ejected TPLF dominated EPRDF regime from power at the center.

Key Words: State, Peasants, Critical Political Economy, Neopatrimonialism, Rural Development Policy, Ethiopia, Oromo

CHAPTER ONE. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background

Social science largely ignored peasants during the first half of the twentieth century. The focus was spread of industrialism and the changes it brought, particularly its effect on workers. Moreover, the two world wars were fought largely among industrialized countries. However, in the second half of the twentieth century more attention was paid to peasants. The reasons were that major wars of this period were fought in areas populated by peasants and development needs and political stability of most of the newly independent countries in Asia and Africa required taking into account peasants who constitute significant segment of their population (Landsberger 1972; Shanin 1989a).

Towards the end of twentieth century the renowned historian Hobsbawm wrote that “the most dramatic and far-reaching social change of the second half of this [last] century, and the one which cuts us off for ever from the world of the past, is the death of the peasantry” (quoted in Akram-Lodhi and Cristóbal 2009, 4). Bernstein (2006) concurs that contemporary small farmers are not peasants; they are rather petty commodity producers subsumed within the capitalist mode of production that spawned the globe in the last few decades in the form of neoliberalism. There are, however, those who argue that rather than peasants disappearing, “repeasantization” is taking place from China to Brazil to Europe and that there are 1.2 billion peasants worldwide (van der Ploeg 2008; Akram-Lodhi and Cristóbal 2009). Thus, arguably “agrarian question”, is a question as to what would happen to peasants engaged in subsistence with the intensification of capitalism worldwide remains still relevant. This all the more crucial with appearance of multinational corporations bent on dominating farming, land grab by land hungry countries in global south, intensification of commodification of labour and land, and population growth all threatening economic welfare and democratic rights of millions of peasants.

Many countries in the global south sought agricultural modernization as the answer to most of these problems. Thus, most states in these parts of the world were concerned with “a desire to plan, at rapid pace, the profound social transformation of the countryside” (Harrison 2001, 193). However, most of these states were weak and they cannot implement their designs for the benefit of peasant society (Harrison 2001, 194). Some of these plans were not well received by peasants. And peasants respond to state action that they find unfavorable just like other civilians, either

through “exit” or “voice” to voice their concerns, to use Hirschman’s terminology, the “exit” option includes dissatisfaction expressed “individually by evasive actions, failure to obey, and shifts to alternative sources of services” (cited in de Janvry 1989, 401). The “voice” option “implies collective action [by the peasantry] with interest articulation and aggregation” (cited in de Janvry 1989, 401).

Rural residents constitute almost 80 percent of the Ethiopian population, while agriculture employs a similar share (OECD/PSI 2020). Grain production by small holder peasants dominates the agricultural sector (OECD/PSI 2020, 4, 18). And most of the peasants live in areas without amenities of urban life. Poverty is widespread among peasants. This is true globally as “poverty still has primarily a rural face, with two-thirds of the world’s poor constituted by the rural poor” (Borras, Kay, and Akram-Lodhi 2007, 1). In Ethiopia too “poverty is virtually synonymous with rurality, and the non-poor in the countryside are a tiny minority of the population” (Dessalegn 2009, 230). Yet, the nature of proper policy/policies that can significantly reduce rural poverty in Ethiopia is controversial.

An understanding of Ethiopian society and politics also requires taking full account of peasants’ contribution to the economy and their role in society-state relations. Huntington, in his seminal work *Political Order in Changing Societies*, wrote “the gap between city and countryside is the crux of politics in modernizing societies” (2006, 301-302). As a modernizing society, Ethiopia couldn’t be any different.

For a long time, state-society relations and state-peasant relations in Ethiopia has been “characterized by a deep power imbalance” (Prunier 2015, 201). The imperial regime of Haile Sellasie was built at the expense of the peasantry thanks to its feudal nature, even though it was the first in Ethiopian history to design and implement agricultural development policies in the form of five-year plans that runs from 1957-1974. The first two of these plans gave priority to commercial and mechanized agriculture while the last one paid some attention to smallholder peasant farms. The peasant revolts in Tigray, Gojjam and Bale challenged the foundations of the regime and had to be put down forcefully (Gebru 1991). These were, however, separate movements that did not come together to ensure systemic change. In other words, “the peasantry never became sufficiently organized or politically articulated to pose a real threat to the political and economic order” of the imperial regime (Clapham 2015, 201).

The predicament of the rural poor was important in serving as a driving force behind the advent of the 1974 revolution. However, it was other urban social forces that triggered the revolution that culminated in the army's takeover of power in 1974. Significantly, Ethiopian students developed the slogan, "land to the tiller" to challenge the imperial regime (Prunier 2015, 201). Their call for land reform will have a lasting consequence for Ethiopian state and society as the Land Reform of 1975 by the military regime shattered the economic foundation of the *ancien regime* as did the new Peasant Associations established to expedite the reform. This fundamentally changed the political landscape in the rural areas, bringing the state closer to the peasants. Agricultural and rural development policies of the military rule emphasized collective farming and state farms neglecting small holder peasant farms just like most socialist regimes of the period. Initially the military regime obtained enthusiastic support of the peasantry during the first few years of its existence due to the land reform. However, later policies like "collectivization", villagization and forced resettlement made the peasants turn their back on the regime through different forms of resistance (giving lukewarm support to these policies, withholding their product and resisting conscription and deserting from the army) short of rebelling in most parts of the country.

In the northern part of the country the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) led rebellion was successful in toppling the military regime in 1991 largely supported by Tigrayan peasants (Young 1997). The TPLF-dominated Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) regime that came to power after overthrowing the military regime put the peasantry at the forefront as the center of its economic and political policy. To be sure, both the imperial regime and military rule have agricultural and rural development policies, but they largely saw peasant agriculture as remnant of the past to be replaced by commercial agriculture under imperial regime and socialist agriculture in the case of military rule. Agriculture itself was seen as a means to industrialization and secondary to industrialization.

Migdal argues that understanding of politics in developing countries requires going beyond what happens in the urban areas and that "there is a need to constantly go back and forth between the top reach of the state and local society" (1988, xvii). For vulnerable and marginalized individuals in these countries the struggle to have control over their lives is dominated by conflict with and resistance against both the "exploitative local powers" and the modernization drive of states

“intent on transforming them and ridding them of their most cherished values” (Migdal 1988, xxi).

It is against this backdrop the study deal with the relation between state and peasantry under EPRDF regime focusing on rural policy and practice, the institution put in place for “peasant capture”, and the modality of peasantry’s interaction with state’s presence in its midst.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Studies of political contestations under EPRDF mostly focus on ethno-national factors (Gudina 2003; Lata 1999). Fisseha (2024, 162) wrote that the fundamental slogan of EPRDF was ““Class in content, ethnonational in form””, without elaborating the content. The major contribution of this study is exploring and analyzing the class content of political economy and contestation under EPRDF. Thus, it brings to the center stage the position and role of peasants, the largest social group in Ethiopia, in the state-society relations under EPRDF.

The engagement of peasants in politics is mostly characterized as passive resistance to imperatives states and market forces that negatively affected their livelihood. Peasants have resisted state-led projects mostly by neither opposing government policies nor rebelling against the state. Rather, their “strategy has been one of sabotage and subterfuge: the aim is to render a project defunct without state officials realizing that failure is a result of purposive peasant action” (Harrison 2001, 193). In this way, peasants avoid punishment, scrutiny, and intervention from the state. Scott (1985, xvi) argues that it is crucial to study instead of the less frequent open and organized political activity by peasants, the more mundane, ordinary, and everyday form of peasant resistance. This against “those who seek to extract labor, food, taxes, rents, and interest from them” through “foot dragging, dissimulation, desertion, false compliance, pilfering, feigned ignorance, slander, arson, sabotage, and so on” (Scott 1985, xvi).

The economic policy of Ethiopia during the monarchy (1941-74) and the military rule (1974-91) prioritized the industrial sector and saw agriculture and agricultural modernization to generate foreign currency (OECD/PSI 2020). After EPRDF came to power agriculture became central to the economic policy of the country. The national economic strategy of EPRDF, i.e. Agricultural Development-Led Industrialization (ADLI) gave centrality to the tens of millions of small-holder farmers. It underpinned Ethiopia’s “rural development action since the mid-1990s” and served as

the basis for subsequent development plans and programmes (Sustainable Development and Poverty Reduction Programme (SDPRP), Plan for Accelerated and Sustainable Development to End Poverty (PASDEP), Growth and Transformation Plan I (GTP I), and Growth and Transformation Plan II (GTP II)) (OECD/PSI 2020).

However, arguably the major reason behind EPRDF's rural and agricultural policy was political control, even if economic benefits were also sought. TPLF led EPRDF was not a democratic front competing within a democratic political system in spite of the pretense of multiparty elections. It used its "coalition" with peasants to undermine any opposition to its hegemonic rule. TPLF's was the dominant member of EPRDF and in order to rule the rest of Ethiopia, beyond its original social base of Tigrayan province, it merged with and created other members of EPRDF coalition. These coalition members or PDOs (People Democratic Organizations) were used to undercut alternative political forces among other ethnic groups (Merara 2003). From the very beginning EPRDF was not willing to negotiate and work with "elite groups" from other ethnicities, preferring to ostensibly work with the masses/peasants. Meles Zenawi, EPRDF leader for a long time, argued in 1994 for coalition with rural people who were supposed to choose his front based on understanding and energizing grassroots participation, at the same time rejecting alliance with elites not coopted by EPRDF even when they have similar program:

We ally with people. Eighty-five percent of the population lives in rural areas. Any alliance that helped us to mobilise this eighty-five percent we made; any that didn't, we didn't. And we have succeeded, not only because of those who were positively inclined to the EPRDF but primarily because of those who were not, because these people are reference points (Sarah Vaughan Interview with Meles Zenawi, August 1994, Vaughan 2003, 185).

The real reason, however, it seems was sidelining elites from other groups by aligning with peasantry and creating a dominant party system sustained by "overwhelming support of rural voters" (Huntington 1993, 10). In spite of the radical changes made to modality of governance by both military rule and EPRDF, there continued the trajectory of monopoly of central power by elites from Northern Ethiopia. The attempts to disguise this by declaring war on injustice of class inequality division by Derg and "national oppression" by EPRDF was futile as "the subterfuge [remained] apparent" (Markakis 2011, 14).

Kassahun also points that in addition to its "presumed" economic benefits, "a major component

of transforming smallholder agriculture is driven by political imperatives aimed at effectively controlling the bulk of the Ethiopian electorate whose votes in periodic elections are crucial to the regime's perpetuation in power" (2012, 2). For Lefort also the motivation behind EPRDF's rural policy "was perhaps more political than economic" (2015, 363). However, he adds another political reason for EPRDF placing peasants at the center of its national development policies was that as a left leaning political party it cannot base its rule on the industrial proletariat that constitutes a tiny minority in the country. Therefore, it chose "the most numerous and poorest class in the country, the class which had been most exploited, and which had given its blood to overthrow the Derg—the peasant class" as the social base for its rule (Lefort 2015, 363).

The implication of hegemonic aspiration of EPRDF was that peasants have no way to influence agricultural and rural development policies that affect their livelihood and did not own the policies made. The overall rural governance architecture under EPRDF was not democratic. The local government level closer to peasants was *Kebele*, the lowest tier of local government in Ethiopia. However, it was not a place where peasants engage in a form of local democracy to influence government policies and activities. Rather it was an instrument of the government through which it penetrates rural areas and controls peasants (Dessalegn 2009; Emmenegger and Keno 2011).

By the beginning of the 2000s, ADLI was not working as expected since "agricultural output per capital was still roughly the same as in the last few years of the military rule and less than the last years of the imperial regime" (Lefort 2015, 364). Therefore, the regime reviewed its economic and political strategy that came to be known as *Tehadeso* (Renewal). EPRDF shifted its economic and political focus from poor peasants towards the wealthier peasantry, also known as "model farmers"¹ and the urban petty bourgeoisie. "Previously the focus was on attaining "food security" and thus uniformly targeted the whole peasant population that was overwhelmingly composed of subsistence farmers (Lefort 2010, 436). The new priority was "commercial farming", which ranks first in the upper economic cluster composed of market surplus farmers" (Lefort 2010, 436). This is an indication of government's attempt reinvigorate agricultural production by

¹ Model farmers are those peasants seen as capable of spearheading increase in agricultural productivity by employing extension packages, producing for market and having entrepreneurial inclinations by EPRDF government (Berhanu and Amdework 2011).

encouraging agrarian capitalism which in other historical context was followed by peasant stratification and emergence of class differentiation within the peasantry.

Under EPRDF, political control trumped other considerations and fostered an environment that neutralized the initiative of peasants from taking advantage of expanding market opportunities leading to avoidance rather than owning of government policy initiatives, even when it prevented direct peasant resistance against the government, unlike the times of imperial (Gebru 1991) and military rule (Young 1997). The extension program, “the largest and fastest growing in [African] continent” (Kassahun and Colin 2014, s198), was put in place by the government to improve productivity of smallholder peasants by providing training, improved seed, fertilizer, pesticides, etc. This did not lead to the expected level of economic growth, due to politicization of the program and engagement of Development Agents (DAs) in pro-regime political activities. On a positive note, the government was capable of preventing famine despite successive droughts through significantly improving economic performance resulting from increased inflow of foreign direct investment and robust infrastructure development (Lavers 2023, 3).

Changes and continuities in EPRDF’s overall rural policy and practice towards the peasantry constitute the crux of this study. There are scholarly works on relations between the peasantry and the state in Ethiopia (Aspen 2002; Dessalegn 2009; Lefort 2007, 2010, 2012; Poluha 2002). The major problem with some these studies is that they forego the impact of capitalism and government policies on class structure and class differentiation among peasantry, except for Dessalegn (2009), Ege (2019) and Lefort (2012). Class/rural differentiation is understood here as a permanent change in the way different groups/classes access own or others labour products based on difference in control over productive resources, this often being land (White 1992, 20). This in turn affects power relation among peasants and between peasants and the state in a dialectical manner. The local level study of peasant differentiation and local institutional arrangement can be linked with national political-economic strategy through researching exercise of power at different levels of society (Hart *et al.* 1989).

Dessalegn (2009) first dealt with the impact of commercial farming and the incipient agrarian capitalism during imperial regime on class differentiation among peasantry (2009, 81-110; see also Markakis and Nega 1986, 55-60 for brief treatment of the same). Second, he dealt with traditional (non-ideological) rural unrest in Wollo province under imperial and military rule

(2009, 111-88) emphasizing the class dynamics of the unrest, with crucial role given to local gentry in the unrest, thanks to the position, mediating between peasantry and central government. This finding conforms to Eric Wolf's contention that middle peasants and poor but "free" peasants play crucial role in peasant uprising due to their "tactical mobility" (1999, 292-93). However, Young in his study of Tigrayan peasant mobilization by TPLF argues class difference had no impact on peasants' participation in the rebellion (1997, 20). Desalegn's work dealt with the time of revolutionary upheaval of 1970s and focusing on an area that later became Amhara region.

There are some studies on the impact of agricultural and rural policies of EPRDF on the class differentiation among peasantry since 1991. Lefort (2012) and Ege (2019) deal with agrarian change in Amhara region under EPRDF. Lefort (2012) explored the regimes attempt to solidify its rule by "enrolling massively among those at the top of the social pyramid" both in urban and rural areas (2012, 681). In the aftermath of the stiff competition the regime faced in the 2005 national election this meant massive recruitment of model farmers into the ruling party. Even though this work is strong in bringing to the foreground the "savvy" political machination behind the regime agricultural and rural development policies, it remains a rather sketchy work that does neither clearly define rural classes nor brings sufficient empirical data to support its arguments. Ege's (2009) work was focused on land tenure and to an extent its implication for rural class differentiation in Amhara region, which has different socio-economic and political background different from that of Oromia region. More relevant for this study was that Amhara region was not subject to serf like *Gebbar* system that took land from peasants in Oromo lands after their conquest by Emperor Menelik, and the traditional *rist-gult* land tenure prevailed in Amhara region (Dessalegn, 2009). The 1975 land reform that brought an end to Gebbar system in Southern Ethiopia was more consequential for evolution of rural economic relations of Oromia than Amhara region (Davies, 2008).

Another scholarly work that dealt with an emergent class of model farmers by Abeje and Ezana (2011) defined rich/model farmers and enumerated measures used to differentiate them from other peasants. In line with the objective of the study, it mostly dealt with entrepreneurial initiative that exists among model farmers, the impact these farmers on wider community and the direct and indirect factors behind the success of this class of farmers. The possibility of state

patronage of model farmers and its implication for control over farmers and power relation among farmers, were not explored, considering most model farmers were also leaders of local government, including sub *Kebele* organizations (Abeje and Ezana 2011, 68) which came into widespread use after the competitive and controversial 2005 national election.

One commonality between Lefort (2012), Ege (2019) and Abeje and Ezana (2011) was that they rely on empirical data from Amhara National Regional State. This area falls within the “core highland” part of Ethiopia (Clapham 2017). The ruling elites of Ethiopia hail from this area (Teshale 1995; Merara 2003). Studies dealing with agrarian change and relations under EPRDF in Oromia region are absent. This is crucial gap considering that it leaves out the impact of the turn in EPRDF’s agricultural and rural policies from smallholder-centered to capitalist farmers or “model farmers” on rural economy and politics in Oromia. Oromia is the largest and most populous region; the regime faced serious legitimacy issues here from the beginning; and it is a major agricultural production area, including those exported to generate foreign currency.

Another contribution of this study is that it attempted to relate the unravelling of the EPRDF since 2014/15 with its policy towards peasantry. Unlike previous studies on state-peasant relations under EPRDF, this research was conducted after the popular protests in Oromia triggered by fear of eviction of Oromo peasants under TPLF led EPRDF’s “developmental state” and supported by peasants led to fundamental change of power at the center of Ethiopian state. Overall, a wholistic picture of state-peasant relations under the EPRDF was obtained in this research. This allowed the research to examine the perspective of peasants on the earlier and later rural policies of the EPRDF and their relation to the dynamics of state-society relation under the EPRDF. Of the two case studies for the study, peasants in Sululta, were directly affected by past evictions by the state, while in Dawo fear of future eviction was what animated their involvement in the popular protests. Chapter 6 deals in detail with these issues from the perspective of social movement and social change under authoritarian regimes and the political contestations involved.

This study attempted to fill these gaps and bring into sharper focus regimes relation with peasantry of Oromia region which falls within the “highland periphery” (Clapham 2017). Study of African state rural governance strategies indicate that variations in mode of rural governance or center/periphery relations can in part be explained by factors internal to African rural societies: “class and communal structure” (Boone 2003, 9). Moreover, it was largely “Oromo protest” of

2014-2018 in Oromia region which was triggered by the displacement Oromo peasants in the vicinity of the expanding capital, Addis Ababa that brought an end to TPLF domination central power in 2018. Thus, among other things, this study tried to empirically investigate if class differentiation/ rural differentiation/peasant differentiation had (had not) taken place since this has significant implication for the questions of what kind of state-peasant relations prevailed under EPRDF as well as whether agrarian transition towards a more capitalist mode of production did take place in rural Ethiopia during 1991-2018. As a study of political economy of rural policies of EPRDF it linked this with changes (absence of change) in power relations and power exercise in rural areas of the country.

Second, this research also attempted to interrogate the political behavior of peasants within the larger framework of global peasant studies. Peasants' political behavior is induced by the objective/material environment and their subjective understanding of the world they live in, namely political consciousness. Peasants are either receptive or resistant to government policies based on their subjective understanding of their interests and also their objective condition that emanates from economics of peasant households as consumers and producers of most necessities of life within an economic system that is largely dominated by capitalist mode of production over the last few decades throughout the world (Akram-Lodhi, Kay, and Saturnino M. Borras 2009; Huntington 2006; Scott 1985). How peasants interacted (resist, accept, neglect) with EPRDF regime and its policies was interrogated within this framework.

In sum, this study researched national agricultural and rural development policies of EPRDF and its impact on rural society (values and beliefs), rural economy (class structure) and governance (power relations) with case studies from Dawo *Woreda* (a tier of local government above kebele and below zones) of South-West Shoa Zone and Sululta town of Special Zone Surrounding Finfinne of Oromia National Regional State.

1.3 Central Argument

EPRDF's agriculture and rural development policies have twin objectives: political control and economic development. However, whenever there was contradiction between the two, the political imperative of regime survival overrode economic development. The result was both authoritarian rule over the peasantry and sowing the seeds of agrarian capitalism, market penetration and incipient class differentiation in the countryside of Ethiopia. The negative impact

of these developments on their life world and livelihood of peasants led them to exploit opportunities to resist the regime: through voting for opposition political parties in elections and supporting social movement.

1.4 Objectives

The overall objective of this study was analyzing the political economy of the interaction between the state and peasants in Ethiopia under EPRDF rule (1991-2018). In order to achieve this objective, the research tried to answer the following specific research questions:

- What were the nature of the Ethiopian state and political imperatives under the EPRDF that drove the regime's policies and politics regarding peasants;
- How did the peasants relate with EPRDF's agriculture and rural development policies and practices;
- Was there emergence of rural class differentiation under EPRDF rule;
- What were the interests, motives/intentions and understandings (consciousnesses) that shaped peasants' interactions with institutions of local governance; and
- How did peasants' political participation affect political contestations under EPRDF.

1.5 Research Methodology

1.5.1 Research Design

Research paradigm, popularized by Thomas Kuhn, means a “general organizing framework for theory and research that includes basic assumptions, key issues, models of quality research, and methods for seeking answers” (Neuman 2013, 69). The ontological foundation of this research was critical realist relational perspective. Relational approaches in social sciences emerged to give the much-needed correction to the one-sidedness of “substantialism” (Dépelteau 2018). A relational approach tries to overcome binary oppositions in social sciences, such as agency and structure, holism and individualism, global and local (Bramwell 2007, 768). It is important also to note the concept of power that unifies the diverse field of political science is “at its very core, *relational*” since any meaningful exercise of power by individual or institution can be understood in terms its impact on other actors (McClurg and Young 2011, 39 emphasis original). Social scientists adopting the post-modernist relational approach or relationalism go further to argue relations necessarily “constitute” entities in relationship, and as such relations are not something

secondary but primary (Emirbayer 1997; Selg and Ventsel 2020). However, in line with *critical realist relational approach* used for this study, we do not prioritize either the entities or the relations as “substances and relations are co-principles of reality” (Donati 2015, 2). The power relation between state and peasants, and the institutions that mediate that relationship are focal in this research. As such not only are we concerned with the essences of state and peasants as social entities that impinge on their relations, but the relations themselves are taken seriously.

In our study of relation of state and peasants, we recognize the importance of their relationship in their constitution, as Wolf (1966) did, but we recognize there are properties of state and peasant that do not drive from that relation. These essences of state and peasant affect their relation; however, we cannot reduce those essences to the relation. In short, there is more to state and peasant that is not merely their relation, important as the relation is. For example, some social scientist have argued strongly that state has autonomy from society thanks to its bureaucratic and coercive apparatus, even as it operates within social relations, and furthermore, that it is not merely an instrument of ruling classes or other social forces (Skocpol 1979). Even though the approach here embeds the state more within society, we note from the critique of those who treat state as autonomous, the importance avoiding conflation of state and society and that lack of some measure autonomy from social forces indicate “failure” of statehood (see chapter two for the contingent approach to state-society relation used in this study). Peasants are also not merely defined by their relationship with market, important as it is, and their essence as family labour employing economic entity primarily concerned subsistence, not profit motive, in spite of their relation with market should be taken seriously (Akram-Lodhi, Kay, and Saturnino M. Borras 2009). Both state and peasantry have other relations, “has boundaries with the outside with which there are exchanges” including the global capitalist system (Donati 2015, 5). The study takes a position between “substantialism” and relationalism approaches (Emirbayer 1997). As will be shown, the study notes state actions has changed the “constitution” of peasants more than is the case with the reverse, a result possible with “inter-action”, not with post-modernist “trans-action” (Donati 2015; Selg and Ventsel 2020). The assumption here is “social relation can be viewed both as an element essential to the process of emergence and as an emergent (structural entity) in itself” (Donati 2015, 5).

The epistemological paradigm that guided this study was at a broader level *critical social*

science. Critical social science maintains that knowledge production itself is structured by existing social relations. The aim of critical social research is to confront the dominant social structures which are considered as oppressive (Harvey 1990). Critical social science is a middle of the way paradigm that avoids law like empiricism of positivist social science and the subjective and voluntarist way of interpretative social science. It argues that social reality exists prior to our perception of it, yet our perception of this reality is dependent on our concepts and theories. In broad terms critical social science engages in “process of inquiry that goes beyond surface illusions to uncover the real structures in the material world in order to help people change conditions and build a better world for themselves” (Neuman 2013, 110). It assumes that reification and false consciousness can stand in the way of human emancipation. The way towards emancipation can be paved through explanatory critique in which we study the social world and how people understand it in order to produce knowledge that values the process of integrating “making observations, reflecting on them, and taking action” (Neuman 2013, 210-17).

Critical social science is often tied to critical theory first developed by the Frankfurt School in Germany in the 1930s and also conflict theory, feminist analysis, and radical psychotherapy (Neuman 2013, 110). More relevant for this study was critical theory’s attempt to understand central dynamics of contemporary society by comprehending “processes involved in historical and social development and tracing contradictions in the present which may open up the possibility of emancipation of contemporary society from its built-in pathologies and forms of domination” (Devetak 2013, 164). For Habermas contemporary society is dominated by instrumental reason, i.e. choosing the best means to end. This is manifested in the two most important institutions of modern complex societies, i.e. the market (in the form of maximizing profit) and the state (mainly as an increase of power). This has led to instrumental reason’s “colonization of life world” and decline of communicative reason, that is, “resolution of problems over truth and moral goodness” through open and free deliberation of everyone affected by the decision (Edgar 2006). This study assumes that peasants are victims of instrumental logic of states that operate in largely worldwide capitalist system. Peasants are marginalized politically and exploited economically in this system. Thus, the importance of grounding this research within Critical Social Sciences/Critical Theories assumption that enlightenment project remains unfinished unless we take stock of the dynamics of contemporary capitalist societies in which

states are hegemonic and how they infringe on human freedom while contemplating possibility emancipation. In that spirit, this study illuminates the tension between state and market which are under the sway of instrumental rationality on the one hand and peasants attempt to hold onto their agency, freedom and communicative rationality in a neo-liberal age that pits the former against the latter.

Within the broader critical social science, the approach adopted for this study was *critical political economy since it better serves us to gain insight into political economy of state-peasant relations in Ethiopia*. Classical liberal political economy of 18th that grew in Great Britain focused on how wealth of monarch and its subjects can be increased (Scherrer, Garcia, and Wullweber 2023). With neoclassical economics the scope of political economy was narrowed to market transactions (Scherrer, Garcia, and Wullweber 2023). In the field of liberal economics, political economy emerged as a subfield that applied economic methodology to the study of politics (Scherrer, Garcia, and Wullweber 2023). In post-war Germany and France political economy is related with Marxism which pays more attention to capitalism and class divisions than rational individuals of liberal political economy (Scherrer, Garcia, and Wullweber 2023). These three approaches: economic nationalism, economic liberalism, and critical political economy, respectively, cover broad issues politics and economics, all recognize that economy and politics are related, and yet have different priorities. Economic nationalism focuses on economic strength of states, liberalism on welfare of individuals, and **critical political economy (CPE)** is “primarily concerned with analyzing and overcoming economic inequalities among different groups on diverse social levels, from the individual household to the global community” ((Scherrer, Garcia, and Wullweber 2023, 3). A common ontological position within CPE is that humans are social beings that cannot be understood outside their social context, in other words social world is constituted relationally. There is a plurality of epistemological positions, spanning the gamut from the original historical dialectics to positivist and post-positivist approaches, which all seek to gain insight into human societies (Wullweber, 2015; Wullweber & Scherrer, 2011). In this study we adopt critical social science’s is a middle of the way paradigm between positivist social science and the subjective and interpretative social science In critical political economy, a wide variety of methods can be found, ranging from regression analysis, triangulation, and comparative approaches, to retroduction and ethnographic methods. Its openness to other social sciences and sensitivity towards societal inequalities without neglecting

either interstate rivalries or individual agency promises a more holistic approach and therefore more convincing insights into political economies is employed (Scherrer, Garcia, and Wullweber 2023, 3). Critical political economy applied to study of contemporary peasants' relationship with state entails, among other things investigating "the social relations and dynamics of production and reproduction, property and power in agrarian formations and their processes of change, both historical and contemporary" (Bernstein quoted in Akram-Lodhi et al 2021, 4).

With its focus on relationships of peasants, most of them poor, and the state, this study adopted the critical political economy approach since this allows us to understand structural economic inequalities and power imbalances that pertain to that relationship. Critical political economy is also utilized as the overarching lens to move analysis beyond surface phenomena (like poverty figures or production data) to uncover structural economic inequalities and power imbalances. In chapter two, we shall deal with meso-theories, specially Marixt and Chayanovian theories, derived from critical political economy, to gain understanding of dynamics of agrarian economy and paths to transitions. In chapter four we deal with economic changes and class dynamics in rural areas (including those on margins of towns/cities) engendered by EPRDF development policies, the institutions established by EPRDF to regulate rural economy (microfinances and cooperatives) and the regimes evolving land governance in relation to its economic and political imperatives. Chapter five and six deal with peasants' relation to local governance and national political contestations (including those that touched on economic issues like state driven "accumulation by dispossession" of peasants' land) under EPRDF.

1.5.2 Research Approach

Any research in the field of social sciences has to clearly indicate the methodology employed because which research methodology makes given research "scientific" is still as controversial as it was in the past. Research methodology is "a reflection on empirical research, on the appropriateness of the procedures and the assumptions used in relation to the intellectual intent of the researcher" (Lazarsfeld and Rosenberg quoted in Curini and Robert 2020, xxxix). The research employed a qualitative methodological approach, which focuses "on puzzling within-case transformations or variation in events and institutions across a limited number of cases" this is in order to "unpack the historical, social and political processes that cause these effects" (González-Ocantos 2020, 104). Quantitative methodology, on the other hand, seeks to measure

the effect of a causal factor or independent variable in a given population (González-Ocantos 2020, 104).

The first reason for preferring qualitative approach for this study was that it helps in “reporting multiple perspectives, identifying the many factors involved in a situation, and generally sketching the larger picture that emerges [which] is not necessarily a linear model of cause and effect but rather a model of multiple factors interacting in different ways” (Creswell and John 2018, 258). This is true of the multiple factors affecting the interaction between peasants and state under EPRDF: global economy in which Ethiopian economy is embedded, the level of capitalist penetration, class dynamics and struggles, political imperative of the government, government administrative capacity and structures and etc. A holistic picture of these relations can be better grasped through a qualitative approach.

The second reason for selecting qualitative methodology as an approach was difficulty of conducting quantitative research relevant to the study. The research largely was about state-peasant relations under EPRDF, which was in the past at the time of field work. Thus, it relied significantly on narrative and recollection generated by participants regarding the trends in terms of property relations, formation of capital and wage labor over the years under EPRDF. To answer research questions eliciting narratives, themes, and meanings through interviews and Focus Group Discussions with different strata of peasants and government officials was found to be more appropriate. The general difficulty of conducting quantitative research in rural parts of Ethiopia: illiteracy, unreliability of data generated, absence of skilled and qualified manpower and that it requires expending significant resource (Pausewang 1973) was taken into in choosing qualitative research approach.

Third, the research used multiple sources of data, combining inductive data analysis with deductive thinking, emphasizing participants’ meanings and requiring reflexivity on the part of the researcher, which taken together made qualitative research approach more appropriate for this study (Creswell and John 2018, 257-58). Qualitative research approach with its focus on contexts and processes help us better understand the impact of both EPRDF agriculture and smallholder-centered national economic strategy, i.e. ADLI, early in its reign and the change in its policy focus towards the so called “model farmers” after 2000s on peasants and how this affected state-peasant relations.

1.5.3 Research Methods

The two major methods of data collection use in this study are interviews and Focus Group Discussions.

1.5.3.1 Interviews

Interviews were a major instrument of data collection for the study. Interviews have the advantage that the data generated “lend themselves to developing theories, supporting causal claims, and understanding complex social phenomena in a depth” (Greenstein and Layna 2020, 1168). The format of the interviews was semi-structured and open ended to provide a wider latitude for participants to reveal their understanding of and explanation for peasant-state interaction under EPRDF. In depth interviews with peasants (model farmers and rich peasants; middle peasants; poor peasants) provided data on the meaning peasants attach to their position (strata) within the rural community, to the presence of local government structures and market in their midst and their explanations for their relationship with the state. Key informant interviews with government officials including experts at *Kebele*, *Woreda* and Ministry of Agriculture (MoA) included discussions of impact of government policy on productivity of peasants, property relations, land and power relations in rural areas.

Interviews with government officials directly or indirectly concerned with policy formulation and implementation generated data on common assumptions underlying the thinking of elites on agricultural and rural development policies. Interviews with peasant provided insight into their “perceptions, behavior, and attitudes” (Greenstein and Layna 2020, 1169) that elucidated their interaction with one another and political and economic institutions that affected their lives.

Interviews, both indepth and key informant, were conducted in two *Kebeles* of Dawo *Woreda* and one *Kebele* of Sululta *Woreda*. Around twenty-eight (28) individual interviews with peasants, DAs, *Kebele* officials, *Woreda* official, MoA officials and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) officials were conducted (for details on the interviews, see Appendix 2). Since there is no strict formula for appropriate sample size in qualitative research, saturation of data determined the adequate sample size for this research, meaning data gathering was stopped “when gathering fresh data no longer sparks new insights or reveals new properties” (Creswell and John 2018 262). This was done with one caveat in mind, the researchers critically engaged with the patterns that emerged and sought alternative explanations during the interviews (Marshall and Rossman

2016, 423).

1.5.3.2 Focus Group Discussions

Focus Group Discussions was the second major instrument of data collection for this study. FGDs can be defined “as a research technique that collects data through group interaction on a topic determined by the researcher” (Morgan cited in Van Ingelgomin 2020, 1190). FGDs that included different segments of peasants (women, youth, elders, rich peasants, middle peasants, poor peasants) and also with government officials were conducted. Each FGD consisted of five to seven members. In the FGDs peasants were invited to discuss their views and perceptions of state-peasant relations under EPRDF (Ingelgom 2020, 1190). The researcher played the role of a moderator leading the discussion on issues of concern to farming households and to get hold of their take on EPRDF policies and their interaction with institutions of local government and the market. FGDs were considered beneficial for this study in that they corroborate information, correct memory lapses, and open space for debates on controversial issues among participants.

A total of eleven (11) FGDs were conducted for this research and just like the interview saturation of data ultimately decided the final tally (for details on the FGDs, see Appendix 2). In general, interviews and FGDs were chosen since they have the advantage of allowing interviewees and participants in FGDs to provide historical material, useful for the research on past interaction between peasants and EPRDF government for which direct observation was difficult since the data was collected after the political reforms in 2018 changed much of TPLF dominated EPRDF. Furthermore, the subject matter of this study covered a period over two decades analyzing the evolution of EPRDF’s agricultural and rural development policies and their impact on state-peasant relations over that period. These instruments also allowed the researcher to control the direction of questioning. Their disadvantage was that they provide indirect information shaped by the perspective of the participants, where the presence of researchers might lead to biases and all participants may not be articulate and perceptive of the issues discussed (Kreswell and John 2018, 264). The researcher attempted to reduce the disadvantages of interviews and FGDs by triangulation through consulting agricultural experts at different levels, reviewing official government documents and reports and other studies on the subject matter.

To sum up, the primary data for the study was elicited through key informant interviews with

government officials and experts based at Ministry of Agriculture (MOA), Dawo *Woreda* and Sululta town, *Kebele* officials and DAs and in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with different segments of peasants. The interviews and FGDs were organized in such a way that when we finished data collection in one *Kebele*, we moved to the next one. The order by which FGDs and interviews were conducted depended on convenience of peasants and officials, made necessary by insecurity in Oromia region and work schedules of the participants. Secondary sources of data were published and unpublished academic works, scholarly journal articles, research reports and review of policy documents.

Table 1. Respondent Matrix: Breakdown of Primary Data Collection

Source Type	Total N (Count)	Dawo Woreda (Rural)	Sululta Town (Peri-Urban/Sheger)	Federal/CSO Officials
Key Informant Interviews (KIIs)	28	18	8	2
Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)	11	8	3	N/A
Total Primary Data Points	39	-	-	-

1.5.4 Research Locations, Research Locations Selection and Sample Size

Two study locations were chosen for the study. The first was Dawo *woreda*, found in South-West Shoa Zone of Oromiaa National Regional State. The *Woreda* has 24 *Kebeles* covering a total land area of 500.90KM² or 50092.94Ha. The district town is Busa, and its approximately located at Latitudes: 8°40'00"N - 8°60'00" and Longitudes: 37°55'00" E – 38°15'00"E. It is surrounded in North East by Ilu, in North West by Dandi, in South by Woliso, in South East by Becho and in South West by Wonchi Woredas. There are three agro-ecological zones in Dawo *Woreda*. These are Dry to Wet Cool Highland (Weyna-Dega), Moist to Wet Cold Highland (Dega) and Moist to Wet Alpine (Low Wurch), approximately covering 63.4%, 21.4 and 15.2% area of the *Woreda*, respectively (EthioGIS MapServer 2022).

The second study site was Sululta Town, found in Oromia special zone surrounding Finfinne, of Oromia National Regional State. It is one of the eight towns or woredas of Oromia special zone bordering Addis Ababa. Sululta is located 23 KM north of Addis Ababa. It is situated between 09° 1784'N and 038° 7579'E possessing an elevation between 2600 - 3230 meters above sea level. The town has four kebeles namely Sululta 01, Abbichu, Qaso Wasarbii and Wale Lubee with a total land size of 4,470.50 hectares (Beka, 2016). Although Sululta town has witnessed significant urbanization in recent years, the area is more a peri-urban area², than a proper urban area since it is still populated by peasants who engage in family-owned farms that utilize largely family labor.

The major reason for the selection of the Dawo and Sululta was that they fall within an area Clapham calls “highland periphery” (2017, 22). TPLF did not mobilize the peasants in these areas for its war against Derg, rather it imposed its rule on them after defeating Derg. Arguably these regions will play critical role in Ethiopia since their altitudes allow settled agriculture and are “accustomed to the basic level of governance that settlement requires, have at the same time been largely excluded from the existing structure of states” (Clapham 2017, 22). How the people in highland periphery are incorporated in Ethiopian state will significantly affect the contours of Ethiopian politics.

The cases for this study were also selected because they provide opportunities to study state-peasant relations. Case selection was unavoidable since even in large collective case studies cases were small that random sampling was not feasible (Stakes 2005, 451). Rather purposive sampling, building in variety and opportunity to learn were more important criteria for case selection (Stakes 2005, 451). Thus, the selection of Dawo and Sululta was purposeful in that they were found in “highland periphery”, the majority of the peasants were smallholders and yet model farmers, and poor peasants were also found, and they were found close to power center, the capital. The design was that of multiple case study, which allows an extension of instrumental study (in which case was examined mainly to provide an insight into an issue, in our case peasant-state relations) to several cases (Stakes 2005, 445-46).

² A peri-urban area is a ‘transitional zone’ between urban and rural tenure systems and can be “cultivated rural land within the urban administrative boundary or within the planning boundary that is under threat of future incorporation’ (Lavers 2023, 193).

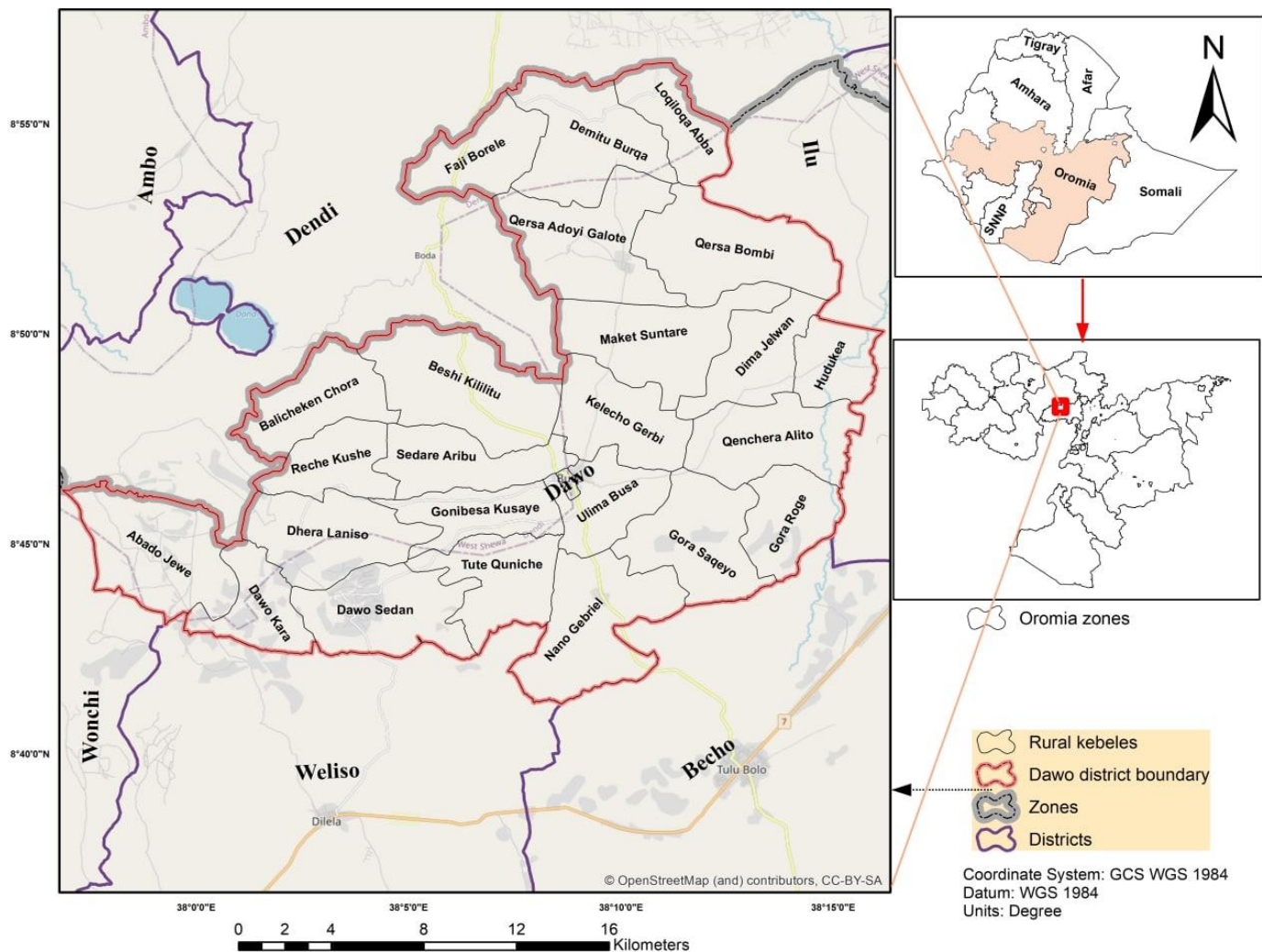
The two areas did show similarities and dissimilarities. Sululta town was closer to the capital than Dawo *woreda*. Since state power in Africa tends to wane as one move away from the capitals (Herbst 2014) and due land commercialization in Sululta there were differences and commonalities in terms of peasants' interaction with and perception of EPRDF regime. There was also another contrast between the two cases. Dawo *Woreda* mainly produces *Teff*, a staple grain that was both domestically consumed by peasants and sold by them because *Teff* was marketable nationwide. However, in Sululta Town, even if wheat, barley, and *Teff* were dominant crops, in recent years animal husbandry and fodder production has become a significant source of income for farmers of the town. Most of the dairy products from the town were sold to and consumed in the capital, Addis Ababa (Beka 2016). Here we compare and contrast the tension between farming for subsistence and profit in the marketplace, in two areas that are assumed to have different levels of market penetration and commercialization.

The sampling technique used were purposive and snowballing. The researcher lived in Sululta for 4 years, knew the local community, and with the help of *Kebele* officials and local research assistant participants were identified. In Dawo, *Kebele* officials and a rural Development Agent (DA) who was born and worked for years in that *Woreda* served as research assistant and helped with identifying participants. The participants were asked to suggest additional participants. Use of local informants and *Kebele* officials suffer from their biases. To mitigate this, we used snowballing and included peasants coming for government services to *Kebeles* and health extension centers as participants.

There is no strict formula for appropriate sample size in qualitative research (Creswell and John 2018, 262). Thus, saturation of data determined the adequate sample size for this research, meaning data gathering was stopped “when gathering fresh data no longer sparks new insights or reveals new properties” (Creswell and John 2018 262). This was done with one caveat in mind, the researcher critically engaged with the patterns that emerged and sought alternative explanations (Marshall and Rossman 2016, 423).

Two *Kebeles* from Dawo *Woreda* (Sadan Dawo and Nano Gabriel) and one *Kebele* from Sululta (Qaso Wasarbi) were selected taking into account accessibility, security and convenience.

Map 1. Location of Dawo Woreda.



Source: EthioGIS MapServer 2022

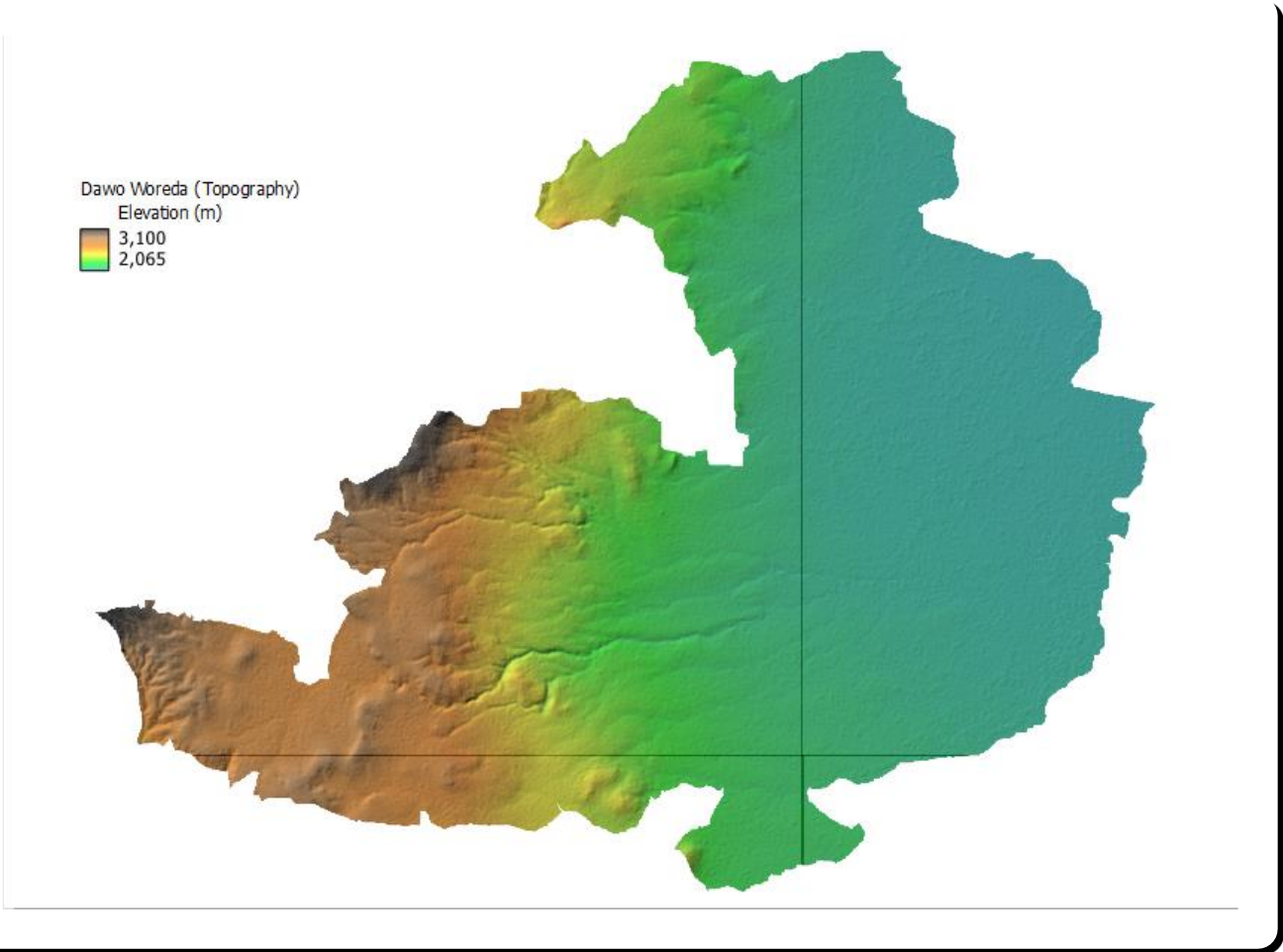
Table 2. Agro-Ecological Zones in Dawo Woreda.

Agro-Ecological Zone	Elevation (m)	Area (km ²)	Percent area (%)
Dry to Wet Cool Highland (Weyna-Dega)	1500 - 2300	10.6	63.4
Moist to Wet Cold Highland (Dega)	2301 - 2700	3.6	21.4

Moist to Wet	2701 - 3200	2.5	15.2
Alpine (Low Wurch)			

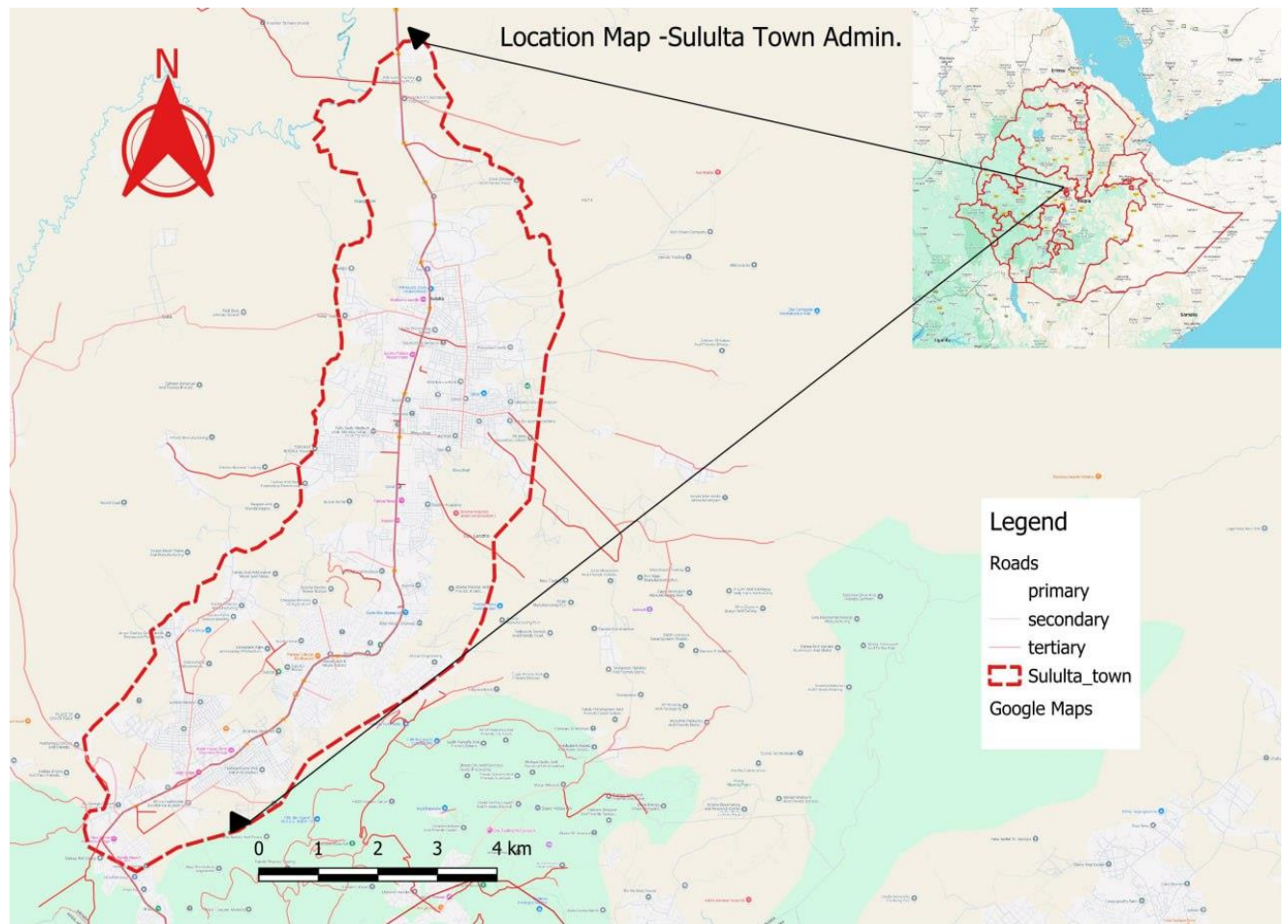
Source: EthioGIS MapServer 2022

Map 2. Agro-Ecological Zones in Dawo Woreda.



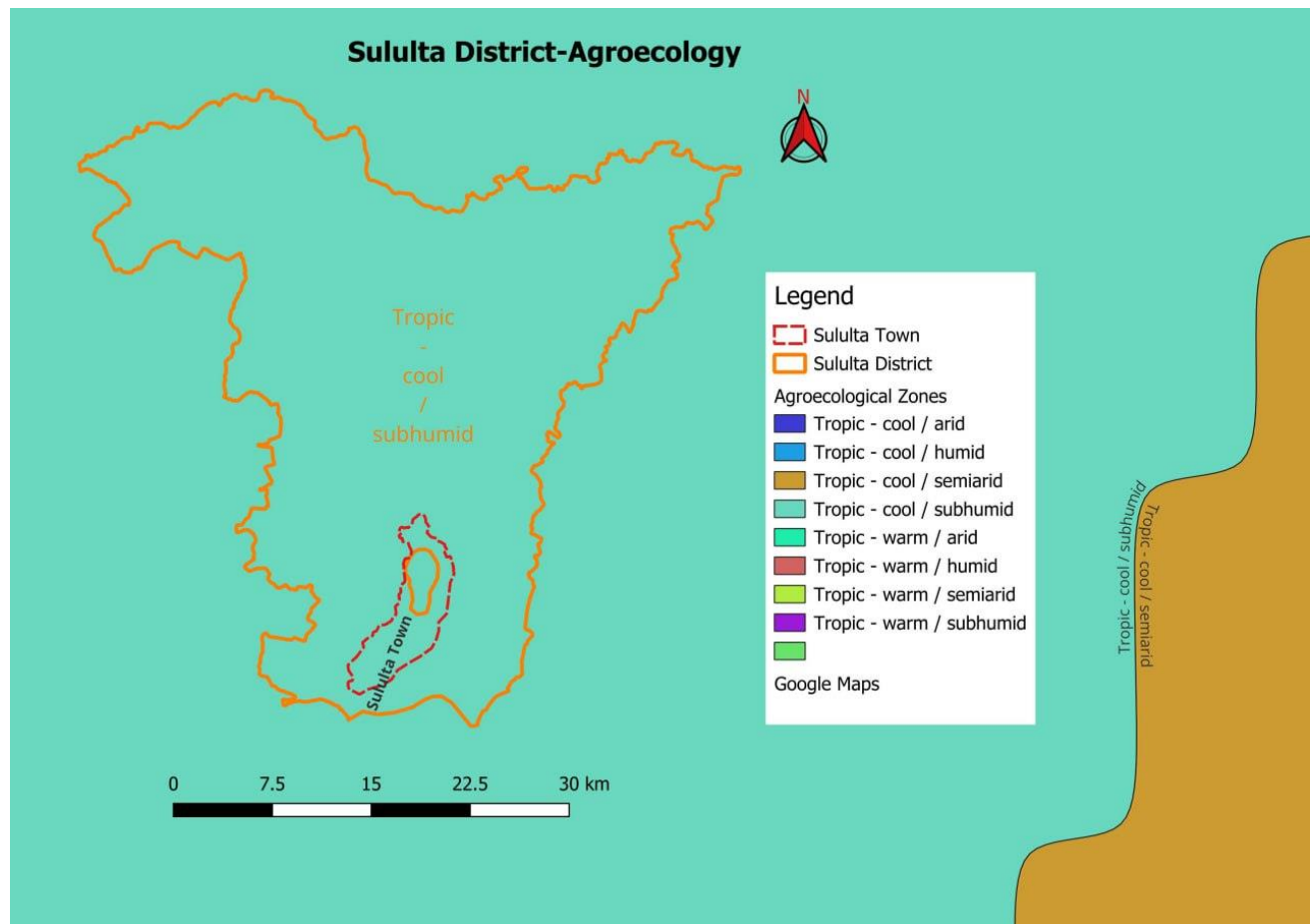
Source: EthioGIS MapServer 2022

Map 3. Location of Sululta Town Administration



Source: EthioGIS MapServer 2022

Map 4. Agro-Ecological Zone of Sululta Town Administration



Source: EthioGIS MapServer 2022

1.5.5 Method of Analysis

The first step in data analysis for this study involved organizing and preparing the data for analysis. This involved transcribing interviews and FGDs and sorting this data, including field notes, into themes. Interviews and FGDs were conducted in local language Afan Oromo and thus translation of the data into English was the next step taken. Third, the data will be coded and labeled into categories. The qualitative analysis software Taguette was used for this purpose, a free and open-source tool designed specifically for thematic coding and qualitative data management. The decision to employ Taguette followed the initial preparation of the data (transcribing interviews and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) from Afan Oromo into English and sorting field notes). The analysis process adhered to the following systematic steps, directly addressing the core research questions:

- Initial Categorization (Open Coding): All transcribed documents (28 interviews, 11 FGDs, plus field notes) were uploaded to Taguette. The first pass involved open coding, where data segments (sentences, paragraphs, or longer narratives) related to the research questions were identified and tagged. This involved creating broad codes such as ‘Land Tenure Security,’ ‘Local Governance/Kebele,’ ‘Political Contestation,’ ‘Class Differentiation,’ and ‘Market Relations.’
- Refining and Axial Coding: In the second step, the initial broad codes were refined and clustered into more precise, thematic categories in line with the theoretical frameworks (Neo-Populist, Marxist Class Analysis, ABD, Political Process Theory, etc.). For instance, ‘Local Governance/Kebele’ was broken down into ‘Surveillance and Control,’ ‘Corruption/Rent-Seeking,’ ‘Upward Accountability,’ and ‘Model Farmer Patronage.’ Similarly, ‘Political Contestation’ was categorized by mechanism: ‘2005 Election Mobilization,’ ‘Oromo Protest Trigger (Master Plan),’ and ‘Passive Resistance.’
- Comparative Thematic Extraction: Taguette was used extensively to extract and compare coded segments across the two heterogeneous case studies (Dawo vs. Sululta) and across different participant strata (e.g., rich peasant/model farmer vs. poor peasant/youth). This comparative function was instrumental in identifying the patterns and themes that directly answered the research questions.
- Key Pattern Identification: This comparison revealed spatial contingency as a core finding. Specifically, codes related to land tenure showed that land-related grievances in Dawo were centered on market exploitation (unfavorable terms of trade/merchant capital dominance), while in Sululta, grievances focused on Accumulation by Dispossession (ABD) enforced by state power and corruption.
- Addressing Research Questions: The rigorous analytical results obtained through Taguette provided the empirical evidence to structure the thesis chapters: Chapter 4 (Economy, Land, and Peasants): Codes confirmed the persistence of the Peasant Mode of Production (incomplete commodification) and analyzed the mechanisms of extraction: merchant price domination (Dawo) versus ABD/rent-seeking (Sululta). Chapter 5 (Local Government and Peasants): Codes demonstrated the mechanisms of coercive control

(e.g., surveillance, sanctions) and patronage (e.g., model farmer privileges) wielded by local government structures (*Kebele/Garee*).

- Analytical Synthesis (Selective Coding): Finally, selective coding was used to integrate the empirical findings with the theoretical concepts, synthesizing the overall conclusion that the state's political imperative of control consistently overrode its developmental goals, thereby setting the central argument of the thesis.

The utilization of Taguette thus ensured that the qualitative data analysis was transparent, replicable in its coding structure, and systematically linked empirical narratives back to the overarching theoretical and research questions of the dissertation. The analysis of state-peasant relations tried to unearth factors that participants in this study (peasants, peasant cooperative, government officials, CSO personnel) identify to affect those relations. This includes subjective factors (conception of state/*mengist*, beliefs about EPRDF and how it is similar or different from previous regime, the position of peasants in society, etc.) and objective factors (landholding, wealth and position within local government structure, etc.).

1.5.6 Validity, Reliability and Generalizability

Validity in qualitative research refers to accuracy of findings through different procedures (Creswell and John 2018, 274). Validity of this study was ensured mainly through triangulation. The researcher presented the same questions (issues and trends in peasant-state relations) to different individuals with possibly different perspectives, getting the perspective of local government officials, and contacting and interviewing peasants with different political leanings. Other measures included clarifying researcher perspective/bias, use of detailed description and discussions of contradictory or negative information.

Reliability of qualitative research refers to consistency of its approach “across different researchers and among different projects” (Creswell and John 2018, 274). However, since what we study in qualitative research is “in flux, multifaceted, and highly contextual”, achieving reliability in the sense of quantitative research is difficult (Merriam and Tisdell quoted in Rallis and Rossman 2017, 136). To ensure reliability of this research the following steps were taken. First the raw data gathered was retained through voice recording and note taking whenever participants in interviews and FGDs were willing (Rutakumwa et al. 2020). On other occasions the researcher took notes as soon as possible after the interviews and FGDs to minimize memory

lapses and prevent researcher's ideas from creeping into data collected. In addition, rechecking the transcripts and cross-checking the codes was done to increase reliability of the study (Flick 2007, 102). Lastly, the research tried to make relevant data, assumptions and logic of analysis of the study transparent to outside scrutiny by displaying relevant data and assumptions.

Generalizability in qualitative research mostly refers to whether “what is learned in one study can still be useful for other settings” (Rallis and Rossman 2017, 138) and it is not whether finding from one site can be generalized to other sites. Creswell and John add that “the value of qualitative research lies in the particular description and themes developed in the context of a specific site” (2018: 276). Inference in qualitative research designs mainly comes from tracing processes carefully in each case (Van Ingelgom 2020, 1190). The study was designed to be a cross-case comparison which to an extent was hoped to strengthen the generalizability of the cases. However, this research did not attempt to develop empirical data that could be generalized to the national level. Rather, it was hoped that findings of the study were useful to understand areas in “highland periphery”. In other words, its generalization was modest as it employed only two cases. The study tried to connect the national policies on agriculture and rural development to a local context, exploring in nuanced and detailed manner the interaction between government and peasants. A thick description of theories and methods was used and the finding of the study would allow other researcher to identify similar cases for which the insights of the study could be relevant.

1.6. Ethical Considerations

Social science researchers continuously confront ethical issues in the course of designing and conducting research. Overall, any research should fulfill the “general standards of ethical research [which] dictate that scholars do not harm participants in a given study” (Mosley 2013, 14). The researcher identified himself, host institution, the purpose of the study, the benefits for participating and assure participant that they can withdraw at any time (Creswell and John 2018, 147-48).

Voluntary participation, confidentiality and anonymity was guaranteed to interviewees. These include “guaranteeing the confidentiality of participants, both in terms of their identities and participation in the study, and in terms of what they reveal in the interview” (Mosley 2013, 15-16). Names of participants in the study were masked and code names given in the research report,

only when necessary, providing additional information about jobs, position, demographics, and expertise about the participants. Also, the researcher sought informed consent by key informants and FGDs participants. “Informed consent establishes that informants realize the purpose of the research being conducted, as well as the risks (and potentially the benefits) to them from participation” (Mosley 2013, 16). During FGDs it was impossible to maintain confidentiality. However, the researcher ensured that the identity of participants in FGDs remained anonymous in the research report. Furthermore, eliciting data was conducted in a way that respects participants’ values, cultural norms and belief systems.

1.7 Scope of the Study

This study dealt with the impact of EPRDF’s agricultural and rural development policies in shaping the interaction of farming households with the state and market system covering the period between 1991-2018 in Dawo and Sululta *Woredas* of Oromia National Regional State. The dissertation acknowledges the significant impact of EPRDF policies on agro-pastoralist communities, particularly those in the lowlands facing resource hardship and displacement due to large-scale commercial farming (see Chapter 3). However, this study is deliberately delimited to two districts representing settled smallholder agriculture within the Oromia “highland periphery”. The exclusion of agro-pastoralist and pastoralist groups, who reside in “lowland periphery” (Clapham, 2017), from the primary fieldwork and analysis is methodologically and theoretically justified based on the following imperatives of research design. The thematic focus was on agrarian transition: the core analytical question of the thesis investigates agrarian class differentiation and the structural impact of the EPRDF’s agrarian policies (ADLI, land certification, model farmer systems) on settled cultivators. Pastoral and agro-pastoral livelihoods, being primarily defined by mobility and communal land tenure systems distinct from the fragmented farm plots examined here, require a specialized theoretical framework that addresses issues of resource access in dryland ecologies (e.g., rangeland management, water scarcity) that fall outside the current scope. The other reason was the geographical and ecological scope of the study: the two chosen case studies, Dawo and Sululta, were selected to represent the high-potential, settled agricultural areas near the political center—the “highland periphery”—where the primary conflict manifests as competition over market surplus in (Dawo) or Accumulation by Dispossession (ABD) in peri-urban areas (Sululta). Agro-pastoralist communities, typically located in the lowlands of Oromia, experience distinct policy mechanisms of control and resource

extraction, often involving large-scale land leasing and government development projects, making them a separate, equally vital, field of study requiring a dedicated conceptual design. Given the inherent differences in their social organization, ecological constraints, and the specific mechanisms of state interaction, integrating the analysis of agro-pastoralists would necessitate a significant expansion of the theoretical model and empirical fieldwork, risking a dilution of the detailed, comparative focus on the politics of “highland periphery”.

1.8 Significance of the Study

The study tried to find out the power relations between government and peasants. Finding the mechanisms for exercise of state power over peasants, from control over resources like land to coercion and any means that were available to peasants to resist state power was done in the hope that this will further our understanding potentialities for empowerment of peasants and in order to direct state activities towards more beneficial and emancipatory intervention in rural society.

The study analyzed the evolution, changes and continuities in the agricultural and rural development policies of EPRDF government, how these policies affected livelihood of peasants, class structure of rural society and the role of local government in mediating between the government policies and peasants. This research will help policymakers to better understand the world of peasants, their political and economic behavior, thereby improving policy making process and implementation in the future.

Many contemporary researchers in Ethiopia are not paying attention to peasantry as social class, focused as they are on ethnicity, federalism and democratization, as such neglecting to treat the majority of the Ethiopian population that was politically marginalized and economically exploited in an increasing agrarian capitalism that is taking hold of rural part of the country. The Ethiopian Student Movement took the peasants and their political significance seriously. This shift can be explained to extent in terms of ideological change, from Marxism and its focus on classes (peasants, workers, and bourgeoisie) of Ethiopian Student Movement to liberal dispensation of the post-Derg era. However, one can also argue that economic and political marginalization of peasants at national level is also at play affecting lack of interest in researching the peasants and the social forces that affect their livelihood and their place in the democratization process in which they constitute the majority. Guillermo O’Donnell said, “my questions still come from broad political and moral concerns [...] I’ve tried to deal with the kinds

of real-world problems that deeply bother me when I'm shaving" (cited in González-Ocantos 2020, 114-15), and this is true for this research too. The research is hoped to create a modicum interest among future researchers to study peasants.

CHAPTER TWO. THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This dissertation employed layered approach theorization. The meta-theory (ontology) was the critical realist relational approach discussed in previous chapter, asserting that economic processes are intrinsically social and constantly shaped by human agency within pre-existing structures. The analytical lens (epistemology) used was critical political economy (CPE), which guides the investigation of structural economic inequalities and power imbalances, specifically concerning production, property, and power in agrarian formations. In this chapter we discuss domain theories/meso-theories that deal with causal mechanisms that we use in subsequent chapters, while reserving discussion of more specific theories like Accumulation by Dispossession (falling under Marxism) and social movement theories (useful to understand strategic relation of state and society) for Chapter 4 and 6, respectively. Thus, the chapter first presents theories that inform contemporary studies of peasants. Second, we discuss strategic-relational approach used in this research to understand state-society relations. Last, we present review of empirical studies on state-peasant relationships in Ethiopia.

2.1 Theoretical Perspectives

There are four schools of thought that influence contemporary peasant studies. These are the Marxist approach of class analysis which views peasantry through their exploitation by the powerful; the “specific economy” typology/ “neopopulism” inspired by works of Chayanov that views peasant social constitution as rooted in a peculiar type of economy, at the heart of which we find the operation of a family farm; the ethnographic cultural tradition that is linked with traditional Western anthropology and sees peasants as the representatives of an former culture continued into present due to a “cultural lag”, that is, the quintessential inertia of peasant societies; and lastly the Durkheimian taxonomy as developed by Kroeber that places “peasant societies in the intermediate position as ‘part-societies with part-cultures’” (Shanin 1989c, 471). Below I will discuss these approaches.

2.1.1 Marxist Analysis of Peasantry

There is a long line of Marxist scholarship on peasants beginning with Marx himself. The major line of Marxist thinking was framed around the fate of peasantry as capitalism progresses and takes root. This was labeled the “agrarian question” in the industrializing and urbanizing

nineteenth century Europe and generally referred to “what to do with a multitude of smallholding peasants who are largely subsistence producers” (Hyden 2013, 141). Karl Kautsky defined the agrarian question as being “whether, and how, capital is seizing hold of agriculture, revolutionizing it, making old forms of production and property untenable and creating the necessity for new ones” (cited in Akram-Lodhi and Cristóbal 2010a, 179).

Marx developed crucial insights into peasant farming that still shapes the debate on their role in the economy and politics. In his earlier work on India Marx saw “the small-scale pre-capitalist peasantry as an impediment to the full fruition of the capitalist mode of production” (Akram-Lodhi and Cristóbal 2010a, 181). In his later, more mature works he elaborated how capitalist farming took root in England by using the concept “primitive accumulation”. This refers to the process whereby “great masses of men are suddenly and forcibly torn from their means of subsistence, and hurled onto the labour market as free, unprotected and rightless proletarians”, in the case of agriculture on the basis of “the expropriation of the agricultural producer, of the peasant, from the soil” giving rise to capitalism in agriculture (Marx 2010, 707).

Marx saw the transition to capitalism in England as a classic one. However, it is crucial to note that Marx foresaw different possibilities through which capitalism can be established or consolidated in agriculture in different times and societies. In England, serfdom almost disappeared by the end of the fourteenth century. Feudal lord remained but were dependent on peasant proprietors. At the start of the sixteenth century feudal landlords with the support state began to forcefully drive peasants from their land and take over common lands, in the process turning peasant proprietors into landless rural waged labourers. Thereby, the so-called primitive accumulation is not accumulation, but transformation of the pre-capitalist means of production into capital and the creation of the capital-labour relation (Akram-Lodhi and Cristóbal 2010a, 182; Marx 1965, 743-744).

Karl Marx saw little political potential and consciousness among peasants. Marx, in his discussion of French peasants argued that even if they have similar living conditions, their mode of production doesn't give them dense relationship, it rather isolates them. Moreover, peasants are self-sufficient, and their livelihood depends more on intercourse with nature than the wider society. Peasants living in close proximity form villages, which ultimately forms the French nation by simple summation “much as potatoes in a sack form a sack of potatoes”. Marx saw that

peasants form a class in so far as their way of life, interest and culture is separate from the rest of society. However, since their interaction is mainly local, lacking national political organization they are not a class. Thus, peasants do not represent themselves, rather they are represented by others who appear to peasants as their masters (Marx 1950, 478-479).

The question of political importance of peasants in relation to revolutionary activities was, however, dealt with significant breadth by Frederick Engels in his work *Peasant Question in France and Germany*. He argued that development of capitalism and competition from producers in new agricultural frontiers in the Americas, Australia, and Southern Africa will lead to “small production [in Europe] irretrievably going to rack and ruin” (Engels 1976, 458).

This requires political response on the part peasants. The way forward was for the political party of urban working class to be a power in countryside by adopting political program that reflect the interest of the peasantry, consequently taking power both in city and countryside. For Engels the emphasis was on political implications of internationalization of food regime for small producers in Europe and that “the agrarian question was thus an agrarian question for and about labour and the expression of its agency” (Akram-Lodhi and Cristóbal 2010a, 185).

Karl Kautsky and Vladimir Lenin, moreover, elaborated and explained how the agrarian capital emerged in the countryside. In the past rural areas produced the tools they needed or imported from city. Industrialization brought cheap manufactures to rural areas. This for Kautsky created a need for money, which in turn led to commodification of agricultural products which were sold to urban dwellers, paving the way for establishment of agrarian capital. Capitalism taking hold in rural areas leads to social differentiation of those who produce for market and those who try eking out a living under increasingly difficult circumstances (Akram-Lodhi and Cristóbal 2010a, 186-87).

Lenin discussed at length the extent of class differentiation and change brought by emergence of capitalism in rural areas of Europe. At top are the big landowners who hire wage-labour and exploit small peasants and do not themselves engage in manual labour; next are big capitalist peasants who hire many labourers, are cultural connected with the “peasantry” and engage in manual labour on their farms; and third are “middle peasants” whose production is sufficient for family needs and some surplus for the market and frequently hiring labour; then peasants who

satisfy their family need and hiring no waged labour; fifth semi-proletarians who partially gain their livelihood as wage labourers while engage in farming; and lastly agricultural proletariat who are wage-labourers on capitalist farms (Akram-Lodhi and Cristóbal 2010a, 189). For Lenin what is crucial for agrarian change towards capitalism is the emergence of capitalist exploitation in which capital appropriate surplus value produced by wage labour.

Other works within Marxist framework dealt with on how European agriculture was transformed from feudalism to capitalist one. The Maurice Dobb and Paul Sweezy debate is a good example. Dobb argued that class conflict between lords and peasants was a crucial explanation of the transformation, in other words “class struggle allowed some peasants to free themselves from their feudal obligations and to transform themselves into capitalists” (Akram-Lodhi and Cristóbal, 2010a: 196). Sweezy, however, argued that feudalism in England came to an end due to expansion of trade and the consequent increase in commodification (Akram-Lodhi and Cristóbal 2010a, 196).

More recent Marxist works deal with the impact of neo-liberalism on peasantry and agricultural production. Bernstein raises the question whether in contemporary world agriculture can play a significant role in structural transformation (from agrarian to industrial) of economies of developing countries. He argues that recent economic changes at global level have made agriculture less relevant to global capital accumulation which is largely driven by manufacturing and services (Bernstein 2006). Others argue that under neo-liberalism we are entering a “new phase of primitive accumulation where advanced nations have subsumed the peasantry under capital through contract farming, diverting land into biofuel production, resulting in a food crisis” (Patnaik cited Lerche 2021, 152). Akram-Lodhi and Cristóbal also argue that neo-liberalism has led to agriculture that is both capital and labour intensive in which capitalist farms and petty commodity producing peasants “produce for the export market, the home market, or, crucially, both” (2010b, 267). This facilitates capital accumulation within those countries and globally by reducing cost of living for workers on a global scale and thereby increasing rate of surplus value appropriated by capitalists. Thus, they contend, agriculture remains relevant to capital accumulation in contemporary world. This general effect of neo-liberalism, however, does not apply to all countries. Ethiopia and countries in Caucasus like Armenia are exceptions to this general process:

in that the agricultural sector is not bifurcated; a petty peasant sector dominates the rural economy of each, with high degrees of labour absorption in labour-intensive technical coefficients of production, limited links to local and global capital, and pervasive linkages across the rural economy. (Akram-Lodhi et al. 2009, 230).

Ethiopia's relative isolation from global markets was the reason behind ADLI, an economic policy "predicated on an expansion of domestic demand as a precursor to enhanced rural accumulation, increased agricultural exports, and eventual structural transformation" (Akram-Lodhi and Cristóbal 2009, 323). However, the expansion of the home market has been less than optimal to have the led to agrarian transition (Akram-Lodhi and Cristóbal 2009, 323). This can in part explain the shift in agricultural and rural development policies undertaken by ERPRD. Under ADLI (small holder) agricultural growth was seen as key to structural transformation of the economy, despite the changes in global capitalism that made such an approach redundant (Bernstein 2006). When ADLI failed to achieve its goals there was a slow shift in economic thinking spurred by ascendance of Meles' group after 2001 split within TPLF, the strong opposition from urban areas in 2005 election and availability of non-Western sources of capital, parti. FDI begun to be seen as crucial to industrialization, there was new focus on urban development, export and commercial oriented agricultural policy (Lavers, 2023). New strategic directions were taken including increased rural road construction, provision of credit markets, "rolling out of specialized schemes in extension services...[and] promoting production of high-value export crops (spices, cut flowers, fruits and vegetables)" (Kassahun 2016, 4). PASDEP outlined key areas for commercialization of agriculture, with an eye on increasing production for domestic use and export. Beside domestic investors, foreign investors from India, Saudi Arabia, USA, Israel and UK in descending order of significance were involved in this endeavor (Kassahun 2016, 5-6; Dawit and Kassahun 2018, 22-27).

Overall, a materialist Marxist framework for analysis of agrarian question, meaning how capitalism is changing production, accumulation and rural politics, can lead to insights into how peasantry is affected by these dynamics. We can also analyze the form agrarian transition taking place in a specific country, understanding that agrarian transition is contingent and different pathways are available for different countries (Byres 1996).

2.1.2. Neopopulism/Theory of Peasant Economy

Alexander Chayanov and his followers saw peasant economy as a mode of production separate from those recognized by Marxists i.e. slavery, feudalism, capitalism, socialism. The importance of his work lies in that “sets up the ‘peasant economy’ and ‘peasant society’ as distinctive forms of economy and society”, and this position has major influence other students of peasant studies (Littlejohn 1977, 118; Thorner 1989; Shanin 1972). He argued that peasant economy is characterized by “peasant ownership but without hired labour”, thus, economic system *sui generis* (Kerblay 1989, 176). For Chayanov, an individual family farm in a peasant economy is motivated by securing needs of its family members rather than maximizing profit. Since family labour rather than hired labour is employed by peasants, the subjective drudgery of working on farms is balanced by subsistence needs of the family

Thus, for Chayanov basic premises of classical economics and marginalist theory that explain economic behaviour of, say for example, a capitalist farmer does not apply to a peasant family (Kerblay 1989, 176). In contrast with Marxist approach which emphasized class differentiation of the peasantry, Chayanov focused on demographic differentiation, in other words the interplay between family history (from marriage of couples, to giving birth to children and to the children reaching working age, etc.), consequent dynamics of family need and family labour exploitation/economic activity (Kerblay 1989, 179).

Goran Hyden work sheds light on unique predicament of states that has yet to capture the peasantry, taking the case of Tanzania as exemplary. He characterizes the peasant “mode of production” as having rudimentary division of labor in which each unit is independent of the other. In this context, cooperation among peasants is “not structural enforced but purely a superstructural articulation rooted in belief that everybody has a right to subsistence” and in addition household reproduction is a fulltime occupation. Just like Chayanov’s Russian peasants, Hyden argues that African peasants “operate according to law of subsistence rather than law of value”. Peasant knows how is practical and “his most important counselors are from previous generation”, not systematized scientific truth (Hyden 1980, 13-16).

The state is superimposed on the peasants in such societies. The peasants do not need state for their reproduction; however, other social classes need access to state for reproduction, and state

in turn need subordination of the peasantry. Peasant resistance to state policies, emanate from the dominance of “economy of affection” in which the peasants “work in order to live” as opposed to the impersonal, “live in order to work” and “production” favored by state. In such situations ruling classes can establish state farms, or collective agriculture production which are more easily accessible to bureaucratic intervention or create “village settlements” in order to “place peasants in totally new surroundings, [where] their local know-how will be invalid and they will subsequently be more open to new ideas and methods of production” (Hyden 1980, 16-26).

Chayanov’s work was criticized for assuming peasant farm as static entity, for romanticizing traditional peasant farming in an age industrial agriculture and because his theory works well in thinly populated area (like Russia) where peasants can readily expand their farm size based on family need than densely populated ones. Bernstein, writing on African peasantries, argues against this approach in that it over emphasizes social relations internal to household, i.e. “the relations through which family labour is organised and the product of labour distributed among the members of the household” neglecting how different unit of production and classes are constituted by social relation within a given mode of production, say for example how capitalism in contemporary world changes peasantry (Bernstein 1979, 422-23).

And yet his approach that focus on “analysis of peasant economies on the dynamics and structures of family farms, are just as pertinent today for developing countries where peasant economies still predominate” (Kerblay 1989, 183; see van der Ploeg, 2013 for a more recent argument for relevance of Chayanov).

2.1.3 Peasants as “Part-Societies with Part-Cultures” and “Cultural Lag” Approach

It was Kroeber’s assertion that peasant form an intermediary position along the continuum of societies and cultures which are more folklike (“a small, isolated, close-knit society in which person to person relations are prevalent, kinship is a dominant factor”) on one end and the sophisticated or “civilized” ones (with large population, depersonalized and individualized relation, writing, urbanization and mechanical industrialization) on the other end (Kroeber 1948, 281-82). Kroeber defines peasantry as a social group that is rural yet related to market towns and is part of a wider population that usually has urban centers. Thus,

[t]hey constitute part-societies with part-cultures. They lack the isolation, the

political autonomy, and the self-sufficiency of tribal populations; but their local units retain much their old identity, integration, and attachment to soil and cults. (Kroeber 1948, 284).

Kroeber's work has shaped the influential works of American anthropologist like Robert Redfield and Eric Wolf. In his book *Peasant Society and Culture: An Anthropological Approach to Civilization* Redfield defines peasants as "a man who is in effective control of a piece of land to which he has long been attached by ties of tradition and sentiment" for whom "agriculture is a livelihood and a way of life, not a business for profit" (1956, 27-28). This work mainly deals with the connection of peasants with outside world, specifically the urban centers (typically preindustrial) from which the "Great Tradition" originates and affects the life of peasants. He relates great tradition to the reflective few in contrast to the little tradition of largely unreflective many. And while "the great tradition is cultivated in schools or temples; the little tradition works itself out and keeps itself going in the lives of the unlettered in their village communities" (Redfield 1956, 70). It is the little tradition that defines the culture of peasants, which they consider is a "lower" form of great tradition. Therefore, unlike "folk" cultures of "primitive" societies, the world of peasantry is not self-contained and complete in itself. Eric Wolf's (1966) *Peasants* also takes an anthropological approach to study peasants. He distinguishes peasants from "primitive" and from farmers and defines peasants with economic structural criteria as rural cultivators, but they are not farmers, because for example unlike American farms theirs is not a business enterprise. Among peasants we do not have direct surplus exchange as we do with primitive society, rather peasant surplus is extracted from them by dominant social group. The group that extracts surplus from peasants exercise effective power over peasants, thus "the term "peasant" denotes no more than an asymmetrical structural relationship between producers of surplus and controllers" (Wolf 1966, 3-10).

Peasants have to accommodate different demands on their produce, including caloric demand to feed their households and animals, replacement fund needed to replace equipment for both production and consumption, ceremonial fund to maintain social relations and rituals with their fellows and funds of rent claimed by powerful social groups to his/her produce pain in labour, produce or cash. It was production for funds of rent that differentiates peasant from primitive cultivator (Wolf 1966, 4-11). "The perennial problem of the peasantry thus consists in balancing the demands of the external world against the peasants' need to provision their own households"

(Wolf 1966, 15) to which peasants can respond by increasing production or curtailing consumption.

To the question of how power is exercised over peasantry, Wolf writes that establishment city is the most common but not the only form of the orchestration of power or influence (Wolf 1966, 11). More important is crystallization of executive power or existence of state. The integration of cultivator into society with a state, and his subjection to “demands and sanctions power-holders outsider his social stratum” properly marks existence of peasantry and the transition from the “primitive” to the “civilized” (Wolf 1966, 11).

Lloyd Fallers applies Redfield’s and Kroeber’s line of thinking to discuss African experience. In answering the question: “Are African Cultivators to Be Called ‘Peasants’?” he argues that whereas the term applies in economic and a political sense, in a cultural sense trans-Saharan pagan Africa cultivators are not peasants since they lack a Great Tradition, i.e. “absence in traditional Africa of the literary religious traditions which formed the bases for the European and Asian high cultures” (Fallers 1967, 40). He excludes the Muslim areas and Ethiopia from this category and suggests that traditional African cultivator is “proto-peasant” or an “incipient peasant” whom literature can quickly make fully a peasant. Fallers concludes his article by pointing out that “one of the reasons why Christianity, Islam and their accompanying high cultures have been so readily accepted in many parts of Africa is that many African societies were structurally “ready” to receive peasant cultures” (Fallers 1967, 40).

Donald Levine applies Redfield’s Great Tradition, Little Tradition concepts to Ethiopian context while discussing Amhara culture (1972: xii). He argues that “wax and gold” or *qene* as a unique creation Amhara high culture, which is learned at higher level of traditional church education (Levine 1972, 8). For traditional Amhara peasant the local market “mediate between his production unit and the external economy”, “the *chiqa shum* to mediate between his domestic polity and the higher political authorities”, and the “local clergy to mediate between his home culture and the “high culture” of Abyssinia as embodied in the institutions of the Orthodox Church” (Levine 1972, 58).

Frederick C. Gamst’s in his article *Peasantries and Elites without Urbanism: the Civilization of Ethiopia* while accepting the major arguments of Redfield, contends that civilization with its elite

and peasants can be also found when “cities are absent, as in Mayan Mesoamerica; nonexistent or not vital, as in early Dynastic Egypt; or *atrophied into uninhabitable ruins, as in Ethiopia*” (1970, 373-74; emphasis added). Ethiopian civilization existed for about a millennium without urban center after its disappearance in 9th century among Tigreans, Agaws and Amharas in the northern and central highlands of the country (Gamst 1970, 374-75). He points out that the most important criteria for existence of peasantries is existence of state that controls them as Wolf also argued, and that while “Ethiopian peasantries do constitute part societies with part cultures and they do form class segments of a larger population; however, they depend not upon the city for their existence, but upon the state” (Gamst 1970 374). “Lack of urbanism” he writes “will insulate Ethiopia and its peasants from fundamental changes in traditional ways of life” (Gamst 1970, 391).

A more recent work on Ethiopia that unfolds along these lines is the Osmond study of Oromo-Harari relation. He writes that before 1995 ethnic-based federal constitution, the contrast is usually between the Muslim elites inhabiting Harar and Oromo farmers and cattle herders living in the wide rural vicinity of the town over whom the former exercised cultural hegemony (Osmond 2014, 1). His study of this relation emphasizes the perspective of city/countryside dichotomy and related Muslim legacies as defining this age-old relation.

The cultural lag thesis has similarities with approaches that view peasants as forming part-society with part culture. However, the former emphasizes that it takes time for time contents of Great Tradition to be worked out to suit the peasants and become their “Little Tradition”. Peasant culture incorporates crucial elements of their Great Tradition, through a process that can take several centuries:

Time to simmer is an essential part of this concept of peasant culture, time to integrate diffused traits and complexes into the peasant fabric, to rework them and to make them harmonious with the functional whole. The time element may be, in part, what distinguishes a peasant culture from a recently acculturated group. (Foster 1967, 11).

Peasants imitate what they see in cities, even if they comprehend them imperfectly. The process by which the elements seen in cities are reworked and simplified to the taste of peasant villages is slow one. As soon as peasants have incorporated those elements, the urban dwellers have moved on to new things. Therefore, the argument goes, “peasants are always doomed to be old

fashioned. No matter how hard they have tried, what they have believed to be the last word has almost invariably reflected the city forms of earlier generations” (Foster 1967, 11).

The research was largely guided by the Marxist analysis of peasantry as a class that is exploited and dominated by more powerful groups. Marxist gainful and long-standing intellectual engagement with peasantry and agriculture makes their work relevant to this study. Marxist thinking was in the background of TPLF led EPRDF policy making and their understanding of “agrarian question” rendering the emphasis on Marxism all the more crucial. The study also used Chayanov inspired tradition. This tradition treats peasant households as unique economic group that behave in a way that is different from capitalist firms. Wherever mainstream economics fails to explain the economic behavior of peasants, Chayanov work comes in handy, thus its importance. The more anthropological approaches to peasants as “Part-Societies with Part-Cultures” and “Cultural Lag” thesis informed the more ethnographic work on culture of peasants.

As Harrison argues in his study of sub-Saharan peasant societies, the position of this study was that “theory should not be imposed upon peasant societies to the neglect of ‘bottom up’ research” (2001, 187). Thanks to post-positivist critique of positivist social science research, we know accept that theoretical insights/inclinations do inform data gathering/selection. Yet, the utmost attempt was made in this study to be as explicit as possible about the assumption that inform field work and the research report. That said, the theoretical works on peasantry were revisited and when necessary critiqued and re-evaluated in light of the field work that was conducted for the study.

2.2. A Contingent Conception of State-Society Relation

Modern state that emerged in Europe in the 17th century and spread to the rest of the world through imperialism, colonialism, and settlement of Europeans in new places after decimation of indigenous peoples as in Australia and North America. States play a crucial role in contemporary society from registering newborns to shaping economic forces that affect livelihoods of millions of people to even take lives. Thus, social and political scientists spend much ink writing and theorizing about states, their essence, and relationship with society.

In the 20th century, three approaches dominated theorization about state and society. The first was the pluralist theories of state that came out of American universities during the 1950s.

Epitomized by Robert Dahl's work *A Preface to Democratic Theory* (1956), this approach saw the state as a neutral arena where plural interest within society competed for influence. For pluralist, "the state has little or no autonomy to follow its own independent course of action; it exists to do the bidding of external interests and to make sure that competition between these is fair and not detrimental to the public good" (Marinetto 2007, 14). With its blindness to the role economic inequality in skewing access to political process to those less affluent and the role of state in perpetuating marginalization of vulnerable social groups, this line of thinking about state continues to inform liberal democratic political practice and thought.

The second approach argued for a conception of state as autonomous entity and emerged in 1980s as a reaction to the excesses of the society-centered approaches of 1970s (to be discussed next) (Marinetto 2007). Inspired by Webers argument that state authority was anchored on independent bureaucracy and monopoly over violence, those subscribing to the approach sought to "bring the state back in" (Marinetto 2007). Some of them sought sources of state autonomy subjectively in individual actions and intentions (decision-making and policymaking), while others such as Theda Skocpol looked for objective sources, that is, bureaucratic and coercive apparatuses of the state (Marinetto 2007). Coming to state-society relations, state centered approaches to exemplified by Migdal's *Strong Societies and Weak States: State-Society Relations and State Capabilities in the Third World* (1988) which focuses on states capability defined as "the capacities to penetrate society, regulate social relationship, extract resources and appropriate or use resources in a determined way" (Solomon 2007, 37). Social control and setting rules of the game in society feature centrally in Migdals work, treating society as object of state projects and limiting the relations that can be explored (Solomon 2007). While the attempt to investigate independence of states due to the volition of their managers or the way they are organized is a welcome intervention, delineating where state ends and society begins is not as easy as Migdal's approach purports it to be (Solomon 2007, 36).

The third approach is the society-centered approaches to the state. Both in its sociological and neo-Marxist variant, it argues state is inextricably linked to society, and as such cannot be understood without taking into account the wider social relation within which it operates (Marinetto 2007). Informed by Parsonian structural functionalism, system theory, and historical sociology the sociological approaches conceive the state as a political system within the wider

social system (Marinetto 2007). Orthodox and some neo-Marxists argue that the state is the instrument of the economically dominant social group, protecting and furthering their interest. However, there are neo-Marxists who eschew such economic reductionism, preferring a **contingent conception of the state**. Works of Antonio Gramsci explored the role of ideas, culture, and ideology in perpetuating hegemony of capitalist state. Nicos Poulantzas explored the role the state plays in protecting “the ruling class from self-destruction” engendered by intense competition through uniting capitalist and disorganizing workers, which is “only possible if [state] retains autonomy from the very class interests it sets out to protect” (cited in Marinetto 2007, 23–24). For Poulantzas, the extent of state autonomy is determined by political struggles that involve the ruling class and the dominated masses. As such, he provided space for some influence over state by the dominated masses. However, determinism continued to influence his work as he argued that even as state make concessions to the works, state will “re-establish the relationship of forces in favour of the bourgeoisie, sometimes in a new form” (quoted in Marinetto 2007, 23–24). Among neo-Marxists, it was Bob Jessop, more than others, who tried to overcome deterministic shortcomings of Marxism by developing a strategic-relational approach to state.

Jessop defines state as “the *core of the state apparatus* can be defined as a distinct ensemble of institutions and organizations whose socially accepted function is to define and enforce collectively binding decisions on a given population in the name of their ‘common interest’ or ‘general will’” (Jessop 2008, 9 emphasis in original). This definition is helpful in that it indicates state’s claim to act for “common interest” (usually through public policy) is central to political contestation as all particular interest could not be included in it and it also links state to wider society. Society, on the other hand, can be understood as “reference to actual categories of peoples, communities and groups” who participate in the same/similar activity (as in education, farming, manufacturing, etc.) and social groups sharing identity markers, symbols and ideals (Solomon 2007, 35).

The strategic-relational approach to state emphasizes its embeddedness in society and that the redrawing of boundaries between state and society is key to understanding state (Jessop 2008). For Jessop, the strategic refers to “the actions of individuals, who, to an extent, can operate free from the constraints of institutional and social structures” shaping the state in the process

(Marinetto 2007, 24). The relational aspect considers “how the state is determined by the balance of forces between capital and labour” (Marinetto 2007, 24). How states and social forces they work for “redefine their priorities, expand or reduce their activities, recalibrate or rescale them in the light of new challenges, seek greater autonomy or promote power-sharing, and disembed or re-embed specific state institutions and practices within the social order” is at heart of the dynamic of state-society relations (Jessop 2008, 6). This approach emphasize that state managers through political strategy impose some unity on different branches of state and classes; that states have strategic selectivity, and are more amenable to some political and economic strategies to gain power than others; and state structure and modus operandi is the result of past contestations and strategies (Jessop 2008). An important contribution of Jessop here is that past and present strategies pursue by state shape their form (Marinetto 2007). Furthermore, he maintains that “the state remains a system that has properties distinct from those of the capitalist economy”, attributing causal priority to neither (Marinetto 2007). Insights from strategic-relational approach are utilized here as we focus on overall political strategy of EPRDF and its impact on its relationship with peasants, the effectiveness of different strategies of political contestation, and the continuity and changes in state-society relations.

It is also important to overcome structure and agency dichotomy for strategic-relational approach. As Giddens (1984) pointed out individuals act within structures and their actions affect structures. More important for strategic-relational approach, Jessop (2008, 41) proposes a dynamic and dialectical approach to overcoming structure/agency dilemma that views structures as strategically selective constraints and agents as strategical calculating in their action, that is, reflexively considering the structures, a point to be elucidated when we later discuss political process theory of social movement. The global capitalist system and state system are the two important structures shaping the lifeworld of peasants. But peasants react to the constraints imposed by these structures, overtime shaping them. This study recognizes the immense impact of state and market forces on peasants, yet peasants respond to these forces, even if with limited options, in such a way that they maintain their livelihood and lifeworld. By grounding the thesis in the critical realist relational meta-theoretical/ontological foundation and the meso-theory of strategic relational approach to state and society, we posits that while social structures (such as the state apparatus and global capitalism) pre-exist human agents, human agency is simultaneously necessary for the reproduction or transformation of these structures over time.

This framing moves the analysis beyond a simple dichotomy of domination/resistance to explore negotiated forms of compliance and pragmatic adaptation demonstrated by field work. Thus, we consider social relations as static and dynamic (Donati 2015), and this will be shown in our discussion of state-peasant relation as static (when discussing local governance and upward accountability in chapter 5) and dynamic (as we consider the role of peasants in political contestation in Ethiopia under EPRDF that led to their, relatively, more humane treatment in chapter 6). In chapter three, we return to the “contingent” relationship of state and society in Africa and Ethiopia.

2.3 Review of Empirical Studies

Most developing countries have large rural populations whose livelihood is mainly dependent on agriculture. However, in the modern industrial and capitalist world “peasants were treated as an anachronism and thereby as an irrelevance by scholars and politicians alike” (Shanin 1989c, 468). Yet in 20th century peasant studies were reinvigorated only in the 1970s thanks to the role peasants played in the Vietnam war, the ‘Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution’ in China, and “the effort to better understand problems and prospects of socio-economic development of poorer countries” (Bernstein and Terence 2001, 2).

Most students of peasant studies agree that state and market play a key role in the rural areas of developing countries. These two taken together are the major sources of “exogenous shocks that set social and political forces moving in the rural areas and thereby account for much of the political activity among the agrarian population of the developing nations” (Bates 1978, 131). Bernstein identifies the state as a vital institution that defines and enforces the “vertical integration” of peasants into broader circuits of exchange (cited in Harrison 2001, 190). The state also intervenes in the market, tries to determine the amount of land and labour devoted to certain crops, and influences labour relations within households. It can introduce various rural development projects to further deepen commodity relations within peasant agriculture. In a nutshell the state “rearranges peasant production, technically and spatially; it uses its party offices as ‘mobilizers’ of labour and marketing/extension apparatus as regulators of the interrelations between peasants and capital” (Harrison 2001, 190).

Peasants’ responses to the institutions of state and the market are determined by objective and subjective factors. In politics, peasants play “either a highly conservative role or a highly

revolutionary one” (Huntington 2006, 293). Huntington further explains that the role the peasant plays is determined by economic systems’ ability to fulfil their immediate economic needs and thus the importance of land tenure, taxes, and prices to peasants:

Where the conditions of land-ownership are equitable and provide a viable living for the peasant, revolution is unlikely. Where they are inequitable and where the peasant lives in poverty and suffering, revolution is likely, if not inevitable, unless the government takes prompt measures to remedy these conditions (Huntington 2006, 275).

While landowning peasants tend to be conservative in political orientation, landlessness makes them revolutionary, therefore, the stability of governments in developing countries to some extent is dependent on their capability to implement land reform (Huntington 2006, 275).

As Bates argues, “a model of risk aversion clearly offers insight into the political as well as the economic behavior of peasants”. Farmers everywhere tend to favor government “that guarantees minimum prices and the public subsidization of the risks of farming” (1978, 139). Besides, “peasants have repeatedly sought political intervention to modify contracts that threaten their members to live below a guaranteed subsistence level, be they mortgages, tenancy agreements, or the investiture of private rights on public commons” (Scott cited in Bates 1978, 139). Most rural projects pursued by states in developing countries do not benefit poor peasants that they claim to serve. The paradox here is that farmers are a minority in developed countries and yet are supported and subsidized by the state. On the other hand, politicians and policy makers in developing countries so often choose policies that violate the interests of the majority of their citizens, i.e. peasants (Bates 1978, 147-148). Scott critiques “high modernism” pursued by states in some developing countries is significant here. He describes the Great Leap Forward in China, collectivization in Russia, and compulsory villagization in Tanzania, Mozambique, and Ethiopia that were pursued in the name of modernization as fiasco since these have been tragic in terms of both lives lost and lives irretrievably disrupted (Scott 1998, 2-3).

It was only under the imperial regime of Haile Sellasie I that “peasant agriculture became the object of state policy” (Dessalegn 2009, 27) which, however, failed to bring significant development of the sector. The major reasons for the failure were the semi-feudal nature of land tenure, that the focus of the three successive five-year plans that run from 1957-1974 was mostly commercial and mechanized agriculture than smallholder producers and the stagnant nature of class structure throughout the period with the exception of the late 1960s and 1970s when

inchoate capitalist farming emerged (Dessalegn 2009, 27-81).

The educated class that generated ideas that undercut legitimacy of imperial regime and led to the 1974 revolution derided liberal democracy that in their view could have “empowered the rural areas that were assumed at least to be deeply conservative in their political orientation” (Clapham 2017, 42). They opted for the top-down Marxist ideology that sought to radically transform Ethiopian society. And, unlike most political changes in Africa in which the peasantry was uninvolved and less affected, the Ethiopian revolution of 1974 “the peasantry was propelled closer to the centre of the stage by historical forces, and the conscious desire of the radical vanguard to *bridge the chasm between city and countryside*” (Markakis and Ayele 1986, 180; emphasis added).

Consequently, the agricultural and rural development policies of the military regime that came to power by the revolution was characterized by attempted villagization, collectivization and resettlement programs that can be dubbed as “high modernism”. In “high modernism” the state attempts “to make a society legible, to arrange the population in ways that simplified the classic state functions of taxation, conscription, and prevention of rebellion” (Scott 1998, 2-3). Southern peasantry supported the revolution enthusiastically and provided a crucial base of support for military regime at the beginning of its rule (Markakis and Ayele 1986, 188). However, the overall the erratic nature of these policies permanently alienated peasantry from the regime. However, Prunier (2015, 226-27) observed that “given the traditional attitude of deference towards authority, many peasants still obeyed superficially but dissented in practice, cheating on their taxes, not carrying out the instructions of the regime and trying to hide their young men from military conscription”. And those forced to join, deserted the army in large numbers, hastening the downfall of the military rule.

EPRDF’s approach to peasants is arguably in line with the earlier change in the World Bank’s approach to rural development that gave emphasis to smallholder peasants (Shanin 1989). EPRDF’s national development strategy, ADLI, emphasized agricultural sector-driven industrialization policy, “promoted small-scale agricultural sector development” (OECD/PSI 2020). If one considers the fact that grain crops produced by smallholders have dominated Ethiopia’s agricultural production, then any feasible rural development policy should include and engage smallholder producers.

In 2000s EPRDF recognized ADLI was not only failing on the economic front but also for political purposes (Lefort 2015). Economically “Ethiopian peasantry, especially in zones of desperately poor subsistence farming such as Tigray, simply did not produce a surplus from which ADLI could be generated” (Clapham 2017 94). It took two rounds of political crises to realize ADLI was not successful in attaining set objectives. The first was the April 2001 split within TPLF out of which Meles Zenawi emerged dominant whereas the second was in 2005 during which “many rural voters followed their local leaders who had decided to support the opposition because they rejected EPRDF’s authoritarianism including its harsh intrusion into their daily life due to what they considered its bias in favour of the Tigreans” (Lefort 2015, 364-65).

Thereafter, there was a shift in economic thinking from ADLI to developmental state model that Meles adopted from east Asian countries of Taiwan, South Korea and China which “sought to integrate Ethiopian economy into global economy as a producer of export goods” (Clapham 2017, 94). With this, the focus agricultural policy shifted from smallholder producers toward wealthier farmers who were expected to produce surplus for the market, were considered more amenable to capitalist entrepreneurship and political interest of the regime.

New policy directions in EPRDF’s agricultural and rural development policy in contrast to ADLI can be observed in the Plan for Accelerated and Sustained Development to End Poverty (PASDEP) that lasted from 2005/06-2009/10. PASDEP forms the second phase of Poverty Reduction Strategy Program (PRSP) of the government which was begun under the Sustainable Development and Poverty Reduction Program (SDPRP), which covered 2002/03-2004/05. In SDPRP we observe a continuation of strategies outlined by ADLI, even if there was mention of commercialization of agriculture spurred by extension of credit through microfinance institutions to smallholder farmers and increasing export of agricultural products due to small size of urban population in Ethiopia (SDPRP 2002, 38-39). The overall strategy, however, aimed to “create critical mass of smallholder commercial farmers through time” by increasing market access, labour intensive farming, better use of land, tenure security, developing extension packages for each agro-ecological zone, etc. (SDPRP 2002, 61-62).

PASDEP tries to strike balance between equitable growth and accelerated growth, small-holder farming and large-scale farming. It states the goal national agricultural development: “to produce

enough food to ensure self-sufficiency in food production at household level and to support intensification of marketable farm products (both for domestic and export market)” (PASDEP 2006, 88). In PASDEP attempts were made to make a massive push towards greater commercialization of agriculture. This called for involvement of both small and large farmers in commercialization of farming, “the shift to higher-valued crops, promoting niche high-value export crops, a focus on selected high-potential areas, facilitating the commercialization of agriculture, supporting the development of large-scale commercial agriculture where it is feasible, and better integrating farmers with markets -both locally and globally (PASDEP 2006, 47).

Studies of the actual implementation of PASDEP indicate that it accorded priority to “model farmers” (Lefort 2015). This was despite the refrain in the policy document the need to improve of pro-poor subsistence farming alongside the push towards commercial of agriculture: “For several million households, the main welfare improvement in the medium term will still come from achieving higher yields of basic food grains” (PASDEP 2006, 47). The model farmers would be provided main support (access to training and farm inputs), the requirement being that they join the ruling party, stop any support for political opposition, and “thus neutralize local expressions of rural dissent” (Lefort 2015, 366-67).

While there was shift in focus of rural development towards peasants under EPRDF (be it smallholder peasants or “model farmers”), however, it continued with state ownership of land that was introduced by military rule. State ownership of rural land thus became “an instrument which enabled it [EPRDF] to have greater leverage over land allocations and greater hegemonic intervention in rural society” (Dessalegn 2009, 191).

In addition to state ownership of rural land, one should also consider the role of institutions of local governance in order to grasp the overall interaction between peasants and the state under EPRDF. One of the changes in rural Ethiopia following the coming to power of EPRDF was establishment of “new structures of local governance and political and administrative apparatuses that continue to be cast and recast” (Dessalegn 2009, 284).

EPRDF didn’t change the governance practices surrounding these institutions in its quest of using them to extend its reach and authority over the peasantry in order to effect political control

and extraction of surplus. The most frequent interaction between state and peasants took place at the grassroots level. Many of the public officials at local level were members of the ruling party. Thanks to “democratic centralism” of the party, upward accountability which governed relations between higher and lower units of government, and the paternalistic attitude towards peasants by public officials, the formal democratization of state-peasant relation under EPRDF is contradicted at every turn negatively affecting the rural society (Dessalegn 2009, 244-261). The continuation of heavy-handed approach to rural governance reduced the scope for initiative and agency of the peasants.

The pro-reform group within EPRDF that took over state power in 2018 has continued much of agricultural and rural development policy of its predecessor. The ten-year development plan of the current government that lasts from 2021-2030 aims to reduce rain-fed agriculture, increase mechanization, and turn highly productive smallholder farmers into investors by helping them have additional land among other things. The plan just like previous plans under EPRDF expects agriculture to play a major role in the structural transformation of the economy, to satisfy the food needs of the country and provide raw material for industries and generate foreign currency through export (PDC 2022). Even if it is difficult to make a decisive assessment of state-peasant relations under current government since it has been in power for only four years, an attempt will be made to see the contours of that relation as it is currently evolving.

For Bates the most important question is whether “rural folk are willing accomplices or passive victims” (1978, 132) to hegemonic aspiration of their governments. However, peasants can resist state policies that they find intolerable (Scott 1985). Resistance to, falling victim to and neglect of state policies or mix of these reactions are the alternatives available to peasants. The same is true for Ethiopian peasantry. And just like the military regime, state continued to dominate the peasantry under EPRDF. There was no independent political party or voluntary association representing the interest of the peasantry. For Dessalegn “the rural voice continues to be silent” under EPRDF as “the state confronts the individual peasant directly and without mediation” of any organization that stands for the peasantry (2009, 332). He adds that growth of “poverty and destitution has made the peasant cowed and submissive” to the regime, all the more inflating “the power of the state in the eyes of the peasant” (2009, 332). Lefort also shows that “most subsistence farmers [in Ethiopia], obsessed by their survival, still considered that they were

incompetent and not entitled to have a say in politics” (2010, 454).

Survival was again the primary goal of peasants during hotly contested 2005 election in Ethiopia (Lefort 2007, 254). The main concern of the peasantry was to have access to means and factors of production, mainly land, over which the state has control. Whoever won elections, the majority of voters expected that the victory of 2005 election would deprive those who did not support it as a result of which avoiding this major risk was deemed important (Lefort 2007, 254). One can argue that even if “survival” was on top of the mind of peasants under EPRDF, there is more to state-peasant relation, in Ethiopia than the submissive and passive peasants one perceives in the above-mentioned mainstream account. The continuation of undemocratic and skewed power relations between the state and peasants in Ethiopia is the central theme of this study.

2.4 Analytical Framework

There are different variables that guided the analysis of peasant-state relations under EPRDF. Class difference among peasants was one variable that was interrogated to see if there was any difference in how peasants relate to state due to their class position. Another factor that was investigated was if there was any preference on the part state (due to policy and political consideration) for some classes over others in its rural development policies and modality of governance that did affect how peasants relate with state. State policies and political considerations may be subjected to change and evolution mainly due to two factors. On the one hand, we have the state reacting to dynamics of the global capitalist system. On the other hand, we have the wider state-society relation, which is largely the result of interaction of political system in place and relative strength of social groups and how they relate with the state. Lastly, how peasants interact with markets was analyzed in this study. In addition, interrogation of any significant change in the proportion product sold and consumed over the 27 years of EPRDF rule was conducted. This helps us to identify if entrenchment and penetration of market forces in rural areas has taken place under EPRDF (Dessalegn 2009; Lefort 2012).

The different factors mentioned here were considered as interacting with one another and that some of the analytical categories used in the research overlapped. The aim was to find out the major social forces shaping state-peasant relations which we consider having existence prior to the perceptions of different actors (local officials, peasants, merchants, etc.) taking part in this relation as well as the researcher. The study tried to find out these forces by critically engaging

these actors through interviews and FGDs. This requires looking for contradictions in the responses elicited and digging deeper through further questioning to find out structural factors not found on the surface. This does not mean, however, that we downplay the subjective experience and meaning these actors attach to their world and their interaction with that world. Rather, the subjective understanding is taken as a window through which we can observe the dialectical relation that transpires between these structures and actors. This dialectical relation at the same time sustains the structure and holds emancipatory potential for these actors to change it through reflection and action.

Table 3. Analytical and Causal Framework: Key Mechanisms and Outcomes

Level	Inputs/Context	Causal Mechanisms (State Action)	Agrarian Outcomes & Responses
Macro/Structural	EPRDF Coalition Architecture; Historical Land Tenure; Global Capitalism Dynamics.	Neopatrimonialism; Authoritarian Developmentalism (Instrumental Rationality); TPLF Institutional Primacy.	Incomplete Commodification; Dual Economy (Subsistence/Market); Political Marginalization.
Micro/Empirical	Local Power Relations; Peasant Livelihoods (Dawo/Sululta); Identity/Class Consciousness.	Local Governance (Kebele/Garee Surveillance); Land Certification/Expropriation; Model Farmer Patronage.	Incipient Class Differentiation; Uneven Development; Passive Resistance; Open Contestation (Protests/Elections).
Synthesis	Political Imperatives (Control/Survival) always override Developmental Aims.	State Domination (via centralized control over land and local institutions).	Peasant Agency (Contestation and pragmatic adaptation).

CHAPTER THREE: STATE, POLITICAL IMPERATIVES, AND AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT POLICIES OF EPRDF

Introduction

In this chapter, we endeavor to present the characteristics and dynamics of polity, politics, and policy which sets the background for later chapters that empirically explore state-peasant relations in Ethiopia under EPRDF. Polity refers to state (African and Ethiopian), politics covers social and political forces that interact with each other (at times competing, contending, and cooperation with EPRDF), and policy refers to agricultural and rural development policies of EPRDF. Such an approach helps us to situate policy (contestation, formulation, and implementation) within a wider context of social relations and allow us to better explain and understand them (Brand et al. 2022). Therefore, in this chapter we present the conquest of Oromos by Abyssinians during Ethiopian state formation, their subsequent economic and political marginalization, the rise of Oromo nationalism, and the attempt by TPLF led EPRDF to cut off Oromo elites from Oromo peasantry through, among other things, agricultural and rural and development that tried to pacify peasants.

3.1. State in Africa and Ethiopia

There are controversy surrounding the nature of state in Ethiopia. Some have argued that it is unique in Africa thanks to its long history of statehood and that it eluded colonization. Others have argued that state in Ethiopia, particularly the dynamics of the last half of 19th century that brought the trapping of modern state into being was that of internal colonization of people in South by Abyssinians of the North (Asafa 1993; Holcomb and Ibssa 1990). Still, some have come forward arguing that state in Ethiopia has gone through similar dynamics as the rest of Africa (Daniel, 2020 and Davies, 2008). Discussion of these dynamics vacillated between those who view “the postcolonial state as an exogenous structure detached from and elevated above society, while on the other, it is an empty shell and vacuous institution absorbed by social forces and particularistic interests” (Daniel 2020, 21-22). Kassahun points out the similarities between state in Africa and Ethiopia: recent integration into capitalist global economy; socio-cultural and ethnic diversity; weak economies and “strong in their pretensions and weak in their quest for effective control and hegemony” (Kassahun 2000, 24).

The argument here is that the modern state in Ethiopia emerged from the expansionist drive of Abyssinian elite to conquer more land in order to generate resource for their insertion into the then expanding capitalist system and to acquire firearms for the intra-Abyssinian competition for dominance. One consequence of this was the most southern of this Abyssinian feud, Shoa kingdom found it convenient to acquire land, control the trade routes and resources by expanding to the east, south and west. As a result, Shoa emerged dominant from the feud among Abyssinians and in the process turning people in newly conquered lands into serfs on their own land, under a semi-feudal political and economic system (Bahru 2005).

In spite of many attempts at reforming the state in Ethiopia, it remained animated by neo-patrimonial imperatives; it did not develop at its core the rational imperative of Western bureaucratic state in Weberian sense and state officials were more like feudal lords (*Baleseltan* in Amharic) than public servants; and it did not develop significant legitimacy within the society that ruptures have brought different elites that “devoured” the state and resources of society before another group took its turn. Part of the explanation for this lies in the preference for neo-patrimonialism as method of rule by the governments. This was also the case with many of the newly independent African states which chose short term distribution of material goods to their supporters which “greatly undermined the potentiality for achieving a betterment of material conditions via long-term investment and productivity growth” (Davies 2008, 69). In spite of the ability of Ethiopia to resist colonization by European powers, Ethiopian state or state in Ethiopia (this are used interchangeably in this work to emphasize the historic origin of Ethiopian state in Abyssinia and its shortcoming of statehood in its modern Western sense, respectively) shares some of the features of post-colonial states in Africa.

Spelling out these features is in order, as this will become relevant to the latter arguments. First and foremost is the neo-patrimonial nature of states in Africa. Neo-patrimonialism is different from classic patrimonialism in that an edifice of modern state was put across the state-society interactions that largely remains patrimonial. Adopting a sociological and Weberian approach to state, Chabal and Daloz argue that the emergence of modern state is much more than emergence of a centralized political power with monopoly over violence over territory it rules. Rather it is an “outcome of a process by which the realm of politics is gradually emancipated from society and

constituted into increasingly autonomous political institutions...[through] the successful establishment of a truly independent bureaucracy” (1999, 5). This implies an end to patrimonial assumption and practice that political power holders have legitimate claim to public property and separation of private and public sphere. This would allow a state to develop neutral status and freedom from particularistic constraints which in turn can lead to state legitimacy and institutionalization.

This has been lacking in post-independence political developments in Africa. Meritocracy was not the basis of recruitment to bureaucracy rather loyalty based on kinship, communal, political criteria was. Not only was rational-bureaucratic state not consolidated in post-colonial Africa, more important for our argument, “*it has never been in the interest of African political elites to work for the proper institutionalization of the state apparatus*. Or to put it another way, its usefulness is greatest when it is least institutionalized” (Chabal and Daloz 1999, 14, emphasis added). The result was a tendency by political actors to “maximize their returns” through instrumentalization of disorder, the evidence of which are “a high level of governmental and administrative inefficiency, a lack of institutionalization, a general disregard for the rules of the formal political and economic sectors, and a universal resort to personal(ized) and vertical solutions to societal problems” (Chabal and Daloz 1999, xviii-xix). Arguably, the core of their thesis applies to Ethiopian state, even if the authors provide a caveat: “*some parts of our analysis do not apply as well to the Horn of Africa, where areas like Ethiopia, Eritrea, Somalia and Northern Sudan have dissimilar social structures and have had a different political experience*” (Chabal and Daloz 1999, xxi, emphasis mine).

The post-colonial state is, thus, Janus faced: first is the bureaucratic, technocratic face of modern state power symbolizing modernity; the second is where real activities of governing takes place, that is patronage distributed from the verandah “governed by a logic which is no longer that of efficiency, but of the share-out” (Berman 1998, 335). The recent resurgence and revitalization of this particular form of political legitimation was, in large part, due to the failings of “modern” political accountability. This in turn reinforces underdevelopment as resources that could be used for long term investment was consumed for neo-patrimonial redistribution. And politically, it means that struggle for power and resources among politicians entrenches the intertwinement of

power and clientelism which essentially discourages accountability to the people and longer-term policies that would lead to sustained economic development (Chabal 2009, 126).

This leads us to consideration of another aspect of state in Africa which has been detrimental to the development of democratization of state-society relations. State has been the site of “hegemonic drive” – “an arena in which elites and special interest groups have competed in order to acquire wealth and power for self-serving ends, rather than to effect meaningful rational-legal governance” (Chabal cited in Davies 2008, 109). Thanks to the state’s inability to emancipate itself from society it has been a space in which struggle among particularistic social forces took place.

Another feature of the post-colonial state in Africa was the absence unified public realm, unlike what can be observed in the West. That is in large part due to the disjunction between state and society – or the public realm and private realm– during colonialism, which resulted in two publics. One is the primordial public which is “closely identified with primordial groupings, sentiments and activities which nevertheless impinge on public interest” to the extent the groupings, ties and sentiments influence and determine the individual’s public behavior (Ekeh 1975, 94). The major constituents of primordial public are ethnic, communal and hometown development associations. They owe their origins to the alienating nature of the colonial state and its failure to provide the basic welfare and developmental needs of masses of ordinary peoples, at times functioning as “shadow state” (Osaghae 2003, 6). In contradistinction to the primordial public is the civic public, which is “historically associated with the colonial administration and which has become identified with popular politics in postcolonial Africa” (Ekeh 1975, 92). Although Ekeh does not say that the civic public is the same as the state, the state agencies or so-called civil structures on which it is based, namely the civil service, police, military, and so on, suggests its close association with the state.

Moreover, the difference between the public sphere in the West and Africa lies also in their moral foundation. Accordingly in the West, “the private realm and the public realm have a common *moral* foundation” (Ekeh 1975, 92, emphasis original). Generalized morality in society, i.e. universal and abstract ones, informs both the private realm and the public realm. However,

private realm in Africa is differentially associated with the public realm in terms of morality. Thus, “[t]he primordial public is moral and operates on the same moral imperatives as the private realm”, while, “[t]he civic public in Africa is amoral and lacks the generalized moral imperatives operative in the private realm and in the primordial public” (Ekeh 1975, 92, emphasis original).

If in other African countries, neo-patrimonialism, state being site of hegemonic drive and absence of unified public sphere and morality was arguably the result of colonial and post-colonial elites attempt to develop a semblance of modern state to “the strongly instrumental and personalized characteristics of ‘traditional’ African administration” (Chabal and Daloz 1999, 13), then in Ethiopia it was the result an attempt by Menelik and more crucially Haile Sellasie to import and adopt a facade of modern state to a rather “traditional polity” and its southern marches (Markakis 1974; Davies 2008).

After giving Ethiopia its current shape by incorporating various autonomous polities into his empire and defeating Italian at Adwa, Menelik embarked on establishment of small administrative units, ministries, minting of currency, banking systems, and railway from Addis Ababa to Djibouti among other things (Paulos 2007, 8). This paved the way for the largely subsistence economy of Ethiopia to have relation, a marginal one, to the capitalist world economy (Holcomb and Ibssa 1990, 71–144). The basis of this relation was cash crops and the export of primary commodities, largely from the southwest, beginning commercialization and willing embrace of westernization, which in the rest of Africa was the result European colonization. Dual economy emerged, one commercial and urban centered in Addis Ababa and the other “a pre-capitalist rural periphery, but with the former component entirely dependent upon the products of the latter” (Davies 2008, 126-7). This relation came to an abrupt end with the 1974 revolution which nationalized properties of domestic and foreign capitalists (Markakis and Ayele 1986).

The relation of Ethiopian economy to capitalist global economy and westernization was increased under Haile Sellasie. The growth of urban based economy around Addis Ababa and the explicit centralization of political power allowed the center to become more powerful than periphery under Haile Sellasie. Unlike previous governments, the emperor instituted profession

army, modern bureaucracy and uniform fiscal system “erecting a state whose capacity to control and mobilize public resources and to skim surpluses was infinitely greater than that of its predecessors (Gebru quoted in Davies 2008, 129). The Machiavellian and personal rule of Haile Sellassie was placed side by side with the first written constitutions of the country in 1931/1955: “the Emperor supervised even the lowliest assignment, because the source of power was not the state or any institution, but most personally His Benevolent Highness” (Kapuscinski, quoted in Davies 2008, 133). He expanded modern education in order to man the burgeoning bureaucracy that was supposed to run based on meritocracy. In reality it was run through patrimonial networks. In order to political climb up within the system, ambitious individuals have to build client networks and distribute resources afforded by their position to that network. Haile Sellasie, being the chief patron, never separated public and private resource, amassing large wealth from Anbassa Bus Company, breweries, hotels, real estate and he appropriated “the entire output from the country’s sole gold mine, which he is said to have deposited regularly in the bulging vaults of a Swiss bank” (Markakis and Nega 1984, 112-13).

The 1974 revolution that overthrew the Haile Sellasie’s regime replaced the divine origin theory of state with that of scientific socialism of a state that rules on behalf of the working people of Ethiopia. The 1975 land reform fundamentally changed the status of peasants in much of the country by allowing them to have the right of usufruct to publicly owned land: “they had the use of the land, and could collect the produce of the land while they were working on it” (Oosthuizen 2020, 50). However, its mode of rule remained in certain aspects neo-patrimonial: “a strongman regime, which comprised an odd of mix of traditional military ideas about hierarchy, discipline, loyalty to the state, and pan-Ethiopian unity, combined with scientific socialism” (Davies 2008, 137). Yet much of what was achieved through clientilism under Haile Sellasie’s regime was done through use brute force under Derg thanks to significant expansion and reach of state apparatus, including into rural areas (Davies 2008). Since the next section will deal with the origin, political and economic imperatives and neo-patrimonial nature of EPRDF, it suffices to say that what emerged under EPRDF was a bureaucratic neopatrimonialism characterized by “state-bureaucratic monopolisation and semi coercive centralisation of neopatrimonial domination operating via secret police structures” (Davies 2008, 112).

It can be argued that state in Ethiopia portrays many of the characteristics of neopatrimonial post-colonial states in Africa, even though it eluded direct European colonization. Ethiopian state has an exogenous as well as indigenous character. Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity, long tradition of statehood and hierarchical politics in Abyssinia laid the foundation for Ethiopia state. These were indigenous to Abyssinia but exogenous in areas Ethiopian state incorporated during its “southern marches”. It has developed a large bureaucratic trapping of modern state, yet most of individuals who manned it behaved like feudal lords (*Balesetan* in Amharic) than public servants thanks to its origin in Abyssinia. Ethiopian state was able to assert centralized political rule since Menelik’s time, without, however, developing rational-legal mode of rule we take for granted for Western states.

We argue here that rather than the typical-ideal approach to state-society relations in Africa and Ethiopia, it more appropriate to utilize a more contingent and contextualized view. In addition to the nature of African state’s discussed above, we must consider the complex nature of Africa’s insertion into capitalist world. This includes the (dis) articulation of pre-capitalist (peasant) and capitalist mode of production (Thomson 2022), existence of public servants that play outsized role in accumulation dubbed “bureaucratic bourgeoisie” by Shivji (1976), and African leader active role in “extraversion” of continent’s relation with outside world in order to mobilize resources (Bayart and Ellis 2000). Applied to Africa, state-centered and society centered approaches to state-society relations take for granted Western conceptions of state and society, argue from analogy and are bereft of historicized and specific studies of state and society relations in the continent (Solomon, 2007).

Overall, the Ethiopian state is similar with African states in that society is distanced from the state (true even for the Abyssinian peasants except cultural affinity and all the more so in South); existence of dual economy and insertion into capitalism as producer of agricultural goods; and importance social formations like ethnicity in the struggle for state power. And, as Taylor would have it “the more negative aspects of politics in Africa [and Ethiopia] are but symptoms of much deeper problems, central to which is the failure by most states to promote broad-based development” (2018, 6). The attempts to achieve agricultural development that improve the livelihoods of masses under Derg and EPRDF was hamstrung by “the political” in the Ethiopian state. This includes the inability of the state to include major social groups in its policy and

decision making of state (as in “highland periphery”) and at the same time the capture of the state power by particular social groups, serving their interest, not the broader society. The disjoint between the state and society hampered the ability of Ethiopian state to be “developmental” in sustained manner, despite not being colonized and having a more bureaucratic state. Even the much praised “developmental state” under EPRDF was kind of a stop gap measure to respond to the series of political and economic crises of late 1990s and early 2000s that EPRDF leaders called “Armageddons” (Lavers 2023, 84–85). It was not grounded on a *fundamental* reset and recalibration of state-society relations, though some attempts were made after the 2005 national election. Seen as such, that it floundered after running for a little over a decade is not surprising.

To anticipate later discussions, the state in Ethiopia was neither never embedded in all the major social groups nor autonomous from the social group that controls it at a given time. Thus, a social group that once dominated the state upon losing power is distanced from and distanced itself from the state, while the newcomer identifies itself with the state, until its turn comes. This has been observed in Ethiopia over the last few decades. This gave rise to volatility of the political system and unpredictability of the economic system, thanks to the intertwined nature of the two, a situation least suited for development in an already impoverished society.

3.2. EPRDF Regime: Origins, Consolidation, Hegemony and Its Rule in Oromia

3.2.1 Origins

Ethiopian state was claimed to have originated from Axumite empire; the Orthodox Christianity adopted by the latter in 4th century as official religion legitimizing Ethiopian state’s rule officially until 1974 (Kassahun 2000, 48). Tigrayans consider themselves legitimate successors of Axumite empire, whose position was eclipsed by the rise of Amharas to dominance in Abyssinia since 13th century. Consolidation of modern Ethiopian state under Menelik II of Shoan kingdom, a rival of Yohannes IV, pushed Tigray to the periphery of the new state. Tigrayans participated as “junior partners” in construction of modern Ethiopian state (Leenco, 1999: 41) feeding the feeling of “lost status” of Tigray within Ethiopia (Kassahun 2000, 47).

Collaboration of some leading Tigrayans with Italians during the occupation led Haile Sellasie to appoint non-Tigrayan officials to Tigray. The attempt to further consolidate his grip over Tigray through administrative and tax reform was felt by local nobilities in Tigray as an attempt at

weakening them. Tigrayan peasantry also viewed the new taxation in cash than in kind as in the past negatively. These measures combined with Tigray's relegation to periphery led to the first localized Tigrayan peasant uprising of 1943. It was through military operation supported with British aerial support that the rebellion was put down (Kassahun 2000, 56-57; Gebru 1991, 84-124).

The TPLF led peasant rebellion in Tigray emerged out of the *mélange* of the 1974 revolution. Ethiopian student movement was where many of those who led TPLF were schooled (Young 1997, 80-88). These educated Tigrayans felt that they were discriminated against by Amharas to secure government jobs as was their impoverished and frequently famine-stricken province of Tigray. It was these grouping formed Tigray National Organization (TNO) shortly after the revolution, a precursor to TPLF that was formed in 1975 that ultimately led the "peasant revolution" in Tigray (Young 1997, 80-88). Following the confusion of the revolution, TPLF fought Ethiopian Democratic Union (EDU) and Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party (EPRP) to emerge as the dominant political force in Tigray. In its struggle with EPRP the TPLF followed the "Maoist line of 'protracted struggles that march from rural to urban areas'" and they found that their revolution was more "convenient in the countryside rather than in the fascist stronghold towns" (Young 1997, 80-88).

The major objective of TPLF in its war against Derg was to eliminate the elite's domination of Ethiopian state that in TPLF's view was responsible for political and economic marginalization of Tigray. TPLF's aim was to transform Tigray and its relationship with Ethiopian state. To realize this, they needed the support of peasants which TPLF attempted to gain through "land redistribution, [provision of] effective services, and accountable administration" (Young 1997, 172). Education was provided by the front and cultural troupes organized to raise political consciousness of peasants, with emphasis on Tigrayan nationalism. Even if TPLF was a Marxist-Leninist organization, it did not oppose the Orthodox Church in Tigray considering the loyalty of most peasants to the Church, rather it sought the support of the Church in its struggle against Derg, which many considered as atheist and against the Church. Rural priests became beneficiaries of the Fronts land reform and encouraged peasants to support its struggle against Derg.

Even if Tigrayans felt marginalized by Ethiopian state dominated by Shoan Amhara elites, this was not sufficient condition for rebellion in Tigray as other non-Shoan provinces were also marginalized and moreover suffered cultural discrimination unlike Tigray without mounting protracted insurgency. Like Tigray, protracted insurgencies in northern Somalia, Eritrea and South Sudan were the result of economic marginalization due to the focus of states in Somalia, Ethiopia, and Sudan on commercial an urban sector, neglecting subsistence sector in these areas (Clapham 1990). Griffin's study of Ethiopian economy of 1982 indicate it was "directed towards supporting the Amhara elite concentrated in the central highlands and, in particular, in Addis Ababa" and this "orientation determined the selection of the economic activities receiving central government support, directed the development of the road and transport systems and allowed the unrestricted development of regional inequalities" (quoted in Young 1997, 89). It was strong nationalist sentiment in Tigrayan combined with leadership and organization provided by TPLF that transformed economic grievances felt by both Tigrayan peasants and petit bourgeoisie into a powerful insurgent force that overthrew Derg (Young 1997, 36-37). For detailed treatment of the course and phases of TPLF insurgency and its successful conclusion in 1991, see Young, 1997: 92-171 and Berhe, 2008: 79-345. TPLF used ethnicity as an instrument to mobilize peasants to contest state power from Derg and it was also got crucial support from Eritrean rebels seeking independence from Ethiopia, considerations that give us a less romanticized view of a "peasant revolution".

3.2.2 Consolidation

TPLF begun planning to rule the whole of Ethiopia after it become sure about control of Tigray by mid 1980s. TPLF's sought partners and Ethiopian People Democratic Movement (EPDM), a faction of EPRP was the first. Next TPLF created Oromo People's Democratic Organization (OPDO) from Oromos it took prisoners in its war with Derg (Young 1997, 166). In March 1990, the EPRDF came up with a proposal for the 'Smooth and Peaceful Transition in Ethiopia', that envisioned transitional government in which different political forces will be represented. The London conference, called by US in the last days of Derg sought peaceful transfer power from Derg to rebels. Once the negotiations failed TPLF took over Addis Ababa while EPLF secure control of Eritrea. It was agreed that referendum on independence of Eritrea will be held within

two years, while Transitional conference will be held in Addis Ababa to hash out what should be done with the rest of Ethiopia (Markakis 2011, 230-31).

Upon securing Addis Ababa, ERPDF invited different nationalities to send their representatives to the Transitional Conference that was then held during the first week of July 1991. The nationality question was key agenda of the conference and was hotly debated. Defending this pillar of EPRDF policy, Meles Zenawi defended the much controversial issue secession as follows: “If you don’t open the doors and windows of a house, those confined within will break the doors and walls and run out to get fresh air. So leave the doors and windows open for the people to feel free and relax inside the house” (Markakis 2011, 232). Since EPRDF and Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) had majority in the meeting, the Conference adopted Transitional Charter and. A transitional government dominated by EPRDF was established: “the office of president and prime minister, occupied by the leaders of the TPLF and EPDM respectively, as well as the ministries of defence, interior and foreign affairs. The OLF got four ministerial posts” (Markakis 2011, 233).

EPRDF promised democratic rule and respect for human rights. The end of civil war led to great popular relief. In the countryside, even though “non-Tigrayan peasants often remain skeptical of the new regime”, the end forced conscription, villagization and cooperatives gave the peasantry some breathing space (Young 1997, 208-9). EPRDF put low taxation on peasants in an attempt “designed to win the government support and serve as a positive basis in which to contrast it with the Derg, and thus reduce, if not preclude, the possibility that discontented urban intellectuals could find a basis of support in the countryside” (Young 1997, 208-9).

The transitional government also reorganized Ethiopian state on the basis of nationality into fourteen regions, called *kilil*, laying the foundation of federal arrangement that was at the center FDRE constitution that came into force in 1995. The FDRE constitution allowed regional states a wider horizon for self-administration: ‘All powers not given expressly to the Federal government alone, or concurrently to the Federal Government and the States, are reserved to the States’ (Art. 52). But in practice, EPRDF controlled regional states by fusion of state and party “in the familiar ‘scientific socialist’ pattern, which had been tried by the TPLF in Tigray earlier and

proved successful” (Young 1997, 244). Leninist “democratic centralism” which successfully “reconciled rigid centralized control with a new form of ‘democracy’” was adopted by EPRDF in the form of “revolutionary democracy” (Leenco, 1999: 99). For Leninist the bourgeois democratic republic (liberal democracy) is “best possible political shell for capital” as it disorganizes struggle of subordinate classes through market relations and parliament, thus, it is important for revolutionaries to replace it with direct democracy of workers’ soviets and vanguard party (Jessop 2008, 57). Ultimately the vanguard party dominated the direct participation of workers in politics envisaged (Jessop 2008). Similar result obtained under EPRDF as party organization was used to control regional states and local governments. Moreover, much of the revenue of regional states came from federal subsidy, allowing them little discretion on how to administer their regions. Through “state-party tentacle” that reaches even below the *Kebele* level EPRDF was able to have tight control over Ethiopian society (Markakis 2011, 247).

3.2.3 Hegemony

EPRDF aspired not only to dominate Ethiopian society but also sought hegemony. Hegemony is achieved when a significant majority consent to a given rule. For Gramsci “the quest for hegemony is driven by the attempt to link economic and political power by the dominant elite and their aspiring counterparts (‘elite and counter-elite’)” (quoted in Kassahun 2000, 26). A balance between force and consent is what makes hegemony different from domination. Ultimately, “the success of protagonists in the hegemonic contest lies in their ability to enlist various groups in society that can endorse the basic and fundamental concerns through expressing consent” (Kassahun 2000, 27-28).

The two groups that posed significant challenge to EPRDF’s hegemonic aspiration were the Amhara and Oromo elites. Much has been said of the divide-and-rule tactic deployed by TPLF led EPRDF to curtail counter-elites from challenging its aspirations. Vestel (1999, 46) sharply points that dividing and pitting against each other non-Tigrayan ethnicities, TPLF was left alone to handle “larger matters”. Moreover, even if EPRDF was apparently a coalition of political parties from Tigreans, Oromos, Amharas, Southern people and other nationalities, “of all these groups only the TPLF was created by Tigrean nationalists in order to further the interest of their

national constituency”, and the rest were used by TPLF to project its power outside Tigray (Leenco 1999, 212).

Related to this project was an attempt by TPLF led EPRDF to appear as the only party representing the interest of peasants. It was EPRDF that freed peasants from some of the unpopular policies of Derg, yet “referring to that liberation, it wants to teach peasants, claims their loyalty and is prepared to enforce it – but does not want to hear their needs and complaints” (Pausewang 2009, 5-6). EPRDF’s design to endear itself to peasants was understandable since “a substantial appeal to the most numerous and powerful elements in the countryside is the sine qua non for the stability of any government in a modernizing country” (Huntington 2006, 242). Huntington further argued that social stability away from praetorianism requires:

the reappearance in politics of the social forces dominant in the countryside. The intelligentsia has the brains; the military have the guns; but the peasants have the numbers, and the votes. Political stability requires a coalition between at least two of these social forces (Huntington 2006, 240-41).

EPRDF chose to combine its military might with vote and support of peasants to sideline urban based opposition political parties, including those from the two largest ethnicities, Oromo and Amhara. EPRDF assumed that land reform of 1975 has leveled inequality among peasants creating essentially a homogeneous class of peasantry. Without class division, it reasoned, one political party can represent peasantry through “popular democracy” (Markakis 2011, 248-49). This guided much of EPRDF’s political thinking so much “it redoubled its efforts to ‘capture’ the peasantry and secure an impregnable political base in the countryside from where it could rule the country” (Markakis 2011, 248-49).

To achieve hegemony, following Lenin’s advice TPLF led EPRDF also sought to steer the national economy, through control of commanding heights of economy (Vestal 1999, 80). Among other things this includes using “[g]overnment fiscal policy will reduce taxes on EPRDF-backed forces while ‘piling up’ taxes on others” (Vestal 1999, 80); control over “the supply of key inputs (seeds, fertiliser and cement) and key services (telecommunications, and distribution of power and water) (Vaughan and Mesfin 2011, 31); and dominance of international trade. In

this regard, in addition to state owned enterprises “endowment-owned companies” of the four ruling fronts i.e. the Endowment Fund for the Rehabilitation of Tigray (EFFORT) in Tigray Region; Tiret or Endeavour in Amhara; Tumsa in Oromia; and Wendo in the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples’ Regional State (SNNPRS) (Vaughan and Mesfin 2011, 6) were used to control economic activities in the post 1991 “liberalized” economy of the country. The gray area they operate in can be seen in that while legally speaking “these funds consisted of private holdings” yet “completely controlled by the central committees of EPRDF branches” (Labzaé and Sabine 2021, 75). In terms of their strength, though public information is not available and these endowment operate in opaque manner, Paulos estimates from 2007 indicate “that the TPLF possesses around 50 businesses or ‘parapartals’, worth around \$447 million... ANDM – 5 businesses, worth \$44.7 million; OPDO – 7 businesses, worth \$19.5 million; and SEPDM – 1 business, worth \$16.8 million” (cited in Davies 2008, 155). Not only was TPLF politically the dominant member of EPRDF, EFFORT was by far the biggest in comparison with others engaged in production of “cement, textiles, livestock and leather, transportation, construction work, pharmaceuticals etc” (Davies 2008, 155).

Another dimension of this aspiration to control the economy was an attempt at replicating the international division of labour in the past whereby the north produced industrial goods and the south agricultural products and raw materials at national level. For Leenco, who used to have close relation with TPLF leadership, TPLF was seeking to turn “Tigray into ‘an export-oriented enclave’, in total departure from the agriculture-related tasks they assigned to other regions of Ethiopia” (2003, 376). He holds EPLF was harboring the same relation for Eritrea (as industrial hub) and Ethiopia, this clash of visions being one of the reasons why Ethio-Eritrean war of 1998-2000 was fought. This economic thinking seems to have changed later on, at least in terms of location of industries, with stronger push for industrialization by the regime and establishment of different industrial zones in areas of Oromia region around Addis Ababa, thanks to proximity of the region to Djibouti port and major urban centers of the country. However, the imperative of having tight grip over the economy remained the same for TPLF.

The economic thinking EPRDF policies can describes as that of “a small revolutionary elite [abandoning] its radicalism when securing its political position through economic reforms that in

turn open up unprecedented business opportunities for them” (Labzaé and Sabine 2021, 77). There was an attempt to differentiate the neo-patrimonialism that existed under EPRDF and Kagame’s Rwanda from most African countries, as “developmental patrimonialism”, “a situation in which rents are centralised and leaders take a long-term approach to rent maximisation. The state may retain patrimonial characteristics, but is more likely to be broadly developmental” (Vaughan and Mesfin 2011, 7). This was back when Meles was at the help of EPRDF and the state, very much resistant to labeling Ethiopia under EPRDF as neo-patrimonial and “political marketplace” and was “favorite dictator” of Western donors. The authors were of the opinion that EPRDF’s “comprehensive reconsolidation of its power in the wake of the strong electoral challenge it faced in 2005, its political longevity and relative stability once again seem assured, *over at least several further electoral cycles*” (Vaughan and Mesfin 2011, 9, emphasis mine). As was shown by developments after Meles’ death, this was more thanks to leadership of Meles than something institutionalized or more apparent than real. After Meles’ death Ethiopia more and more fell into what was supposed to be true of other African countries according to these authors: “a non-developmental kleptocracy in which the leadership has succeeded in centralising the rent process, but takes a short-term view often because they are insecure in their position” (Vaughan and Mesfin 2011, 8) as was shown by attempt to push through with integrated Master Plan for the capital and surrounding areas which was aimed at taking away land from peasants for cheap and sell it for “rent” to the emerging urban middle class for house building.

3.2.4. EPRDF’s Rule in Oromia

Oromia is the largest both in terms of population and territory of the regional states created by EPRDF. Controlling and taming Oromo nationalism that sought more autonomy than TPLF led EPRDF was ready to allow was crucial for the latter if it was to achieve political and economic hegemony. It was the northern highland kingdoms that embodied the “high culture” of traditional Ethiopia, while the Oromos apparently “embodied the ‘low’ culture” (Bates 2008, 89). “Oromo culture, history, and language have been despised and repressed” by successive Ethiopian regimes “as primitive, backward and inferior” (Asafa 1998, 3). As such Oromos became “the object of campaigns mounted by the hegemonic center. In the times of the empire, they were forced to convert to Christianity and to tithe to the church; following the revolution, they were forced to surrender their lands to a socialist state” (Bates 2008, 89).

It was against this background that modern Oromo nationalism emerged in the 1960s through the agency of Matcha and Tulama self-help association, Bale peasant uprising and through participation of Oromos in Ethiopian student movement (see Asafa 1999, 4-11 for details). It was the establishment of OLF in the early 1970s that ultimately gave Oromo nationalism its political organizational basis. OLF founders “defined the Oromo position in Ethiopia as colonial, demanded the right of self-determination, and called for an armed struggle as the only solution” (Markakis 2011, 196). The 1974 and the subsequent land reform that benefited Oromo peasants, significantly reduced OLF capability to mobilize peasants in its struggle against the Derg. The Somalia invasion of Ethiopia in 1977 complicated OLF operations in the eastern parts of Ethiopia. Somalia’s and OLF’s overlapping territorial claims in Hararghe and Bale did not help matters (Leenco 2004, 3). Had it not been for this complication, Leenco speculates, “the defeat of the Ethiopian regime in 1991 by the EPLF, OLF, and TPLF (made possible with the Sudan government’s pivotal support) would have perhaps been achieved as early as 1977–78” (Leenco 2004, 134).

This left OLF with the option of restarting its operation from Sudan, where it established an office in Khartoum in 1978, and made contact with the Eritrean fronts and TPLF there (Markakis 2011, 197). In the words of one author sympathetic to TPLF cause, TPLF’s attempt to forge relation with OLF was not much of a success due TPLF’s suspicions of OLF’s secessionist tendency and low regard for OLF’s leadership and military effectiveness (Young 1997, 208). OLF was not comfortable with TPLF due to latter’s desire to dominate possible alliance, ideological rigidity and “also that Tigrayans retained a traditional antipathy to Oromos” (Young 1997, 208). TPLF created OPDO in 1990 to rival OLF, further souring the relation between the two (Young 1997, 208). TPLF justified its creation of OPDO since independent Oromo organizations were unable to provide effective leadership, which in TPLF’s view “could be because of their nature” (Leenco 1998b, 147). Marx wrote of peasants that “they cannot represent themselves; they must be represented”, similarly OPDO, created by TPLF, was supposed to be the external savior and representative of Oromos (quoted in Leenco 1998b, 147).

It was with “undercurrent of fear and suspicion” that was “never missing, even at the best of times” in relation between OLF and TPLF (Leenco 1999, 69), that these two sponsored the Transitional Conference and later participated in the Transitional Government of Ethiopia. TPLF was the strongest of the two in terms of military prowess (Cohen 2000, 52) and garnering a broad support of different nationalities in Ethiopia through the front it created i.e. EPRDF. Some of the OLF leaders of the time claim that it was due to “assurances and pressures by neighboring governments and Western powers” that they participated in the risky endeavor of democratizing of Ethiopian state with TPLF (Cohen 2000, 52). In 1992, OLF and TPLF agreed to remove former guerrillas from public administration into barracks in order to create a freer atmosphere for district and regional elections scheduled for June 21, 1992 (Leenco 1998a, 61-62). TPLF’s non-compliance with these agreement, harassment and imprisonment of OLF members, closing of OLF offices soured the already difficult relation between the two (Leenco 1998a). “Amid much chaos, it was the EPRDF, which had more armed troops and cadres than the other parties that turned the election results in its favour” (Aregawi 2008, 339). OLF left the Transitional Government in June 1992 (Abiyu 2003, 80) resorting to protracted guerrilla war against TPLF led EPRDF, which did not make much progress in the coming decades of TPLF led EPRDF rule. OLF claims that TPLF partnership was not genuine from the get-go and that “TPLF simply needed the Oromo as big stick with which to threaten the Amharas” during the transition (Leenco, 1998b, 147). Leenco claims that Meles Zenawi stated to him that OLF seeks to dominate Ethiopia and failing that secession of Oromia, revealing the power struggle that pitted these two partners in TGE against one another ultimately (Leenco, 1998b). In spite of the fallout from the power struggle between the two, OLF achieved from its participation in TGE and drafting of Transitional Charter which laid the foundation 1995 FDRE constitution the creation of Oromia region with “sufficient legislative, executive, and judicial power” to develop the natural resources, culture and language of Oromo people (Abiyu 2003, 76-77).

Once OLF was out of the picture, TPLF used military force and the power of central government to put Oromia region under the control of the OPDO (Abiyu 2003, 80) which ever since dominated political landscape Oromia region. However, OPDO continued to suffer from lack of legitimacy seen as “‘Oromigna mouthpiece’ of the TPLF” by Oromo nationalists, even if it was created alongside other parties “to create a pan-Ethiopian image for the ethno-nationalist TPLF”

(Aregawi 2008, 333). Despite, OPDO has tried to outbid Oromo nationalists by claiming to develop Oromo culture, its implementation of the Latin alphabet for Afan Oromo for official use in Oromia, asserting Addis Ababa to be the capital of Oromia (Markakis 2011, 244).

That OPDO engaged in “a relentless campaign of harassment, arbitrary arrests and violence against real and imagined OLF members and sympathisers, and a heavy handed reaction to frequent student demonstrations” through its reign did not help it garner legitimacy in the eyes Oromos (Markakis 2011, 244-45). After OLF left transitional government “that state authorities link occasional protests with Oromo based political organizations, notably the OLF, is one of the major sources of insecurity among the Oromo population” (Solomon 2007, 69). Lack of good governance and widespread corruption in Oromia did not help OPDO to garner sufficient legitimacy for its rule. In this connection, it is pertinent to point out recruitment strategy of EPRDF in the wider South, after it secured power was not helpful in developing local government with integrity and bureaucracy that was merit based. Following clear instruction, it was the lower intelligentsia that was preferred by the TPLF led EPRDF to lead the local government in Oromia:

elementary school teachers, nurses and medical assistants, agricultural extension workers, local government clerks, secondary school dropouts – who had some education and skills, but were languishing in rural backwaters with few prospects of advancement (Markakis 2011, 233).

The more educated and urban-based upper intelligentsia were shunned by the regime, as they were thought to potentially mount resistance to the regime (Markakis 2011). It is not TPLF led EPRDF’s encouraging social mobility of the lower intelligentsia that was the problem but the predatory logic underpinning it. The TPLF sought to build docile partners, PDOs that did not challenge its hegemonic aspiration, even if the result was filling regional governments other than Tigray with officials that were corrupt, opportunistic, and incompetent (Gudina 2003; Young 1997). This strategy makes political sense if one considers that TPLF was a creation of upper intelligentsia that successfully mobilized peasants to wrestle state power from “the larger and apparently more sophisticated Amhara elite” (Leenco 1999, 226). As such why would it allow the Oromos, the largest ethnic group, to have such an opportunity? The alternative road of building a multinational party led by upper intelligentsia composed from different ethnic groups was not taken. TPLF found it more convenient to have Oromos represented by “lower” intelligentsia,

whose expectation was more manageable through material enrichment that the neo-patrimonial system provided and can easily be cowed into submission since they owe to TPLF their new-found social importance (Markakis 2011).

TPLF led EPRDF rule fits within the overall neo-patrimonial governance strategy followed by most post-colonial African states, albeit of a bureaucratic neopatrimonialism variant, that is, the state equipped with better bureaucratic and security apparatus (Davies, 2008: 112). State institutions were manned by individuals loyal to their superiors with they have personal relations than the wider populace in whose name EPRDF claimed legitimacy of its rule i.e. “revolutionary democracy”/ “popular democracy”. TPLF led EPRDF’s “Revolutionary democracy” was more of ploy to prevent counter-elites from mobilizing the masses in non-Tigrayan areas of the country than it was a genuine attempt of vanguard party bent of transforming a pre-capitalist and peasant society Ethiopia into prosperous, industrial and democratic society. State remained more an arena for competition among different social groups, a price to be won in “competing ethnic nationalism” that characterized Ethiopian political system in order to improve the economic and political lot of particular ethnicity (Merera 2003).

Overall, the EPRDF was structurally and ideologically dominated by the TPLF. This TPLF primacy defined its relationship with its coalition partners (ANDM, OPDO, SEPDM) and, by extension, its rural governance strategy in regions like Oromia. The dominance of the TPLF within the EPRDF coalition structure was maintained through three systematic, enforceable mechanisms. First, was ideological and organizational primacy: The TPLF imposed its 'Revolutionary Democracy' ideology and Leninist 'democratic centralism' across the EPRDF's collective structures. This institutional arrangement ensured that despite the existence of a federal framework, all policy debates and resource decisions were ultimately centralized, forcing regional parties like the OPDO (which lacked early legitimacy among Oromo elites) to adhere to the TPLF line. Second, was control over coercive and cadre apparatus: TPLF members commanded the national security and intelligence apparatus, controlling the deployment of cadres and the party-state fusion at federal and regional levels. The mechanism of cadre deployment prioritized lower-intelligentsia individuals for woreda and kebele posts, favoring loyalty and upward accountability over merit or downward accountability to local constituents.

This ensured that the repressive apparatus (surveillance, military, police) reported upwards through TPLF-controlled lines. Last, we have economic primacy and resource allocation: The TPLF's economic vehicle, EFFORT (Endowment Fund for the Rehabilitation of Tigray), possessed vastly superior financial resources compared to the endowments of the other three allied PDOs. This economic disproportion translated directly into political leverage, allowing the TPLF to trace and control mechanisms of national decision-making and resource allocation, reinforcing the perception that the coalition primarily served Tigrean economic interests. This economic foundation justified the continued use of policy instruments for political reward and patronage across the country.

3.3. EPRDF's Rural and Agriculture Development Policies

In political science we study public policy “the description and explanation of the causes and consequences of government activity” (Dye 2017, 4) because of its significance for understanding the interaction between political system and society that affected by it. Policy evaluation basically attempts to discern the political, economic and social consequences of public policy (Dye 2017, 5-6). This section deals with the agricultural and rural development policies and strategies of EPRDF as they evolved over time.

Clarification of concepts cultivators used in this study is in order before proceeding. The cultivator in post-1991 Ethiopia exists in a state of conceptual tension. The policy domain attempts to classify this actor as the ‘smallholder’-a rational economic actor concerned with productivity and market response. Conversely, the historical and political economy tradition emphasizes the ‘peasant’—a social category defined by its embeddedness in hierarchical political obligations, tenure insecurity, and exploitation. The discrepancy between the descriptive policy language (smallholder) and the critical political reality (peasant) must be formally addressed. This dissertation therefore adopts a synthesized analytical category to reconcile these political and economic dimensions: **Peasants as politically embedded smallholders operating under incomplete commodification and state mediation, distinguished from fully market-oriented (capitalist) farmers.** In contrast, the term ‘smallholder’ is used in this dissertation specifically when engaging with the EPRDF's official policy discourse, which framed this group as entrepreneurial, market-oriented actors. Smallholder farmers mostly possess a small plot of land

(often micro-plots inherited from the 1975 reform). While all subjects of this study are, in a technical sense, smallholders, the term 'peasant' is preferred as it more accurately captures the political nature of their subordination and their partial integration into markets, which was a central mechanism of EPRDF control. This conceptual distinction allows for a clearer analysis of the tension between the state's political objective of control and its economic rhetoric of market-led development. This definition of peasants retains the critical dimension necessary for the thesis's political economy argument, confirming that despite policy rhetoric and market engagement, the majority of Ethiopia's rural population remained subjects of political control and incomplete capitalist transformation. Their economic behavior remains driven partly by subsistence imperatives (Chayanovian logic) and is mediated heavily by the state's command over land and local institutions (political embedding).

Poor peasants are a socioeconomic stratum within the peasantry defined by profound resource deficits and vulnerability. Typically possesses no ox or only one ox, rents out most of their small land holding, and is not food secure throughout the year. They may be compelled to engage in wage labor or client relationships (*gabaree galuu*) for survival. Model farmers are a favored stratum of peasants (post-2005) who are politically co-opted by the state to serve as technical and political role models. They are distinguished by having multiple oxen and the resources (fertilizer, inputs) to produce enough surplus for the market. Their economic success is partially attributed to diligence but also significantly to state patronage (prioritized access to resources, credit, and local governance positions). Commercial farmer is a fully market-oriented (capitalist) actor who engages in farming primarily for profit maximization. Distinguished by controlling productive resources (land/machinery) and systematically exploiting wage labor for capital accumulation. This class was targeted by later EPRDF policies (PASDEP), but did not emerge significantly in the study sites in the Marxist sense.

Inheriting an economy that was shattered by civil war and unpopular socialist economic policies that reduced economic initiative of the population, EPRDF has to begin from scratch to put the back on its feet while at the same time ushering in transition from command economy to market economy. One of the earliest economic policy documents of EPRDF, *The Document Ethiopia's Economic Policy During the Transitional Period* published just before it took power identifies

low savings, external debts, inflation, declining terms of trade for Ethiopian exports and balance of payment deficit as some the economic maladies facing the country (Tomkinson 2019, 74). A more fundamental economic problem it was concerned with was that “[t]he structure of the economy is such that it is extremely backward and dependent on the external sector ... Because of weak linkages between sectors, especially between agriculture and industry, there is no coordinated development” (quoted in Tomkinson 2019, 75). This line of economic thinking will be at the heart of the subsequent economic policies of EPRDF. Transforming agricultural productivity of peasants through technological change while recognizing the need to strengthen its link with industry was seen as crucial for EPRDF from this period onwards. Derg’s agricultural “surplus squeeze strategy” was to be discarded and external finance sought fill in the gaps (Tomkinson 2019, 70, 77). This thinking led to Agricultural Development-Led Industrialization (ADLI), the major economic strategy of EPRDF.

3.3.1 Agricultural Development-Led Industrialization (ADLI)

Established in 1994 (OECD, 2020: 46), ADLI was a national economic strategy that aimed at transforming Ethiopian economy centered on agriculture: “agriculture should be the starting point for initiating the structural transformation of the economy..., and peasant farmers and pastoralists constitute the cornerstone” (quoted in Dessalegn 2008, 131). By taking into account the abundance of labour and land, dearth capital and that the bulk of countries population live in rural areas, the strategy puts development of agriculture as critical to bring about structural transformation of national economy. ADLI envisages agricultural development through “using technology and green inputs to intensify production on already cultivated land; expanding production onto free land by population resettlement; and by redistributing land that is being used sub-optimally” (Dessalegn 2008, 193). Within agriculture the focus was on smallholder farming and crop production (Dessalegn 2008, 131).

ADLI was on the basis of development theories of the 1960s which advocated for growth of agriculture first in order to provide inputs for industries and demand for industrial products (Dessalegn 2008, 138). The strategy’s argument was that agricultural growth will increase income of peasants, reduce poverty and marketed surplus. Improved agricultural productivity will in turn provide more farm products to urban centers, in particular industries stimulating

industrial growth which will thus provide more goods for consumption by urban and rural dwellers. Hopefully this will create “a dynamic link as well as the possibility of a balanced growth, with the rural sector providing the propulsive force” (Dessalegn 2008, 138). The difference between 1960s development thinking and ADLI was that the former focused on large scale farms and simultaneity of investment in industry and agriculture, which was not the case with ADLI (Dessalegn 2008).

ADLI has been subjected to a number of criticisms. First, Ethiopian economists have argued that it focused “on supply, i.e. generating high crop yields, to the complete neglect of demand, i.e. the market where the crops can be sold” (Berhanu cited in Davies 2008, 194). Moreover, since there was no sufficient demand for raw agricultural produce in regional and international markets, surplus production led to collapse of price for agricultural products as in 1995-97 and 2000-02 (Berhanu cited in Davies 2008, 194). Development of small towns was not considered, a flaw since “these provided the demand for the farm surplus, became centres of trade and commerce, and provided off-farm employment to the rural population” (Dassalegn 2008, 138). Second, it was argued that ADLI did not pay sufficient attention to structure and size of rural land holding: “the average household needs not less than two and half hectares of land and a pair of oxen to produce enough food for the family for a year. According to a recent agricultural census, only a small percentage of households in the country, about 13 percent, have land measuring above two hectares” (Dassalegn 2008, 138). This is further complicated by population pressure that leads to further fragmentation of farm plots (Dassalegn 2008, 139). Lastly, analysts have argued there was “no examples of an ADLI-like strategy having worked anywhere else in the world, because in countries like China, Japan and India heavy investment was simultaneously put into industry to create a complementary sector to agriculture” (Getnet cited in Davies 2008, 194).

EPRDF’s assessment of ADLI was that it achieved modest economic growth. “During the period 1992/93-2001/02, GDP per capita has been growing by 2.4 percent per annum” which is low yet “encouraging given the situation Ethiopia was in during the last two years of the late 1990s, notably weather-related shocks [El Nino], Ethio-Eritrea border conflict and major terms of trade loss” (SDPRP 2002, 2-5). A 2005 assessment of Ethiopian Economic Association indicates that agriculture grew at 2.3% per year since 1992, less than the rate of population growth (cited in

Davies 2008, 197). In this scenario, rather than agriculture growth leading to industrialization there would be “a collapse of peasant production under the strain of its excess workforce, leaving behind a booming population without the means to feed itself” (Davies 2008, 197). The low level of economic growth registered under ADLI (Lavers 2012) will force the government to later reassess its economic development approach. Next, we shall consider *Agriculture and Rural Development Policy and Strategies* which came out in 2003, providing a more detailed account of agricultural and rural development thinking of EPRDF, still remaining within the provenance of ADLI.

3.3.2. Agriculture and Rural Development Policy and Strategies

Produced by the Ministry of Finance and Economic Development, *Agriculture and Rural Development Policy and Strategies* document elaborates on and expands agriculture and rural development policy and strategy outlined in ADLI. There are four major goals that were set out for this strategy: rapid and sustainable economic growth, broad based economic development, eliminating dependency on food aid and development of market-oriented economy.

First, agricultural development was taken as crucial for rapid and sustainable economic growth. The justification was that agriculture was dominant in Ethiopian economy, the rural development can be mainly associated with agricultural development, though not limited to it. The document considers labour and land as abundant factors of production, and it expects a shortfall of capital to remain in the short and medium term. Thus, it argues that “rapid economic growth can be realized only if we can adopt a strategy that promotes the economic uses of our limited capital resources and more extensive application of our labor and land resources, particularly the former” (MOFED 2003, 10). Agricultural development was considered as judicious use of factors of production and a rural development strategy that provides for livelihood of the majority rural households. That said it was expected that in the long term, the industrial sector will become “the strategic and leading sector in the overall development process” (MOFED 2003, 10).

Second, the document argues that agriculture centred rural development strategy benefits the masses “since land is broadly distributed and labor is a key factor in the strategy, the bulk of the output will be owned by the producing people”. This was expected to ensure maximum benefit to

the maximum number of people. In this regard, the document claims to take into the experiences the of East Asian countries, the basic lesson of which was that having correct policies in place was not sufficient unless those policies were appreciated and collectively implemented indicating the beginning of “developmental state” thinking. Development should benefit the mass of the working people, and if nothing else Ethiopian masses possess labour that can contribute development (MOFED 2003,, 7, 11).

Third, the strategy was supposed to eliminate food aid dependency. Rapid growth in the agricultural sector was considered as central to achieve this lofty goal considered the recurrent famine for which Ethiopia is almost a byword. To withstand global market shocks, the domestic economy must be expanded. This strategy was “unique strategy that will extricate the country from reliance on external assistance for the most basic commodity, i.e. food, transforming our role from recipients of aid to participants in global economic development” (MOFED 2003, 12).

Lastly, this agricultural and rural development strategy was hoped to orient agriculture towards production for the market. As to the fear that market orientation can adversely affect the livelihood of peasants, we are told that increase in agricultural productivity will not lead to declining income for peasants/farmers, since in spite of possible depreciation of price for agricultural products as consequence, the larger volumes of agricultural products will make up for it. What is more, the urban population that spends more than fifty percent of its daily expenditure on food items will benefit from cheaper prices of agricultural products (MOFED 2003, 12).

As mentioned, the document prefers labour intensive agriculture to capital intensive one: “we expect to promote advanced technology and farming methods that are, nevertheless, not labor-displacing in nature” (MOFED 2003, 15). This can be understood if we consider that preventing rural to urban migration was in the background this strategy and state ownership of land it advocates for. On one hand, increased unemployment and sprawling slums in urban areas were considered fertile ground for urban based opposition, as the election of 2005 will prove. On the other hand, rising rural unemployment can be used for rural based rebellion by the likes of OLF and ONLF (Lavers 2012; Davies 2008, 251).

The strategy foresees also educated agricultural force work replacing uneducated ones. The reason it claims is that such a work force can easily adopt new agricultural technologies, is literate and engage in scientific farming (MOFED 2003, 18). What is surprising is that only primary education was seen to be enough by EPRDF: “primary schools in both *rural and urban* [areas] impart adequate general knowledge” (MOFED 2003, 19; emphasis mine). Considering the large number of illiterate people in the country, which stood at 71% in 1999/2000 (SDPRP 2002, 12), this can be seen positively. The rural development strategy document suggests up to 70 percent of “young, educated population can make a significant contribution to the development of our country *only* if it can be deployed in the agricultural sector” (MOFED 2003, emphasis mine).

A considerable number of pages from the strategy paper is devoted to rebuttal of multiple criticisms of EPRDF land policy i.e. state ownership of land. Against the criticisms that public ownership of land discourages expansion of microfinance and banking service in rural areas, its answer was that the same problem exist in countries where small holding farming dominates even if land is privately owned; similarly the issue of land fragmentation is said to exist even if land privately owned since inheritance indeed takes place in that case too; to those who argue that commercial farming will stifled due to this policy, it responds that large tracts of land is available in lowland of Ethiopia without the need to displace large number of peasants which if allowed can lead to political instability (MOFED 2003, 23-28). In nutshell, it points out that many of the problems raised by critiques are not inherent to the land policy. The long-term solution the strategy puts forth to problems raised by critiques of EPRDF land policy is ensuring rapid economic development that will create strong industrial base and expansion of service that can employ large number of labor currently employed by agriculture rather than consolidation land holding through sell of land that privatization land entails. Despite subsequent tinkering with here and there, the core and broad arguments presented in this document were not discarded by EPRDF.

3.3.3. Sustainable Development and Poverty Reduction Program (SDPRP)

SDPRP was the first poverty reduction strategy program (PRSP) of EPRDF that was based on assessment of a decade of economic experimentation and experience of the country under its rule. It was produced in 2002 and ran from 2002/03-2004/05. It states that both economic growth and poverty reduction are priority of the Ethiopian government, unlike some countries that focus on economic growth only and assume poverty reduction as a consequence of it. Poverty reduction was the core of the agenda of the country's development, the building blocks of this were according to the program: Agricultural Development Led Industrialization (ADLI), justice system and civil service reform, decentralization and empowerment, and capacity building in public and private sectors. The program's "overriding and intentional focus [was] on agriculture" (SDPRP 2002, i). This was justified in that it allows the inclusion of rural population in the economic growth and poverty reduction process.

ADLI was the basis of the program. Land and labor were once again considered the two factors of production that were considered essential to agriculture and rural development of the country. This issue was elaborated in the 2003 *Agricultural and Rural Development Policy and Strategies* document discussed above and consultation on this white paper was one of the inputs for SDPRP. The program foresees that linkage between agriculture and industry outlined by ADLI was to be strengthened and exploited by "non-peasant private sector", in other word investors, that were supposed to directly engage in agricultural production (commercial farming), agricultural marketing and processing agricultural products.

The program's envisioned Civil Service Reform Program (CSRP) and decentralization that put districts (*Woredas*) at the front and center of socio-economic development by directly providing block grants to them. Thus, the focus of the second phase of decentralization was *Woredas*, the first phase being the creation of regional governments that were constitutionally granted different powers in the 1995 FDRE constitution (Emmenegger 2016).

The pro-poor growth dimension of the program was based on the study by Alemayheu G, Abebe S, and J Weeks entitled "The Pattern of Growth Poverty and Inequality in Ethiopia: Which way for a Pro-poor Growth?" from April 2002 sponsored by the Ministry of Finance and Economic

Development (MOFED) (SDPRP 2002, 20). Agriculture was identified as the major source of economic growth and investment in “raising the productivity of labor in general and rural labor in particular (through investing on education and health), and land” (SDPRP 2002, 23). That said, the existence of evidence that shows positive correlation between economic growth and income inequality was the reason the program explicitly sought and advocated for pro-poor growth that accelerated poverty reduction. The program sought to promote growth with equity: “to be broad-based so that the gains of growth accrue to the majority of the poor” (SDPRP 2002, 26).

To achieve economic growth that is pro-poor, it was argued, requires addressing the dependence of agriculture only on rainfall, having strategy to cope with periodic terms of trade shocks, enhancing productivity of land and labor, and structural transformation of the economy. Pro-poor growth was also said to require “a strategy explicitly designed to change the distribution of the gains from growth” (SDPRP 2002, 26-7). It also advocates that development partners purchase food from surplus producing region to transfer to areas with food deficit than import food aid from abroad in order to tackle decline in cereal price during periods of better harvest that negatively affect peasant productivity and income (SDPRP 2002).

Agriculture and rural development were at the center of the program, and the content was similar to those covered by *Agricultural and Rural and Development Policy and Strategies* (SDPRP 2002, 51-105; MOFED 2002). One significant departure of SDPRP was economic problems arising due to rapid urbanization was identified to require urgent resolution. High unemployment, inadequate social service for low-income groups and increasing urban poverty were some of the problems that rapid urbanization entails. It highlights that “for a variety of historical reasons, municipal governments were not adequately integrated into the larger legal and accountability framework of regional governance” (SDPRP 2002, 126). The details of those historical were not divulged, but one can assume political affiliation of most urban areas was one of them, as urban elites and residents were opposed to what they call “ethnic federalism” of EPRDF and regional states it created. This was to prove crucial in the highly competitive 2005 national election (Abbink 2006).

Some of the interventions the program puts forth for urban development and management were strengthening and improving urban governance; improving infrastructures such as markets, roads, drainage, sewerage systems and sanitation projects; increasing affordability urban houses; facilitating land lease; and improving employment opportunities through small and medium enterprises (SMEs) development. There were no details about the urban development in the program and it seems an afterthought than original consideration of the program and the document itself mentions that the issue of government's lack of attention to urban development arose during consultations for SDPRP (SDPRP 2002, 32).

The government report on SDPRP performance indicates that “there was negative real Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth rate of 3.3% in 2002/03 as a result of drought, followed by strong positive performance of 11.9% and 10.6% during the subsequent two years, 2003/04 and 2004/05 respectively” (PASDEP 2006, 3). There was also an increased total flow of external resources, including direct budget support that rose from 309 million Birr in 2002/03 to 2.9 billion Birr in 2004/05 (PASDEP 2006, 4). It was also indicated that all economic sectors contributed to the growth recorded under SDPRP. There was a dearth of independent evaluation of the performance of SDPRP. It was also under SDPRP that a new land proclamation system and program of issuing over 4 million certificates in the four regions (Amhara, Oromia, SNNPR, and Tigray) was implemented to increase tenure security of peasants (PASDEP 2006, 7). That said, overall, as a program SDPRP remained within provenance of ADLI, without significant change to its basic tenets.

3.3.4 Plan for Accelerated and Sustained Development to End Poverty (PASDEP)

A Plan for Accelerated and Sustained Development to End Poverty (PASDEP) was the second PRSP of EPRDF and lasted from 2005/06-2009/10. It was an attempt to build on the progress made under SDPRP. The program was part of government's vision to turn Ethiopia into a middle-income country within 20 to 30 years in which democracy, good governance, and social justice prevailed. It also included some new directions that include “*a major focus on growth* in the coming five-year period with a particular emphasis on greater commercialization of agriculture and enhancing private sector development, industry, urban development and a scaling-up of efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)” (PASDEP 2006,

emphasis mine). There was also a shift from reliance on small holder agriculture of ADLI and pro-poor emphasis of SDPRP in PASDEP:

It will also continue to pursue on the ADLI strategy, but with important enhancements to capture the private initiative of farmers and support the shifts to diversification and commercialization of agriculture. But there is now a consensus that growth is of the essence, and an accelerated growth strategy is at the core of the PASDEP (PASDEP 2006, 46).

Furthermore, it states that the goals of PASDEP among other things include building “an economy which has a modern and productive agricultural sector with enhanced technology and an industrial sector that plays a leading role in the economy” (PASDEP 2006, 44; emphasis mine). A major impediment to growth of agriculture was identified as predominance of subsistence agriculture and lack of market-orientation in agriculture. The agricultural products that were identified to deserve special attention and follow up were cereals, oil seeds, pulse, fiber crops, fruits, vegetables, coffee, tea and spices crops. The aim was said to be to improve the living standard of small holder farmers and generate foreign currency through export of agricultural products in order to achieve development goals of the country and manage balance of payment deficit (PASDEP 2006, 72).

In addition, PASDEP calls for intensification of marketable agricultural products for both domestic and international market through commercialization of agriculture and large-scale commercial farming in order to achieve accelerated growth. Most of the large-scale commercial farming has targeted lowland areas considered as “unused” (by state perspective that utilizes land use conceptualization of settled agriculture) but used by pastoralists more than the highland areas farmed smallholders considered as politically crucial. Gambella and Benishangul-Gumuz regional states are the most affected and “are home to ethnic groups that practice pastoralism and shifting cultivation and which have historically been both physically remote and politically marginal to state power” (Lavers 2012). For a documentary movie that captures the essence and consequences of land grab without consultation and compensation, “clearing the land and clearing people off the land” that lead to forced eviction and even exile to South Sudan of the Agnauk, an indigenous people in Gambella region, with the complicity of some of the foreign donor that supported the regime see *Dead Donkeys Fear No Hyenas* (DDFNH, 2017).

In terms of improving food security, Safety Net Program, which was commenced by the government in 2005 in collaboration donors, was supposed to continue throughout PASDEP. Safety Net Program was designed to serve dual purposes: “helping bridge the income gap for chronically food insecure households and engaging such households in community asset building efforts to earn income, especially during the lean season and times of drought” (PASDEP 2006, 96). The Safety Net Program was planned to cover 8.29 million chronically food insecure people in 287 *Woredas*. The Safety Net Program finance largely by donors “in effect [support] government policies that in many parts of the country offer little potential for transforming smallholder productivity or solving the problem of food insecurity” (Lavers 2012).

Thanks to the urban based opposition to EPRDF in 2005 National Election, more effort was put to include urban areas into development efforts in PASDEP, without sacrificing historical emphasis on rural population. It was argued that “while the focus of much of pro-poor development must inevitably remain rural-based, urban areas will play a more central role in the next phase of Ethiopia’s development, and in the PASDEP, than they have been in the past” (PASDEP 2006, 161). The justification put forth were that significant part of the modern sector growth takes place in urban areas because of concentration of people, infrastructure, and services; that rural-urban linkages need to be strengthened, to maximize the poverty impacts, and to take full advantage of the synergies; urban areas provide the essential market and demand for rural production, and the essential source of skills, services, innovation and investment that need to spread out to rural areas (PASDEP 2006, 161). The urban development strategy adopted by PASDEP has four pillars: support for Micro and Small Enterprises and job creation; integrated housing development; improved access to land infrastructure and services; and promoting urban-rural and urban-urban linkages (PASDEP 2006, 162).

Arguably it was with PASDEP that development policy of EPRDF took a significant break with ADLI, the latter sought basically to “getting the masses of small farmers to feed themselves through public support” (Lefort 2015, 366). PASDEP with its focus on accelerating economic growth was also different from the pro-poor SDPRP. Further shifts in PASDEP can be seen both in the emphasis it gives to commercialization of agriculture and urban development. The former was aimed at generating more revenue and hard currency for the government and the latter at

managing urban based political opposition. The next two five-year development plans installed by EPRDF, Growth and Transformation Plan I and Growth and Transformation Plan II were more or less incrementally built on the development strategies, policies and programs set out in PASDEP (Lefort 2015, 372).

An important context to the changes that came with PASDEP was that EPRDF adopted the “developmental state” model. Even if EPRDF sold “public enterprises to party holdings and to a tycoon did not amount to full acceptance of capitalism by TPLF elites” (Labzaé and Sabine Planel 2021, 78-79). The inevitability of capitalist development was recognized by Meles after the 2001 split with TPLF. This was more due to power struggle within the front, in which he sidelined the left leaning faction with “Bonapartist tendencies”, than pressure from foreign donors (Labzaé and Sabine Planel 2021). It was not the Western neoliberal type of capitalism that begun to guide Meles’s and EPRDF’s economic thinking but the East Asian developmental states with their streak of authoritarianism. In Ethiopian case authoritarianism was ostensibly replaced by democratic politics. In “developmental state” model state plays a more prominent, even that of transformative role in the economy than is the case with neoliberalism.

According to Castells (1992, 55) a developmental state “establishes as its principle of legitimacy its ability to promote sustained development and ... structural change in the productive system”. This has also been reflected in the Ethiopian context. “Developmental state” was not democratic in Ethiopia, despite the rhetoric. Particularly, the controversial 2005 elections were followed by EPRDF’s crackdown on the opposition parties, civil society and the media as well as further narrowing of the political space. EPRDF still sought to strengthen its legitimacy on the basis sustained high rate of growth and infrastructural development that were witnessed in the country (Asnake 2011, 3).

Building a globally competitive market economy with state guidance was at heart of the “developmental state” model. Thus, under this new dispensation “the peasant masses were now seen as less useful than the most advanced actors, the ‘new entrepreneurs’ and ‘constructive investors’ active in agriculture, industry and the service sector” that were seen as crucial for building such an economy (Lefort 2015, 365).

That said, it was after PASDEP and adoption “developmental state” that Ethiopia scored significant economic growth, becoming one of the fastest growing economies in Sub-Saharan Africa. Accordingly, “from 2004 to 2011 economic growth has averaged around 10.6 per cent per year, more than twice the Sub-Saharan African average” (Lefort 2015, 468). This glittering assessment of the Ethiopian economy tells only half of the reality though, as it ignores “the contradiction between a sharply growing modern sector and the persistence of dire poverty mainly among the peasants”, in other words emergence of dual economy (Lefort 2015, 358). And moreover, between ten and fifteen million Ethiopians, mostly peasants, remained food insecure and needed food aid throughout this period (Lefort 2015).

Table 4. Policy Mechanisms Linking Political Imperatives to Agrarian Outcomes

Policy/Instrument	Political Imperative (Control/Legitimation)	Developmental Aim (Agrarian Outcome)	Mechanism in Kebele Prac- tice
Land Certification (1st & 2nd Phase)	Regime survival, secur- ing rural voter base, neu- tralizing inter- nal/external pressures for land privatization.	Enhanced tenure security, encouraging long-term investments, facilitating land rental markets.	Kebele offices responsible for registration and distribu- tion; certifica- tion used as a tool of politi- cal reassurance against redis- tribution.
Model Farmer Sys- tem (Post-2005)	Political patronage, co- opting rural elite (richer peasants) post-2005 electoral crisis to main- tain social control.	Diffusion of high-yield technology (extension packages), increasing market surplus, demon- strating achievable pros- perity.	Prioritized ac- cess to subsi- dized inputs, promotion to local leader- ship (Ga- ree/Gott); use of success sto- ries as propa- ganda.

Expropriation (Péri-Urban)	Rent extraction, rewarding political allies/urban elites, suppressing potential urban opposition.	Urban industrialization/housing, facilitating FDI attraction, capital accumulation by dispossession (ABD).	Use of the vague "Public Purpose" clause (Proclamation 455/2005); systematic payment of minimal compensation to displaced peasants.
----------------------------	---	--	---

Source: Developed by Author

3.4. Conclusion

The heart of conundrum for TPLF led EPRDF's political and economic strategy was that even if sought through its "revolutionary democracy" and various economic policies to directly mobilize the rural masses cutting off counter-elites from their social base, it never shed its image in popular opinion as government of Tigrayans and first and foremost serving their interest. This did not mean TPLF led EPRDF did not benefit non-Tigrayans in absolute terms as the economic development after mid 2000s attests to. TPLF led EPRDF maintained a tight grip over state apparatus and commanding heights of the economy and concentration of power in the hand TPLF officials, feeding into to that image.

The relatively higher support that TPLF had in Tigray was not enjoyed by its junior partners OPDO, ANDM and SEPDM in Oromia, Amhara and Southern Nations, Nationalities and People's regions respectively. The hegemony, legitimacy and building of dominant party system that TPLF led EPRDF sought through its agriculture and rural centered policies (unique considering economic policies of its predecessor and justified at least in the ends it sought) and lately "developmental state" was put to the ultimate test through the street protests that engulfed the country from 2015-2018 (Lavers 2023).

Even though state in Ethiopia has shown now and then its capability to bring about far reaching societal changes, for instance Menelik's imposition *Gebbar* system in the wider South, Haile

Sellasis's centralization and modernization, Derg's land reform and EPRDF's federal state restructuring, it never attained state-wide legitimacy equally shared among its diverse social groups, it did not develop enough rational-legal authority to fend off the urge to adopt neopatrimonialism's proneness to short term economic thinking and it remained the site and prize of particularistic political struggle that characterized post-colonial African political landscape (Clapham 1988, 2015; Davies 2008; Lata 1999).

CHAPTER FOUR: ECONOMY, LAND AND PEASANTS

Introduction

Agriculture is the major economic sector in Ethiopia employing over 85% of the people who mainly reside in rural areas. Control over rural population and extraction of surplus from agriculture was seen as crucial for survival of EPRDF regime. Two field sites in Oromia regional state were selected to look into the political economy of state's relation with peasants under EPRDF regime and to a lesser extent under its successor since 2018, the Prosperity Party (PP). The inclusion of PP was driven by data, as peasants and officials were inclined not only to discuss agrarian issues of EPRDF era but also the pressing agrarian issues under PP, including the changes in terms of trade that they saw as harmful to peasants. The inclusion of PP would also serve as starting point for future researchers. One of the field sites was in Dawo *Woreda*, a rural area with a market town at Busa that also serves as an administrative center. The other was Sululta, a peri-urban area that underwent significant urbanization over the years.

The last chapter attempted an analysis of EPRDF government's agricultural and rural development policies, strategies and interventions. This chapter will analyze the interaction of those interventions with peasant society and agricultural activities, and their effect on the livelihood and welfare peasants in Dawo and Sululta. It considers the role of microfinances and cooperatives in rural economy is considered. The issue of land governance under EPRDF, rural land certification in Dawo and state led land dispossession in Sululta are also discussed in the chapter.

By adopting the critical agrarian political economy approach that investigates “the social relations and dynamics of production and reproduction, property and power in agrarian formations and their processes of change, both historical and contemporary” (Bernstein quoted in Akram-Lodhi et al 2021, 4), an attempt will be made to gain insights into the similarities and differences of the economy of two areas as well as the changes and continuities under EPRDF and to an extent PP. In spite of the analytical and explanatory aim of the following discussions, great care was taken to allow the peasants' voices to be heard throughout and their valuation and evaluations of matters to stand on their own. This is usually true for qualitative research design that allows us to learn “the meaning that the participants hold about the problem or issue, not the

meaning that the researchers bring to the research or that writers express in the literature” (Creswell and John 2018, 258). Also, necessary precautions were taken to avoid the pitfalls of both descriptivism and empiricism (Greco 2021, 254).

In the following two chapters codes were used for key informant interviews and Focus Group Discussions, for easy readability, on which the chapters were based. For example, I1 refers to Interview number one, FGD 3 refers to Focus Group Discussion number three. The details of the interviews and FGDs, including places and dates, were provided in Appendix 2.

4.1. An Overview Agricultural Products and Rural Economy of The Study Sites

Found in South West Shoa Zone of Oromia regional state, Dawo *Woreda* occupies a typical highland plateau of Shoa massif, and it is a rural area known for its *Teff* production in its *Woyna Dega Kebeles*. In the more Dega areas of the *Woreda Enset* is grown for largely household consumption. Thus, we find the two dominant staple foods of the country produced in the *Woreda*, *Teff* is consumed throughout much of the country while *Enset* is largely consumed in Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples regional state that borders South West Shoa Zone.

Perched below the Entoto mountains that surround Addis Ababa city to north, Sululta Town administration is found formerly in Oromia Special Zone Surrounding Finfinne. Since 2022 Sululta town was included in the newly created Sheger City of Oromia region, which cover most of the Oromia Special Zone Surrounding Finfinne. The landscape in Sululta is dominated by sprawling urban area surrounded by rural area covered by large grazing lands and communal forests. It forms part of the peri-urban area around Addis Ababa. A peri-urban area is a “transitional zone” between urban and rural tenure systems and can be “cultivated rural land within the urban administrative boundary or within the planning boundary that is under threat of future incorporation” (Lavers, 2023: 193). Although Sululta town has witnessed significant urbanization in recent years, it is mainly populated by peasants who engage in family-owned farms that largely utilize family labor. Cereal production in Sululta is limited due to heavy rainfall and low fertility of the soil. Still some peasants continue to produce some wheat and barley on small plots. Potato is also produced. Other agricultural activities in the area include dairy production and animal fattening which is made possible due to large grazing area from

which animal feed is produced for local consumption and sold in large quantities destined mainly for pastoralists and agro-pastoralists in a lowland area.

The local economy in Sululta is significantly affected by the sprawling urban area. In the recollection of local people urbanization was/is a phenomenon of the recent past, which over the last two decades turned the few houses and shops found along the asphalt road that passes through area into a major suburban area.

4.1.1. Local Markets

We can define market as both “a state of mind and a place to trade” (Redfield 1956, 46). The agriculture and rural development policy of EPRDF envisages that “strictly speaking, rural development means nothing but the transition from subsistence to market oriented agricultural economy” (MOFED 2003, 48). This was based on the premise that rapid and sustainable and rapid development is possible when driven by market forces. It argues that it is necessary to break down domestic consumption orientation of peasants production and that in order to “induce farmers to produce more than own consumption there is need to actively promote demand for goods and services that mutually benefit agriculture and other sectors” (MOFED 2003, 41), envisioning a process not dissimilar to Kautsky’s discussion of how production of cheap manufactures creates need for money and penetration capital in rural areas (Akram-Lodhi and Cristóbal 2010a, 186-87). However, peasants tend to hold the “impersonal world of the market” at arm’s length in order to balance its imperatives of profit with that of “the local traditional and moral world” (Redfield 1956, 46).

In both Sululta and Dawo the district towns, Sululta and Busa respectively are the major market towns and destinations of agricultural products. There is a big weekly market on Monday in Sululta and on Sunday in Dawo and minor ones on other days. The former are remarkable for presence animals like cattle, sheep, and goats that are brought to the market in addition to grain, vegetables and fruits. And merchants from distant areas also bring clothes, shoes, religious ornaments, electronic products, etc. on the days of the big market. Farmers from most *Kebeles* participate in these markets. Not the least, these are days when inter-village and intra-village social relations also come to life and feasts of food and drink largely accompany them. The

smaller market largely caters to the daily needs of population of the towns, middlemen and middle women are the key actors, not peasants themselves.

In both Sululta and Dawo merchants play a crucial role in integrating peasants within the national economy. Peasants consider merchants as their exploiters with the support of the government. This evidence, for the peasants, was in that allegedly local officials intentionally paralyzed cooperatives and set price ceiling for agricultural products for the benefit of the merchants, a point which will be elaborated later in the section on cooperatives. Orthodox Marxism treated merchant capital as an impediment to advances of capitalism, unlike industrial capital. Merchant capital with its focus on exchange rather than production is considered to perpetuate agricultural backwardness. A more recent scholarship indicates that merchant capital can be productive “in the form of produce-tying money advances, investments in storage, transport and processing and even direct cultivation” (Jan and Barbara 2021, 172). Merchant capital can help transition to capitalism in rural areas by subsuming peasant households to the logic of market, in the process turning peasants into Petty Commodity Producers (PCPs) “whose ‘aggregate labour-power is exploited through price domination’” (Banaji quoted in Jan and Barbara 2021, 173). Thus, it was argued that merchant capital is less a precapitalist remnant it is for orthodox Marxism and more of integral element of contemporary capitalism (Jan and Barbara 2021)

The merchants in both study sites have invested in storage facilities and transportation sector as well extending loans to peasants who fall on hard times. In Sululta animal feeds (hay) is a major source of income for peasants: “Hay is what peasants from here sell on market. The small amount of grain produced here is not sufficient for subsistence that people buy grain from market” (I4). Storage for animal feeds is provided by merchants and well to do peasants in Sululta. Some of them buy animal feeds at a lower price during harvest and sell it later at a higher price. Storage is also rented for a price to other peasants. Merchants and well to do peasants also provide loans to peasants on future harvests of animal feeds.

In addition to animal feeds, peasants in Sululta used to sell firewoods, cow dung (used as substitute for firewood), butter and milk in Addis Ababa to get cash before urban expansion in Sululta and land commercialization over the last decades. The grain produced here was not even

enough for family consumption since the land was not fertile. The land in Sululta was not fertile enough that should stay fallow for a year to give little agricultural produce (I22; I16). Some of the locals, particularly women, were happy that there was urbanization since it helped them to sell their produces nearby, avoiding long travel on feet to Addis Ababa to sell dairy products and firewood. It was during Aba Dula presidency of Oromia region (2005-2010) that few industries that produced pasteurized milk were established in Sululta (I22).

In Dawo *Woreda*, *Teff* is the major agricultural product in the Woyna Dega area. Enset is also produced in the Dega areas of the *Woreda*. As “one of the main domestically marketed crops in Ethiopia”, *Teff* is produced by rural households “for the market and it is an important source of cash income” (SDPRP 2002, 17). National statistics shows that the effect of cultivation of Enset on decrease in the probability of poverty was “not significant at all” and for *Teff* the effect “becomes significant around 10%” (SDPRP 2002, 17). This was corroborated through field work in Dawo, whereby the *Teff* producing areas were considered better off and food self-sufficient than the poorer *Enset* producing *Dega* areas. But there are some improvements in the livelihood of peasants in Dega areas after they started producing potatoes (I2). That said, most of the *Teff* produced by peasants was mostly sold to merchants who have storage facilities and transportation mechanism that allows them to sell it at better price in Addis Ababa. Peasants in Dawo sell *Teff* to generate cash for education of their children, health expenses, taxation, to buy fertilizer, and procure edible oil, onions, coffee, gasoline, etc. (I3; I5; FGD 6). According to an agricultural expert from Dawo *Woreda* *Teff* is more of cash crop that peasants sell on the market than food for peasants’ domestic consumption that they sell *Teff* and buy the much cheaper maize for domestic consumption (I21). In the words of one peasant “this area[Dawo] is famed as *Teff* producing but we don’t consume it, we sell it and consume maize” (FGD 1). Maize is considered as food for the poor, *Teff* is considered as food for the well to do and peasants in Dawo proudly (some resentment might lurk in the background) talk of the fact their *Teff* so special that it was bought in person by residents of Addis Ababa on the weekly Sunday market. Other peasants point out that even if they were farmers that they go hungry and don’t have enough seeds for next season since they sell what they produce for different expenses (FGD 6). They complain that EPRDF used to give fertilizer on credit and collect the money during harvest

time. This is used to force peasants to sell their produce at similar times, increasing supply and thereby depreciating prices (FGD 10).

From this evidence, it seems dependence on market have increased in both Sululta and Dawo. In Sululta off-farm activities and agricultural activities other than grain/cereal production, i.e. animal feeds and dairy farming were crucial to generate cash to buy food items for domestic consumption since subsistence farming cannot provide enough food due to infertility of land and heavy rainfall that turns some of plateau's areas into swamps (Abadula 2019, 112). This was made possible in part due to urbanization in the area. In Dawo, on the other hand, there were limited opportunities for off farm activities that significant amount of the grain they produce was sold on the market to generate cash for different expenses. The pull of market forces is gaining more and more control over the livelihood mechanisms of peasants in both areas. The major actors in these process were merchants who have “strategic command” over market (Jan and Barbara 2021, 173) even when peasants retained some control over their labour (which was/is largely provided by family members of peasant households) and land (which was/is at least legally state and public owned and allows usufructuary right to peasants, this more so in the less commercialized Dawo than in Sululta where forced eviction of peasants from their land by EPRDF has upended peasants access to land and tenure security). This was/is made possible since merchants have control over pricing and provision of consumer goods; have capital to buy, store and transport agricultural products; and in the case of Sululta have the means to develop land for middle class housing. Thus, the merchants in both areas were/are capable of “setting the terms on which PCP participated in markets and profiting from their adverse inclusion” (Bernestien cited in Jan and Barbara 2021, 173).

The expansion of rural roads under EPRDF made integration of peasants into market system and the national economy possible, for which the peasants credit the government (I1; I5, FGD 1, FGD 6). The major impediment to efficient utilization of these roads was that they were not properly maintained and repaired. EPRDF sought to solve this problem by encouraging local people to become de facto owners of the rural roads. The major responsibility for rural road repair and maintenance was put *Kebele* leaders who were tasked with “mobilizing and coordinating the efforts of the local people to that end” (MOFED 2003, 57). A *Kebele* manager in

Dawo Woreda confirmed that rural road construction, repair and maintenance had consumed much of the energy of Kebele and sub-Kebele units, even while the problem persisted (I3).

4.1.2 Peasant Differentiation

There are three theoretical frameworks that explain peasant differentiation. The first is modernization theory that largely sees market forces and new technologies as the major drivers of peasant differentiation. There are entrepreneurial farmers who consistently follow market logic and “obtain the relative benefits (higher incomes, enlarged savings, attractive price differentials and, sometimes, more subsidies) that will allow them to further develop their farms” and farmers who don’t and become “marginalized and quit, presumably to join the ever-growing ranks of urban workers” (van der Ploeg 2017, 2). Farmers themselves are divided into “laggards, ‘in-between’ farmers or progressive developers” along the traditional-modern continuum (van der Ploeg 2017, 3). Class differentiation is the preferred term for Marxist theories of differentiation that was elaborated above under the section Marxist theories of peasant studies. Suffice to say for Marxists differentiation “*stems from* processes of commoditization and capital accumulation which subsequently *result in* class differentiation” (van der Ploeg 2017, 4, emphasis original). The third approach was demographic differentiation inspired by works of Chayanov. This approach was also elaborated above in the theoretical section as neopopulism/. Its major argument was that differentiation was cyclical and was driven by demographic forces internal to family unit (van der Ploeg 2017).

Here we *largely* adopt the Marxist approach, in which differentiation leads two antagonistic class of peasants over time, i.e. “agrarian capitalists, who control large and growing slices of land, and proletarianized workers, who have lost the land they previously tilled” (van der Ploeg 2017, 4) to discuss the results of the study. Capitalist penetration of rural areas is a prerequisite for peasant differentiation. Commodification of means of production (agricultural land and farm tools/machinery) and labour are largely absent in the study sites. Agricultural land was owned by state allowing usufructuary right for peasants and labour was mostly provided farm households. Agriculture itself was not capitalist in the sense of “farmers hiring wage labourers” (Cousins 2022, 1391) since employment of wage labour was infrequently deployed during peak harvest. Land commercialization exists in Sululta but it was mostly for real estate and housing

development, not for commercial or capitalist agriculture. Thus, small scale peasant agriculture takes place parallel to the modern economic sector brought by urbanization in Suluta, a kind of dual economy. That does not mean urbanization has not affected peasant livelihood as some of the youth in Suluta have found some jobs and became wage labourers in the town as some peasants have left behind agriculture due forced eviction or voluntary sell of their land and others have augmented their assets from land sale. It, however, means that capital generated by urbanization has not transformed small hold peasant agriculture either through mechanization or reinvestment in the form of capitalist agriculture.

The only thing that comes close to capitalist farming in Dawo was the irrigation farming that used to produce vegetables, fruits and onions along *Gafarso*, *Kallacho* and *Jaliwan* rivers. These irrigation farms employed wage labor due to labour intensive nature of irrigation produced vegetables, fruits and onions. The labourers were not locals and largely came from Southern nations, nationalities and people's region and Amhara region because of their prior skills in irrigation. These irrigations were also capital intensive since it requires employment of labour and provision of farm inputs like herbicides, pesticide and fertilizer. Therefore, these irrigations were largely operated by wealthier individuals from towns who used to rent land from peasants, who were sometimes employed as wage laborers. The impact of these irrigations on peasant class differentiation was minimal due to its limited scope. These have subsided with current governments focus on wheat irrigation largely owned and run by local peasants (FGD 7).

Public ownership of land after the 1975 land reform has led to “peasantization” i.e. “the creation of small cultivators, undifferentiated, therefore uncompetitive, insecure in terms of meeting their basic needs, and unable to be involved in initiatives towards improvement and modernisation of their farms” (Dessalegn 1985, 61). Even if there was difference in terms of meeting family need among peasants' due farm size and number ox(en) owned, the “*qualitative* difference” in terms of marketable surplus and “particularly with regard to accumulation, is insignificant” (Dessalegn 1985, 61, emphasis in the original). Furthermore, Dessalegn elaborates:

The peasant with 3 hectares of land, for instance, is only slightly better-off than the one with 1 hectare, for the reason that both are fettered by the same 'mode' of production. They use the same traditional implements, the same cultivation methods, and the object of production in both is identical, namely, self-

sustenance...True, peasants with bigger plots, who also have large families of working age and surplus oxen may be in a good position to produce more, but much of the produce will be used up at home to feed the family (1985, 61).

A much similar picture obtains under EPRDF since it continued with much Derg's land policy. Thus, the class equalization of land reform continued under EPRDF as manifested in "micro'-plot holding" agriculture (Dessalegn cited in Davies 2008, 203-4). Ege (2019, 33) also considers 'the exceptional degree of equality [of land holding] that is the legacy of the land reform' as one of the robust findings of peasant studies in Ethiopia. Dessalegn goes further to blame the land holding system for impoverishment of the country when he says, "the social homogeneity in rural Ethiopia today, which is in large measure a consequence of the land system, is an inhibiting factor for agrarian development" (Dessalegn 2006, 4). Legal land rental, which EPRDF allowed (USAID 2014) to help with efficient use land short of privatization, exists to an extent in both Sululta and Dawo. But its impact on peasant differentiation was again insignificant due to limitation on the years and proportion of farm plot a peasant can rent.

The number of ox(en) owned and the quantity of farm input peasants can afford and use are the major criteria used by agricultural experts, development agents and peasants themselves to differentiate among peasants (poor peasants, middle peasants and model farmers). According to a former development agent currently working as land expert at one of the *Kebeles* in Dawo:

We divide peasants into three classes. The wealthy, middle and poor. But land is not the only criteria. Property also matters. If you have large land and do not properly utilize it, you can still be poor. Another can rent your land and work it and still become a model farmer. There are some peasants who rent their land and engage in wage labour or live with better off peasants, working on their land (gabaree galuu). My estimate of peasants like this is around 5% (I2).

Rather than promoting consciousness of class difference, EPRDF agricultural and rural development policy discourse and practice on the ground seems to have preferred the modernization approach to differentiation in which transition of peasants into farmers by encouraging competition and emulation of model farmers by other peasants, its Marxist "revolutionary democracy" aside. This could be due to the influence of donors on agricultural and rural development policy of the regime. Indicative of this was the view of agricultural

experts and DAs. One agricultural expert at Dawo Woreda Agriculture Bureau explained differentiation as follows:

Poor peasants usually did not employ modern farming techniques and used little or none of the farm inputs that improved productivity. Some rent most of their land and cultivate small sections of their land. Most people in Dawo Woreda fall into poor peasants, even if some transitioned to middle peasants/model farmers. The criteria we used was: model farmers have at least two pairs of oxen and produce enough food that they sell surplus for market after providing for family consumption; middle farmers mostly have a pair of oxen and are food secure but provide little surplus for market; and poor peasants have an ox or no ox, rent most of their land and are not food secure throughout the year. Some poor peasants work on farms of well to do peasant, engage in wage labour and send their children to rear cattle and work on farms of other peasants. There was no increase in wealth inequality over time, and the tendency was more towards increased mobility from poor to middle to model farmers to investors (I21).

In spite of the recognition that there are poor, middle and model farmers, the agricultural development agents and experts discarded the Marxist view that “there was an inherent tendency driving [peasant] polarization into classes of either capital or labour” (Cousins 2022 1393). The emphasis was on mobility and the transition from a poor group to a richer one. The agricultural development agents and experts divided farmers themselves in terms their proclivity to adopt modern farming techniques and technology, true to modernization approach: “There are different types of peasants: fast learners, those who learn from fast learners, those who wait for results to adopt and laggard ones” (I20). The explanation provided by peasants themselves for differentiation shows how much the discourse of modernization has got grip on their imagination, probably through various training provided by DAs and agricultural experts. To give examples, one of the peasants explains “Peasants differ in their hard working and wealth. Those who afford to buy enough fertilizer for their farm can be successful and model farmers” (FGD 9). Another, himself a model farmer adds “they [model farmers] work hard, accept new farming method, save from their income, give loan to poor farmers, set an example for others, have enough produce for consumption and sell surplus for the market” (I8).

Studies of agriculture and rural development “ignore class differentiation at their peril, given the ubiquitous role of class interests (often in combination with other axes of difference)” (Cousins 2022, 1388). That said, there was not much *qualitative* difference among peasants in the study

sites say for example in terms of mechanized farming or some peasants exploiting the labour of other peasants, other than some peasants producing more than others by using more farm inputs, land and oxen. There is little evidence that model farmers themselves have transition to capitalist farming consistently applying market logic, increasing their profit through either intensification or scaling up of their farm operation, though some better off peasants rent land from poorer peasants. There was not mechanization to talk of in both study sites that one agricultural expert “Model farmers were/are supposed to be modern farmers. But most of those considered as model farmers here were/are merely those with many oxen, lacking any mechanization. Real model farmers might exist in Bale and Arsi” (I17). Farm tools remain traditional and can be obtained by any peasant at close to no cost, land more or less accessed by almost all peasants, we don’t have a class of peasants that own the means of production (land and machinery) and employs and exploits wage labor for profit. Thus, we can assert there was little class differentiation in the Marxist sense of the term under EPRDF in the study sites, since we did not have evidence for emergence of two antagonistic class of peasants over time.

4.1.3 Agrarian Labor

We can understand labor in its obvious form as “the act of exerting energy to produce commodities or services within the ‘labor process’” while in the form of social reproduction it “is the set of private and public activities, institutions and unpaid and paid forms of work that are largely carried out by women” (Pattenden 2021, 91). Through interviews and FGDs conducted in both Sululta and Dawo, it was confirmed that most of the peasants employ family labor for farming. For one *gare misoma* leader in Sululta “there is not large enough land to employ all members of peasant family that peasants don’t employ wage labor” (I23). Thus, we can identify them as peasants in the sense that they are “small-scale agricultural producers who rely mainly on household labor” (Cousins 2022, 1387). Still there are other labor arrangements in the study sites that regulate compensation for laborers depending on assets brought into the arrangement: land, seeds, fertilizer and oxen.

The first was sharecropping arrangement known in both sites in Afan Oromo as “*Hirtaa*” (literally meaning division). It was usually put in place one party has land but not oxen, fertilizer or seeds or labor power to cultivate it. Usually “if the landowner provides seeds, he/she will get

half of the produce, otherwise one third (*Siso*)” (I22). It was poor peasants who did not afford oxen and other farm inputs that got into such an arrangement. The elderly also engage in “*hirtaa*” because they don’t have labor power as widowed and divorced women do so because they are culturally prohibited from plowing. In the case of Dawo, sharecropping is not very prevalent in *Woyna Dega* but still persists in *Dega* areas (I2).

The second labor arrangement was locally known as “*gabare galu*” in which poor or landless rural residents reside with and work for better off peasants for a whole year and get paid in money or kind, usually grain. This arrangement has declined under EPRDF to the extent that now it almost does not exist (I2; I11). This was a kind labor tying arrangement. The third arrangement was wage labor, which was employed during peak season of harvest. Rather than the back breaking daily wage labor in towns, wage labor on rural farms was seen as preferable way of generating additional income by the rural poor. These wage laborers “sell their labour-power because they lack sufficient means of production for their own livelihood” (Pattenden 2021, 92).

Hirta (sharecropping) is more beneficial than land rental, a topic we shall discuss below in detail. But the poor cannot provide seeds for sharecropping, thus choosing to rent their land. The better off peasants rent fertile land from poor peasants and sometimes employ them as wage laborers (FGD 2). Wage labor employed in agriculture was almost non-existent in Sululta except during harvest and most of the wage labor employed in Dawo was on the more capitalist irrigations that used to produce vegetables and onions. “*Gabare galu*” was infrequent and significantly decreasing over time both areas. Very few peasants engage in sharecropping and land rental in Sululta but more such arrangements exist in Dawo with land rental more common than sharecropping. Tenancy with sharecropping alongside usurious money lending are considered as ‘semi-feudal’ relations in agriculture (Bidwai 2021, 73). Both exist in Dawo, while sharecropping also exists in Sululta town but not usurious money lending. We can add *gabare galu* to the list since labour was not free to seek other employment for a whole year tied to the household as it is. But such arrangements were too infrequent and declined with time that we can say the dominant labor regime in agriculture in both study sites was that of peasant household employing family labor.

4.1.4 The Changing Terms of Trade

It was Adam Smith who recognized implicitly the possibility of class contradiction between capitalists, landlords and workers, without inquiring it further to its logical conclusion. His investigations included how national wealth was created and also “how it is also distributed among ‘the different ranks and conditions of men’”, yet “he, the inveterate optimist, was obviously waylaid by the notion of the ‘progressive state’, which, according to his contention, is ‘the cheerful and hearty state to all the different orders of the society’” (Smith quoted in Mitra 1977, 182). It was with Ricardo that class antagonism between capitalist and landlords come into its own in his discussion on price of corn: “the capitalists represent ‘town’ and the landlords ‘country’, the Ricardian problem of income distribution then also emerges as a ‘terms of trade’ problem between town and country” (Mitra 1977, 184-5). Ricardo stood for the interest of capitalists, Malthus for landlords and Marx for workers in subsequent debates. For Marx peasants were included among non-revolutionary elements of working people alongside artisans, small traders and manufacturers, shopkeepers, etc. since they were against economic progress, capital accumulation and industrialization in their attempt to “survive on the basis of small-scale operations” (Mitra 1977, 189).

The problem of exchange between town and country, industry and agriculture emerge for Marx since capitalist need foodstuff and raw materials from agriculture and market for their commodity in the countryside. He states that in the Volume I of *Capital* “the foundation of all highly developed divisions of labor that are brought about by the exchange of commodities is the cleavage between town and country. It may be said that the whole economic history of society is summed up in the movement of this antithesis. We pass it over, however, for the present” (cited in Mitra 1977, 190). Yet, he did not develop it further in his later works. In the Soviet Union, the terms of exchange between agriculture and industry were manipulated in favor of the latter to extract surplus from agriculture for rapid industrialization. For developing countries, this remains a crucial development issue since “the determination of the appropriate rates of exchange between the products of agriculture and industry has assumed a grave significance, if only because it is for them a major *modus operandi* for raising a surplus for growth” (Mitra, 1977, 191).

It was Robert Bates, adopting mainstream economic thinking, who dealt with these issues and its implications for politics and growth of agriculture in Sub-Saharan Africa in his 1981 book *Markets and States in Tropical Africa: The Political Basis of Agricultural Policies*. The fundamental issue it investigates was “the political calculation that induce governments to intervene in ways which are harmful to the interest of most farmers” (Bates 1981, 3). Farmers interact with three markets: market for agricultural commodities, market for agricultural inputs and market for consumer goods. African government intervene in these markets to shift resources from agriculture to industry and generate foreign exchange (Bates 1981). They prefer to subsidize farm inputs rather than offering better prices for farm products because the latter is politically useful. The interest of state, industrialists and bureaucracy takes precedence over that of farmers (Bates 1981).

African state also faced pressure to reduce food price. The urban workers and employers seek low food prices as also the state did as major employer and sponsor of industrialization. Furthermore, declining purchasing power of urban dwellers have sparked most of their protests under colonial rule and leading overthrow of some governments in post-independence Africa. In the end agricultural policy becomes the result of the relation of governments and their urban constituents. Manipulating trade policies, including exchange rates, and direct intervention in the market through official marketing channels including setting price for agricultural products were the measures deployed by African governments to lower food price for urban dwellers, ignoring the consequences for farmers. This has pitted government bureaucrats against farmers in rural Africa, the latter seeking alternative markets that offer better prices and the former seeking to appropriate farmers produce at lower price offered by government, but also allowing corrupt officials generate revenue by helping farmers evade the very policy they were supposed to implement (Bates 1981, 30-44).

The following discussions were based on peasants’ assessment of terms of trade between agricultural products, farm inputs and consumer goods gathered from Dawo Woreda in January 2023. Peasants’ perception of recent changes in terms of trade were a major concern in Dawo but not in Sululta. In Sululta it was inflation in general, that was the concern. The major reason was that in Dawo agriculture was the mainstay of the peasants, while in Sululta more and more off-

farm activities were available, grain was not sold on market as source of income, and the meager grain produced was consumed by peasant households. The following discussion can be educative in showing how peasant view and perceive change in terms of trade under EPRDF and PP and their relationship with market in general. During FGD one participant in the study made a claim that I will quote at length, as it reflects the view of others:

The price of fertilizer and our products were in balance under EPRDF. Now fertilizer has become expensive as the price of our produce declined. Also, the price of clothes and other goods was balanced under EPRDF. We don't have control over the price of our products, merchants do as they wish with prices. Merchants determine not only the price of consumer goods they sell to us, but also the price of agricultural products we sell to them. Grain merchants even change the price from the morning to afternoon if they buy many quintals [100KG sack] in the morning. There is this idea that we should decide on the price of our products as merchants do. The government tells us to form cooperatives, but the cooperatives are not helping us with price of agricultural products. Cooperatives have accurate measurement; they don't cheat that way as merchants do and they promise us future benefit. But the price is lower than what merchants pay us. Merchants raise the price once cooperatives start buying from peasants, once people move from cooperatives to merchants, they reduce the price: they play peasants like that. We are toiling but not getting sufficient return for it (FGD 4).

This is indicative of peasants' vulnerability to price shocks which they don't control. The way they articulated their vulnerability to the outside world, merchants, cooperatives and government was a surprise to the researcher to say the least. Maccoby made the same point about Mexican peasants, "his small plot of land — all he can physically handle with slow, unprofitable methods of farming — and his loss of profit to city buyers have determined the peasant's life for centuries" (1967, 336). A Kebele manager at Dawo added that "the market condition was better under EPRDF than PP. You sell cheap but the things you buy were also cheap under EPRDF]. Now you sell a lot and can't even buy a few things. The price of fertilizer has reached 5000 birr, edible oil 1000 birr, a soap is 50 birr, a pen 20 birr, exercise book 70 birr last year" (I3). An unemployed youth with peasant parents after observing that there was balance between what was bought and sold under EPRDF, points out that it now "as distant as heaven and earth are" under PP (FGD 1).

There are many factors that determine "exchange configurations" agricultural markets which among other things includes the "nature of the commodity itself", "its character as a staple or

cash crop” and “its cultural significance” (Jan and Barbara 2021, 175). The peasants usually measure the terms of trade and indicate its change in terms of what a kilo of *Teff* buys, not only because it is the major source of income in Dawo but it seems because of its cultural significance. Many of the peasants who participated in the study were irritated by the fact that a kilo of *Teff* sold for around 40 birr at the of the study could not buy a piece of soap which costs a little over 50 birr. Telling was the following story told by an older peasant: “I asked my daughter to wash my cloth, and she told me that it costs above 50 birr, shocked I asked ‘what happened (*muca inni akkanaa eessaa dhalate*)?’ and she responded that the market rose. There was balance under EPRDF, now we are suffering (*ni gubanne, ni bobaane*)” (FGD 9). Another peasant added:

We used to buy 10 corrugated iron sheets selling one quintal of Teff, now it only buys less than 5 corrugated iron sheets. Merchants push the peasants down, we sell our products, our sweat, on their terms because we need cash. We wish we could directly sell to consumers who are mostly our children, but it is merchants and brokers who benefit from our product. We know how much price Teff fetches in the capital because we have children there: double the price we sell it here. The government is helping in this by posting the price at which we have to sell our products (FGD 6).

The peasants also perceive that the government was in a kind of collusion with merchants to exploit them. After indicating that the new PP government promised to return some of the money peasants paid for fertilizer in the previous year (2014 E.C) but did not since learned lying to peasants from EPRDF, another participant said “this [PP] government belongs to merchants, it is helping them while is killing peasants, merchants buy cheap from us and sell at much higher price. We hate farming. If we stop farming, what will government officials eat, though we have *Enset*? Then the government can take its land, since it claims to own it to begin with” (I5). Invoking God to come to their rescue another peasant complained “nowadays we are harmed, our harm is that our grain [price] was dead, they killed it. How can we buy ox? And the peasants are crying. I hope God does not let our sweat go to waste. It is bad when grain price is too expensive or cheap” (I1).

The government was blamed for putting price ceiling on farm products, while there was no price ceiling for products sold to them by merchants, “Don’t we, the peasants, have any rights? Why do they decide on our [agricultural goods) products only?” (FGD 8). Cooperatives were also seen as incapable of helping peasants with their situation. Agricultural experts at Dawo *Woreda*

describe the situation as explosive and that peasants were on the edge that some of them were considering peaceful demonstration against the situation. Pointing out that even if there were more provision farm inputs, support for extension workers and Farmer Training Centers (FTCs) with PP government, “peasants think there are actors seeking to create gulf and friction between peasants and government because of the price cap on farm produce dampening price while price of consumer goods and fertilizer have skyrocketed” (I20). Whatever scapegoats’ peasants have in mind according to this “politically correct” expert, most peasants blame the PP government and merchants that it “protects” at their expense for the worsening terms of trade.

Price for agricultural goods is not only determined by supply and demand prevalent within the market system but also “the result of contestation between the interests of capital, labour, PCPs [peasants] as well as the state” (Jan and Barbara 2021, 174). Thus, we should broaden understanding of exploitation and accumulation to include “various points in a web of exchange and rivalry relations” in addition to the surplus extracted from labor in production process (Jan and Barbara 2021, 174). From the above evidence we can argue that peasants recognize that they were price receivers than price setters in agricultural markets. They understand they are vulnerable to exploitation through price set by more powerful actors like the state and merchants through “formal and informal institutions [that] regulate transactions” (Jan and Barbara 2021, 175). Part of the explanation for their weak position vis a vis these actors lie in that peasants were “relatively inactive in interest-group politics” since they were scattered, numerous and suffer from problem free riding (Bates 1981, 88-90).

Furthermore, the peasants *perceive* terms of trade favoring industry/consumer good over agriculture under PP, unlike the balance or equilibrium that persisted between the two under EPRDF. This will not come as a surprise if we consider the professed inclination towards neo-liberal economic thinking under PP. Some of the economic woes of the country under PP emanate from the war in Tigray (which some of the peasants recognize as responsible for worsening terms of trade for them) and the global increase in the price of fertilizer and oil due to the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war. Yet we should not forget that EPRDF tried to be “exclusively” the party of peasants. Even when its economic thinking gravitated towards the more modern economic sectors after 2000s, thanks to political calculations that sought some buy in for its rule

and votes from peasants' smallholder agriculture remained crucial for the EPRDF. We can hardly claim the same for PP which allegedly favors the urban areas in its economic thinking. It rather seems under PP agricultural policy was returning to the norm in other African countries that favor urban areas over rural one (Bates 1981). That said, the issue of changing terms of trade under these "two regimes" needs further empirical investigation preferably by economist deploying quantitative methodology.

4.2. Land Policy and Tenure Security under EPRDF

Land is a socio-political, economic, and ecological relation characterized by its multiple functions: as a natural resource and a bounded terrestrial bio-productive system; as a primary means of production and a site of capital accumulation; and critically, as a contested social relation that determines class formation, tenure security, rights of access and exclusion, social status, and political power. Land as "the principal agrarian asset" is central to the three components of the agrarian question: agricultural production, capital accumulation, and through its unequal control, distribution, access and use it is fundamental to rural politics (Akram-Lodhi, Kay, and Saturnino M. Borras 2009, 214).

Thus, it is around land that social and economic life of agrarian societies is organized. In such a society "land tenure regimes constitute an institutional template for sociopolitical organization" as property rights bring together the political, legal and economic order (Boone 2013, 5). The issue of land has been at the heart of political and economic changes in Ethiopia from the late 19th century creation of modern Ethiopian state.

The political economy of state-peasant relations is intrinsically institutionalized through the legal frameworks that define who owns land, who controls its use, and who benefits from its surplus. Under the feudal land tenure (pre-1974), land was controlled by the elite (kings, nobility, and the Church) and subject to various systems of tenure, including the *Gebbar* system in the conquered southern territories where peasants were reduced to serf-like tenants, and the *Rist* system in the north, characterized by kinship-based access rights. This era established a profoundly inequitable system where the state's power was realized through the land-controlling nobility, who exacted tribute and administered control over cultivators ("*gebare*"). The 1975 land reform of the *Derg* (Regime) implemented a radical land reform under the slogan "Land to the Tiller" that

successfully removed the feudal system and shattered the economic power of the aristocracy. Though the land reform was enthusiastically supported in the southern part of the country where *Gebbar* system existed under the imperial regime, it was resisted in the *rist*-held northern parts of Ethiopia (Davies 2008, 190). Paradoxically, the reform did not confer private ownership upon the peasants but resulted in state ownership of all rural land. Peasants were guaranteed a lifetime “holding” right or usufructuary right, which gave them the right to use the land and collect its produce, but restricted the rights of sale and mortgage. The creation of Peasant Associations (PAs) centralized local administration and replaced the landlords as the primary mechanism of state control and surveillance in rural areas. Under EPRDF the 1995 FDRE Constitution and subsequent proclamations served as legal templates of land tenure. The EPRDF inherited and maintained the core principle of state ownership of all urban and rural land (Article 40 (3) of the FDRE Constitution) which states “[t]he right to ownership of rural and urban land, as well as of all natural resources, is exclusively vested in the State and in the peoples of Ethiopia. Land is a common property of the Nations, Nationalities and Peoples of Ethiopia and shall *not be subject to sale or to other means of exchange (emphasis mine)*”. This decision ensured the state retained control over the single most important productive asset, allowing it significant leverage over land allocation and hegemonic intervention in rural society. This policy provided the foundation for two crucial mechanisms analyzed in this study. The Rural Land Administration and Use (Proclamation No. 456/2005) operationalized the constitutional mandate by guaranteeing rural peasants lifetime holding rights, giving them all rights except the explicit right to sell or mortgage. This framework justified the subsequent land certification programs (Phases 1 and 2), aimed at reassuring peasants (like those in Dawo) that land redistribution would not occur and improving tenure security to stimulate investment, thus linking policy to a specific developmental aim. The Expropriation for Public Purpose and Payment of Compensation Proclamation (Proclamation No. 455/2005) legislation granted the government the power to expropriate land for “public purpose” with compensation, a clause that became the primary legal instrument enabling Accumulation by Dispossession (ABD) in peri-urban areas like Sululta.¹ Subsequent implementing proclamations were criticized for violating constitutional protections by denying market-value compensation for expropriated property, turning the concept of “commensurate” compensation into a tool of state-led appropriation. Urban land governance was defined by a series of lease laws (Proclamation No. 80/1993, 271/2002, and 721/2011) aimed at

transferring state-owned land to tenants. However, loopholes, particularly the “negotiation” clause in the 2002 revision, enabled widespread corruption and malpractice, linking urban land politics directly to the neopatrimonial character of the EPRDF regime and setting the stage for the land speculation seen in Sululta. The continuous line from 1975 to 2018 is the retention of ultimate land ownership by the state, which served the core political imperative of control over the peasantry and rural resources under the guise of equitable resource distribution and developmental strategy.

The EPRDF land policy that retained state ownership while allowing peasants to have usufructuary right to land has been subject of heated controversy. The government argument for state ownership of land was that privatization of land will lead to concentration of land in the hands of wealthy in through distress sale by poor peasants. On the other hand, local actors and international donors advocating for private ownership of land arguing that state ownership of land gives little tenure security and, in the process, stifling peasants’ initiative and productivity (Davies 2008, 209-56). The advocates of privatization of rural land subscribe to mainstream liberal economic thinking that private property is the foundation of economic development. One of the most famous advocates for privatization was De Soto who in his work with a telling title *The Mystery of Capital: Why Capitalism Triumphs in the West and Fails Everywhere Else* argues that it was lack of formalized property rights in non-Western world that explains their underdevelopment. The result was the asset of the poor “cannot readily be turned into capital, cannot be traded outside of narrow local circles where people know and trust each other, cannot be used as collateral for a loan, and cannot be used as a share against an investment” (De soto 2000, 6). De Soto was even sent by U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) to meet with Meles and his cabinet to encourage privatization of land in Ethiopia (Lavers 2023, 125). The solution for these societies was to bring assets of the poor, including land, into the legalized property system. This thinking has influenced land policies favored by the World Bank and other international donors that advocate for turning communal tenure into private land holding in Africa (Manji 2006). Communal land ownership was thought to lead to “tragedy of commons” which leads to abuse and destruction of these properties since they were considered by mainstream scholars as nobody’s property. Nowadays, armed with the same arguments, the terminology privatization was replaced by land titling (Hussein 2010, 18-20).

Seen from the perspective of the regime its approach to land was pragmatic unlike its critics who argue from “ideological position” while for EPRDF “it is not a sacred issue that has to be upheld in its own right” but should be viewed “from the point of view of output growth and broad welfare objectives” (MOFED 2003, 24). EPRDF seems to have later accept rural land titling to take place in order to enhance tenure security of peasants, short of allowing privatization of land until such time “economic growth and hence substantive off-farm employment have been generated” (Davies 2008, 213). In addition, rural land rental was allowed provided that it was registered by competent authority (FDRE Proclamation No. 456/2005 Article 6, sub article 6).

As to the view of peasants on land policy, most of those from Dawo *woreda* (the view of those from Sululta was different and will be presented below) seem to accept government position on land, except the appropriation of land without/with little compensation. Accordingly, one peasant put his views as follows:

We were told that land belongs to the government and its surface to peasants [Peasants assume minerals in their land belong to government]. You can rent that land. Land sales will put the poor into the hands of the rich. That land belongs to the government is problematic when the government claims land belongs to it and takes away your land for development without compensation. This has happened in our Woreda. The government has constructed irrigation dam on peasants' farms, first they were promised compensation but still they got nothing (I6).

Another peasant added “Once you start selling land, humans will also be sold. Where will you build houses and farms? Land must be passed to your children” (I8). While the majority share the above view, there are also more cryptic sentences used by peasants showing they have little power over the land policy “we know that land belongs to government since we have to pay tax to cultivate it” “we ourselves belong to state. It is a good thing that we don’t sell and buy land” (I20; I1 respectively).

Government officials also share the same view. An agricultural expert at Woreda points out government rhetoric has influenced peasants’ view on land policy “almost all peasants accepted government position on land because they listen to government and there was no complain on this” (I18). It is important to note that semiotic or discourse plays crucial role in policy contestation, formulation and implementation (Jessop and Sum 2023). Its selection, retention and

reinforcement should be seen, however, in relation to and interaction with institutions, interest of actors, and material forces in society (Jessop and Sum 2023).

Elaborating the reasons why peasants should not be allowed to exchange land at will, another agricultural expert adds:

It is as if the [land] policy was based on research on the reality of peasants. Peasants are not economically savvy, business minded and well versed in the world of cash economy since they do not have modern education and engage in little off-farm activities. Their main concern was fulfilling their immediate needs, generating enough money for taxation and education of their children, and securing food throughout a year by farming only once in a year. Therefore, if land was privatized, most would sell their land because of various problems that force them to seek immediate cash. They could not convert cash from land sale into profit by engaging in modern businesses [capital] not only because they are not economically savvy but also because their social life was enmeshed already in wasteful spending of their meager resource on Mahber (monthly rotating religious and social feast based on specific days on which saints of Orthodox Church were commemorated), wedding, baptism, etc. (I21).

An individual who serves at Dawo Woreda administration argues that there was no complaint about state ownership of land since the harmful and privatized land policy of Haile Sellasie was fresh on their mind, at least for the older peasants, that they support EPRDF land policy (FGD 7).

4.2.1 The First Phase Rural Land Titling

An attempt at rural land certification was begun by TPLF in Tigray back in the days when it was fighting Derg by providing basic information on white pieces of paper, in order to win over peasants to its cause (I24). The prompt for the land certification mainly came after the 1997 land redistribution in Amhara region which was mainly viewed as “score settling by the EPRDF against former Derg sympathizers, which severely undermined trust in the Regional Government” (Ege cited in Davies 2008, 237). Land titling became a means to reassure peasants that redistribution will not take place unless requested by the community (Davies 2008). There was also major land redistribution in Tigray and fewer ones in Oromia and SNNPRS, all in all creating problems since there was no documentation of the land so redistributed (I28). It was under this context that Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE) Rural Land Administration and Use Proclamation No. 456/2005 included provision for land titling in article 6 sub article 1:

The sizes of rural lands under the holdings of private persons, communities, governmental and non-governmental organizations shall be measured as appropriate using cultural and modern measurement equipment; their land use and level of fertility shall be registered as well in the database center by the competent authorities established at all levels.

The first proper land registration and certification took place in Tigray in 1998 and was followed by Amhara, Oromia and Southern regions subsequently. This was done at the behest of regional governments, not federal government (Davies 2008, 232). It was assumed that this phase will be accomplished in a short time, at low cost and with available human resources (I28). Thus, this first round was done by using traditional measurement, does not show exact location and merely shows neighbouring plots (I24). It also was problematic since there was no clear directive or description of its objective from the federal government (I24).

This first round of land registration and land holding certification project in Oromia region begun in 2004 (USAID 2014) with the aim enhancing tenure security of peasants, provide them with evidence before court in a case of conflict and allow peasants to obtain compensation if government takes registered land for “public purpose” (Hussein 2010, 65). Before this project “peasants had merely held the land that they obtained through redistribution in 1975, or inherited from their deceased parents, with no official documentation to claim the land” (Hussein 2010, 65). The Ministry of Agriculture’s Land Use Directorate “estimates that 90% of farming households have first level land certification” (USAID 2014). And yet the land titling provides “nonalienable use right certificates rather than full titles” (Deininger et al 2011, 312), thus, neither allowing land transfer to another nor being taken away the way other private properties do. This is in line with state ownership of land and usufructuary right provided for peasants under the regime, as Proclamation No. 456/2005 Article 7, sub article 1 points out “[t]he Rural land use right of peasant farmers, semi-pastoralists and pastoralists shall have no time limit”.

The data gathered from Dawo *Woreda* (as peri-urban areas the Kebeles in Sululta were not covered) indicate that at first peasants were skeptical of land certification project but later through awareness creation came to accept it. At first some peasants were apprehensive considering it as a ruse to take away their land while those who wanted to illegally sell land feared that the land certificate was intended to prevent that (I3; I18). A *Kebele* chairman in Dawo

claimed that the fear that prevailed among peasants at first were also due doubt “[that] the government want to know land available in order to redistribute it, create agricultural cooperatives that used to exist under Derg and increase tax on their land” (I17).

It was when the peasants were told that land certificates would serve as proof of ownership of their land and it was useful as evidence in court of law that they accepted it, and some even consider it as good as identity card (I6, I8, I18). Its usefulness for peasants was the key to creating acceptance for the land titling “we saw it as proof of land ownership since you cannot even pay tax without it” (FGD 4). Before tax receipts on rural land were used as evidence of land ownership, and if you don’t pay tax on it to the government it is as if you don’t own the land. That said a still skeptical peasant asked on his view of land certificates answered “It is better if you ask the educated on this, what do the illiterate know about this? But we were told to have it, we assumed it must be good, and we kept the certificate because we thought you never know what could happen if you lost it” (I12).

Studies of the first phase rural land registration and certification process have been hailed “one of the most successful low-cost land registration programs in Africa and elsewhere” (USAID 2014). It was also democratic and participatory, and it was also claimed that “the program increased tenure security, land-related investment, and rental market participation and yielded benefits significantly above the cost of implementation” (Deininger et al 2011, 312-15). Moreover, in their studies in Southern Ethiopia, on women in southern Ethiopia, Holden and Tewodros have found that women “were given equal treatment in terms of the documentation and enjoyment of land rights, has significantly strengthened the property rights and bargaining power of women and promoted gender equality” (cited in Solomon 2015, 57).

4.2.2. The Second Phase Rural Land Titling

It was deficiencies of the first phase rural land titling led to the second phase rural land titling. The first phase land titling did not provide accurate size as traditional measurements were employed. It did not also provide the exact geographic location of farmlands. Thus, farmlands of peasants did overlap sometimes. Furthermore, there was no easy mechanism to update changes in land holding, say for example through inheritance or land rental, except through rewriting

changes on the certificates (I20; I24; I28). In short it “did not map individual plots or provide the level of spatial detail documenting boundaries that would allow for the development of cadastral maps for improved land use management and administration” (USAID 2014).

The second level land certification was supported by international donors. The US through USAID “supported two programs to provide ‘second-level’ certification to Ethiopian households: the Ethiopia Land Tenure Administration Program (ELTAP) (2005-08) and the Ethiopia Land Administration Program (ELAP) (2008-12)” (USAID 2018). This programs “piloted the use of handheld GPS devices to map and demarcate parcel boundaries” (USAID 2014). For the scaled-up program the World Bank provided help through two projects: Sustainable Land Management Program (SLMP) and Climate Action through Landscape Management (CALM) (USAID 2014). Additional support was provided by UK’s Department of International Development (DFID) Land Investment for Transformation (LIFT) Programme and the Responsible and Innovative Land Administration (REILA) project provided by government of Finland (USAID 2014). The scaled up “second level” land titling undertaken by government of Ethiopia employed modern land measurements technologies orthophoto/aerial images and in areas where flying airplanes was difficult due to security issues like Ethio-Eritrean border and Wollega satellite images were used (I28).

There was computerized digital storage of the second level land certificates. This was done through National Rural Land Administration Information System (NRLAIS) that was developed by MoA with the help of REILA (I28). There is a computerized mechanism for updating the registry at *Woreda* level, unlike the first level certificates, which currently covers more than 300 *Woredas* (I28). This proved its usefulness in the recent war in Northern Ethiopia whereby documents relating to land were destroyed in Woldia area but was recovered through digital information kept at Amhara region (I24). In terms of coverage, the second level certification has “reached the majority of rural smallholders in the Highland regions (Amhara, Oromia, Southern Nations Nationalities and Peoples, and Tigray)” (USAID 2014). The MoA estimates that of the 50 million parcels that belong to peasants, 30 million were registered and 25 million certificates were issued (I28).

In Dawo Woreda the second level certification begun implementation in 2009 E.C. (I20). Thanks to awareness created through the first land certification, peasants were enthusiastic about the second level certification program, that even peasants who were left behind go to Woreda to get the new land certificate (I3). They saw it as equivalent of the urban land certificates, local knows as land *Karta Lafa*: “peasants were made aware that the new land certificate was similar to the one used for urban lands and that they can take loan using it. Peasants never imagined that land can be measured accurately, and they were surprised by it” (I17). One peasant said “the first land certificates were measured by humans and was inaccurate. The new land certificate (*Karta*) was more accurate and led to some increase in taxation. But we don’t mind it, because it shows *all* our land” (FGD 4, emphasis mine). Another claims the second level certificate “shows the boundaries of our farmland and we have more faith in it” (I12). In addition to accuracy the second level certificates, the fact that it was kept in computers was seen by peasants as less susceptible to manipulation by government officials: “the new land certificate was done by computer and there was no possibility of human manipulation, therefore it was better than the first one. It also serves as full evidence of joint ownership of land by husband and wife who photograph was in computer” (I5).

An important recent development in relation to second level land certificates was the peasants were allowed to use it as collateral to get credit from financial institutions (I24). This was at experimental stage according to officials *Sinqe* bank (a microfinance institution at Oromia region that became bank) and the land has to be two or more hectares (I14). Asked what will happen to those lands if someone defaults on his/her loan, the officer answered that they did not have peasants who defaulted on their loan, but the bank held the land certificates as collateral since certificate itself states that it can be used for rent and loan (I14). A more forthcoming Land expert at one the *Kebeles* in Dawo responded that “a copy of the certificate is given to microfinance institution, the original is kept at Land Office of the *Kebele*, so that peasants could not rent that land until they pay their debt. That land will be rented to others to recover the loan, if peasants fail to pay back” (I2). The new certificate is also being used widely for transactions related to land rental.

Evaluation of the impact of second level certification conducted by USAID in 2016 indicate that there was “a 10% additional increase in the likelihood of households in the treatment group taking out any credit for farming purposes” through informal lending and “an 11% increase in the likelihood of the household believing they have a heritable right to bequeath their land, relative to households with no certification or first-level certification” (USAID 2016). In terms encouraging rural female empowerment second level certification showed “an 11% increase in the likelihood of a wife possessing land in her name, and a 0.32 hectare increase in land held jointly by husband and wife or by female-headed households” as well as “44% increase in a wife deciding which crops to grow on land in her possession” (USAID 2016) an encouraging result in general. The MoA, it was claimed, has tried to make the second level certification and registration process as inclusive as possible. This was not limited to women but also other vulnerable groups that have difficulty making claim to land due to cultural, social and economic marginalization. This was crucial for the whole process, since marginalization of women and vulnerable groups in the process “will make illegal claims to land legal” (I28).

The implication of land titling for the long-term welfare of peasants is difficult to guess. Tenure security was mostly seen as absence of fear of state initiated eviction, but it also important to consider “the risk of dispossession due to potential market liberalization” (Chinigò 2022, 107). There is a possibility that land titling can *ineluctably* lead to commodification of land and lay fertile groundwork for any future privatization of land, in the words of Levien (2012) “making land available for capital”. There are examples from around the world, including India and Mexico, whereby privatization of rural land led to massive impoverishment of peasants (Harvey, 2005, 160-61). The benign attempt at improving tenure security for peasants advocated by international donors and some domestic civil society organizations, NGOs and opposition political parties should not lead to a scenario whereby the hard won right for the majority of peasants to have access to farmland was given up promoting privatization. As such, these initiatives must be scrutinized for their long-term effect and we must look beyond their rhetoric, which as shown above was successfully sold to peasants.

That said, even by the objectives set for the second level certification program, there were some problems. There are conflicts on land holding claims that arose during registration: “poor

peasants who rented their land to procure fertilizer and other necessities, lost their claim to their land to well to do individuals who rented that land with helping hand from agriculture bureau officials” (FGD 8). And some plots were not identified with the owners since peasants were not present to identify their plots because since they were not informed beforehand (FGD 6). Some peasants made clear their tenure insecurity with even the second level certificates since it was not approved by legislation that makes the land their own land “things are changing nowadays [under PP] and our land might be redistributed by the government. Those peasant with smaller plots and the youth demand land redistribution” (FGD 6). Hussein makes similar observation when he says, “titling may create conducive conditions for the rich and politically powerful to grab land at the expense of the local communities or small landholders” (Hussein 2010, 24).

Experts interviewed for this research also claim that second-level certification project was largely donor driven with little input from regional governments and that it was “not supported by detailed legal framework for land registration, the legal basis was merely the claim that ‘land will be registered’” (I24). There were also problems in relation to registering communal lands, since there were individuals land that encroach on communal lands and at times members of committee established to oversee certification make claims to communal lands (I28).

Furthermore, land belonging to peasants in peri-urban areas in Sululta was not covered by the second level land certificates. Peri-urban areas are “neither getting the services of urban areas nor are they being treated as rural areas” (I24). These emanate from the fact that peri-urban are not recognized as such legally, that problems arising from land administration there require legal resolution (I28). There were occasions whereby officials from MoA trying to give land certificates in peri-urban areas were forcefully stopped by town administrations (I28). The problem that arises from this will be made clear in the next section.

4.2.3. Land and “Accumulation by Dispossession” in Peri-urban Sululta

During field work for this research, one contrast between the field sites observed was that in Sululta the earlier period of EPRDF was seen as comparatively more benign and democratic as compared to the situation after 2005 National Election, while the inverse was true for Dawo. In Sululta, peasants who participated in the study assert that EPRDF has brought back feudalism

that was destroyed by Derg, replacing landlords (*Aba Lafa*) with investorts (*Aba Qabegna*). In Dawo peasants claim there was more continuity with Derg and consolidation of peasant gains from land reform of 1975. This is ironic considering EPRDF foresaw the same if free market in land was established:

they [the peasants] would be compelled to sell their land to a few wealthy individuals, leaving themselves landless and without any means of livelihood. This process would surely lead the peasants back to a situation similar to that of the feudal era, where a few landlords owned and controlled most of the land (Draft Economic Policy of the Transitional Government, 1991 quoted in Young 1997, 246).

The explanation lies in that commercialization of land and appropriation of land from peasants with small or no compensation was intensified in Sululta after that election, while nothing like that took place in Dawo. “It was under [EPRDF] that all land in Sululta was taken away and lost. Government officials and few individuals prospered from this. Comparatively Derg has no fault, it took land from landlords and gave it to peasants” (FGD 2). It will be argued hereunder what took place in Sululta and much of the rural areas covered by Oromia Special Zone Surrounding Finfine was typical case “accumulation by dispossession” (ABD). This concept was developed by the geographer David Harvey and he reconstructs Marx’s “primitive accumulation” to argue that rather than occurring only at the beginning capitalism, something akin to “primitive accumulation” continues to play an important role even in contemporary neoliberal capitalism. Since the process is ongoing one, he substitutes “primitive accumulation” by ABD (Harvey 2005, 144). There are debates on whether “primitive accumulation” and also ABD are primarily defined by their function for capitalism (capitalization of production and proletarianization) or the extra-economic means used to achieve them (use of violence and state power) (Levien 2012). Anyways, neoliberalism unleashed a new wave of “enclosure of the commons” in which “assets held by state and in common were released into the market where overaccumulating capital could invest in them, upgrade them, and speculate in them” (Harvey 2005, 158). He posits that in the post 1973 period accumulation by dispossession became the primary contradiction within imperialist capitalism (Harvey 2005, 172). Primitive accumulation that birthed capitalism has to be repeated so that accumulation continues in contemporary capitalism (Harvey 2005, 182).

For Marx, primitive accumulation meant “taking land, say, enclosing it, and expelling a resident population to create a landless proletariat, and then releasing the land into the privatized mainstream of capital accumulation” (Harvey 2005, 145). For Harvey, problems arising from capital overaccumulation that does not find profitable outlet can be resolved through ABD that “release a set of assets (including labour power) at very low (and in some instances zero) cost” which once released capital can turn to profit (Harvey 2005, 145).

ABD can be applied to variety contemporary forms of dispossession: “SEZs, slum clearances, large-scale agricultural plantations, dams, real estate development, infrastructure projects and all manners of privatizations of natural resources and public wealth” (Levien 2012). In developing countries, it usually occurs “with the strong backing of state powers” (Harvey 2003, 154). ABD is also becoming more and more about turning land and other assets into capital. As Sassen puts it, in many instances land is “more valuable to the global market than the people on it” (cited in Harvey 2003, 154). That is why many contemporary political struggles focus on dispossession from land and other resources.

For Levien (2012) ABD is essentially “a political process in which states – or other coercion wielding entities – use extra-economic force to help capitalists overcome barriers to accumulation”. The barrier usually are peasants not willing to sell their land and “capitalists increasingly look to the state to expropriate land through eminent domain” (Levien 2012). Ultimately the state acts as a broker between capital and peasants, opening an opportunity for profitable investment of accumulated capital. Jessop (2008, 11) argues “a key statal task is to aid the organization of spatio-temporal fixes that facilitate the deferral and displacement of contradictions, crisis-tendencies, and conflicts to the benefit of those fully included in the “general interest” at the expense of those who are more or less excluded from it”.

State played a similar role under EPRDF by wielding various proclamations and even violence to help with commodification of peri-urban and rural land around Addis Ababa. The capital which was said to be “an ever frontier making city” and its dynamic frontiers were used as “a political and economic strategy through which the state and its urban elites accumulate wealth through dispossession” (Asebe and Teshome 2022, 2). The Proclamation No. 80/1993 (Proclamation for

the Lease Holding of Urban Lands), enacted before the 1995 FDRE constitution allowed state to “sell” land through tender or auction in effect intensifying land commodification of peri-urban lands. This in effect opened an opportunity for personal enrichment of state officials and private brokers (Asebe and Teshome 2022). The 2005 Expropriation of Landholdings for Public Purposes and Payment of Compensation Proclamation (Proclamation No. 455/2005) authorized state to expropriate land for “public purposes”. Article 3, subarticle 1 of the proclamation reads:

A woreda or an urban administration shall, upon payment in advance of compensation in accordance with this Proclamation, have the power to expropriate rural or urban landholdings for public purpose where it believes that it should be used for a better development project to be carried out by public entities, private investors, cooperative societies or other organs, or where' such expropriation has been decided by the appropriate higher regional or federal government organ for the same purpose.

The phrase “public purpose” was vague enough to open opportunities to expropriate land for private end based on “political decisions” (Asebe and Teshome 2022, 7). The Urban Lands Lease Holding Proclamation No.721/2011 further entrenched the power of state officials to convert “rural villages into smaller town administrations in order for politicians and brokers to benefit from the land tenure business” (Asebe and Teshome 2022, 8).

The 2001 split within TPLF that resulted in Meles group ascending to position of dominance and the subsequent adoption of “developmental state” led to a turn towards a more capitalist oriented development program for the whole country. In subsequent years, the areas surrounding Addis Ababa became fertile ground for accumulation of capital and profitable investment of capital accumulated elsewhere. EPRDF used “the land grab” in the peri-urban and rural lands around the to buy support from residents of the capital that opposed it. This mainly attempted through “legalizing lands acquired through illicit processes” by residents of the capital (Asebe and Teshome 2022, 8). Citing a government insider, Asebe and Teshome (2022, 8) claim:

the government transferred between 4.8 and 5.4 million m2 of land for Real Estate projects alone until the 2005 election, while tens of millions m2 of land were expropriated in the name of industrial zones, condominium houses, flower farms and other leases for private housing, displacing hundreds of thousands in the process.

Data gathered for this study from peasants and government officials indicate state power was used to expropriate land from peasants in Sululta in the name of “public purpose”. As already mentioned, the more rural lands included in Sululta town administration were not covered by both the first-level and second-level land certification. This was seen as deliberate move by the EPRDF to easily dispossess and pay lower compensation for peasants dispossessed of their land in the name of “public purpose”. Aba Gadas in Sululta claim that EPRDF used to take land from peasants paying less than one birr, 60 cents per 1m² of land, occasionally for land covered with crop ripe for harvest. The land was then given to investors who “work in collusion with government officials, surveyors and brokers to rob us of our land for cheap in the name of investment. But they did not invest on that land, they sold it for millions of birrs for those building houses on it” (FGD 2). This in turn forced peasants to sell their land to private individuals for a somewhat better price than losing it to government supported investors at such lower compensation “peasants divided their land into 200 m², 400m² and sold it for 20,000/30,000 Birr. You can see the latter is better for peasants” (FGD 2). Another Aba Gada added:

Land was sacred in the past, “if you sell land you don’t prosper” our forefathers used to say (“Lafti hooda qabdi, hin gurguramu. Ilmi lafa gurguru, hin margu” jedhan[Afan Oromo]). Then surveyors started to come at night to measure land of peasants, they enclose it and then in the morning they tell peasants that they only have compensation for the land, not the land anymore. That is why peasants chose to sell their land to individuals for better prices. In this way few individuals tore apart like cloth the land in Sululta, a land on which we grew cattle, oxen and sheep (FGD 2).

Peasants in Sululta claim that false promises were made to them by EPRDF as took land from them: “investors will help improve your live”, “they will pay you sufficient compensation”, “you will get employment”, etc. Still if peasants resisted, they were intimidated by government officials who told them “Land belongs to government, what do you have?” (FGD 2). A Gare leader under EPRDF recounted the following incident that graphically shows us the predicament and dilemma of peasants as they tried to hold on to their land, hemmed between government and private individuals seeking to take it away:

I know a woman who was given over 200,000 birrs by private individual seeking to buy her land. She thought government compensation would fetch her higher price and refused. The government ultimately gave her 43,000 birr. I saw her crying at town administration complaining to officials and was heartbroken (I23)

This way, we were told, those in power organized themselves, built towers and exploited peasants. Another resident of Sululta claims that land commercialization was brought by government itself since it paid low compensation to peasants as it gave land to investors who “sold those lands for higher prices without actually investing in it. Thus, peasant begun to be shrewd and started selling their land for higher price than waiting until it was forcefully appropriated by government” (I15).

The question we must ask here is why did the government officials not take over for development purposes, lands sold by peasants to private people if the lands were illegally sold (these were peasant lands without homes)? And if land commercialization was considered an unintended consequence of government actions why weren’t measures to mitigate it taken? None of the interviewees gave an example of government taking over and paying compensation to land sold by peasants to private persons. It seems the intention of taking over land from peasants for low compensation was all along to kick start commercialization of land in the area in order to create space for profitable investing of capital accumulated by TPLF led EPRDF cronies and building of homes by the increasing number of middle classes.

Therefore, land commodification in Sululta was not only engendered by government expropriated land that sold back to investors and private individuals, but also through the reaction of peasants in Sululta who anticipating low or no compensation if their land was taken over by government tried to preempt this through bulk “sale” of their land:

EPRDF paid 2/3 birr per m², and for a whole hectare they paid 20,000/30,000 birr. So, people calculated that it was better to sell 400m²/500m² of their land for 40,000 birr, and thus fear of low government compensation fueled land sale. If you resist, you will be imprisoned and released after they have taken over your land. ‘Rather than lose my land for such a price’, peasants thought, ‘why not sell it and feed my family?’ (I22).

Such land sales were affected in the name of selling houses in contractual agreements, even when the land was empty, since land sale illegal under EPRDF (I4). This selling of land by peasants seems to be more consequential to land commercialization in Sululta than the process whereby land expropriated by government was leased back to investors and other private individuals. It was the comparison of low compensation made to peasants for the land government expropriated from them and benefit made investors that forced peasants to choose commodification of their

land. Levien calls “the ratio between the cost of dispossessed land handed over to capital by the state and its ultimate appreciation after development costs the ‘*rate of accumulation by dispossession*’” (emphasis mine). Asebe and Teshome (2012, 8) confirm that “peasants were paid ‘compensation’ per square meter of land with the lowest rate of three Ethiopian Birr (ETB) used in the 1990s and early 2000s to 18.50 ETB in the 2010s, which the government later leased to private investors for 3000–17,500 ETB”. Even if calculations were not made for “rate of accumulation by dispossession” of lands from peasants in Sululta, anecdotal evidence gathered there indicate that private investors made whopping benefits by selling back lands expropriated on their behalf by government.

It is not that land in Addis Ababa was efficiently and exhaustively utilized for real estate development or for public purposes that surrounding peri-urban areas became targets for expropriation for “public purposes”. It seems rather that due to the high price of land in the capital which “capitalists” could not invest in as profitably as in peri-urban areas that made the later target of ABD backed by state power bent on getting back into good grace with residents of the city.

Oromia Special Zone Surrounding Finfinne Zone was established in 2008, during Abadula Gemeda presidency Oromia region, bringing together villages and town around the capital (Asebe and Teshome 2022, 14). Abadula (2019, 118-19) claims the Zone was established to prevent illegal land grabs and coordinate development projects in the towns around Addis Ababa. But almost all residents of Sululta claim that expropriation of land from peasants and corruption intensified after the 2005 election. It seems strengthening of local government in the area allowed government to further penetrated local community as it afforded it “a dense network of state institutions in the countryside” that “provides infrastructure for state agents to ‘rewire the circuits of local authority’ and micromanage local political process” (Boone 2003, 32). The opportunity for local government officials to use their authority to enrich themselves also rose exponentially with commercialization of land in Sululta (I23).

The power of local officials to provide or withhold legal maps for houses built within Sululta town administration was the key complaint of local people. We are informed that beginning early

2000s E.C. “surveyors started to just produce site plans for peasant owned land, communal lands and government lands and sell it. We tried to resist this and brought the case to higher officials. But they intimidated us by accusing us of support for opposition” (I23). To be threatened was the least that can happen to those who resisted practices of government officials since, we are told during field work, there are many who were imprisoned, physically beaten and forced into disappearance in the name being anti-development and anti-peace element.

There was attempt to give legal maps to older peasant houses, known as “*Qabiye Duri*” starting in 2006 E.C. in order for peasants to have legal houses in the context of sprawling urbanization in the area. It covers only 500m² land and peasants paid 7500 birr to get it. Peasants complained the 500m² was not enough as they need more land covered for their children’s inheritance to no avail. Once more local officials and bureaucrats turned this into an opportunity for corruption:

It was city dwellers, government officials and brokers who benefited from it. There are many peasants who do not have maps even though they have submitted proper documents to the town administration. Maps without geographic reference were made and sold by Sululta town officials to their relatives and others, and once land was bought, they put geographic references of the bought land on the maps. Even maps were produced for deceased individuals. And maps were produced and sold for lands without houses (I15).

The impact of land commercialization in Sululta was not the same for peasants. Few who are better positioned due to their wealth and connection with officials and land speculators have taken advantage of land commercialization, becoming brokers, businessperson and landowners. The majority, however, fall into the category of those trying to survive on the small-scale farming and dairy farming and underemployed wage labourers. The same process was observed in India by Levien in relation to special economic zones established in peri-urban areas, where he saw “real estate–driven agrarian involution in which exchange displaces production and a dispossessed peasantry looks, with very unequal success, to opportunities for rent, interest and mercantile profits in the ‘informal economy’ for survival” (Levien 2012, 964-6).

4.2.4. Informal Land Transfers in Dawo

Peasants have found ways to transfer land in informal ways even under the more prohibitive land tenure under Derg (Yigremew 2006, 29). Under EPRDF rural land transfers in the form of sales were prohibited, even if land transfer through donation and inheritance were allowed.

Participants in the study note there are some peasants who sell their land in both Sululta and Dawo with the assistance of credible local elders/better off individuals serving as guarantors, or among relatives since there was no legal support to support property rights of land so secured. In Dawo such land sale is known as *Cira Kutii* in Afan Oromo literally meaning “Final Cut” referring to the binding nature of land sold so. These was practice by poor families with many children due food insecurity survival particularly during *Kiremt* season, buy clothes or cover education expenses of their children. They usually “seek first to rent their land, absent that they sell their land as *Cira Kutii* as a matter survival. Those with money were willing to pay higher for *Cira Kutii*” (I2). According to this *Kebele* Land expert the first level land certificates distribution Green card because it was a mere piece paper that can easily be changed. Not only that the measurement of the first land certificate was not accurate, and since peasants were fearful of higher taxation they reduced, sometimes by half, the land they have during registration, this allowed peasants to sell the land not covered by the certificate (I2). Some of the peasants they sell land in this way claim the land was included in their plot illegally and “they bring stamped paperwork supporting that claim from *Kebele* to *Woreda* land administration” (I20). *Woreda* officials were said know that peasants were actually selling land but still cooperate to change land certificates taking bribe. Thus, obtaining legality to land that was actually sold (I20).

The poor peasants sell their land through *Cira Kutii* do so in the name of land rental, “by taking more than the average price for renting of land” from the buyer (I11). Land rental was thus manipulated to get secure access to land, “this was done by putting higher price than was actually paid to individual giving away his land for rent in the contractual agreement. If he/she seeks to change his/her mind, then he/she must pay the higher price put down in the agreement (FGD 10). This has begun to emerge in peri urban areas around Busa town and “the same trick is used by some peasants in rural areas to sell land” (I11).

Now after second phase of land titling it is almost impossible to sell land, “for one it is accurate, and peasants are informed that the computerized system is with our superiors and does not allow it” (I2). Land sale might still exist, “even if it is illegal and not as easily manipulated by officials to change “ownership” and give legality to land sale which was a common practice with the green card” (I2). In general, however, *Cira Kutii* in Dawo was less frequent than the widespread and legal land rental (I20).

4.3. Cooperatives and Microfinance in Rural Areas

Cooperatives and microfinance institutions were established by EPRDF to intervene in rural economy to provide services and goods that market cannot reliably provide. Cooperatives were mainly used to distribute fertilizer and other agricultural inputs, and also to buy agricultural products from farmers in order to stabilize fluctuating prices of agricultural products. Microfinance institutions were established to provide peasants with credit that commercial banks are unable to provide.

Cooperatives were created to improve the marketing system and provide market information to peasants. The reasoning is that it is not practical for peasants to directly sell to consumers, and it is difficult for merchants to buy from millions of smallholder farmers, thus the need for cooperatives (MOFED 2003, 44). Cooperatives were expected to “sell consumer goods, agricultural inputs and implements direct to farmers”, reducing the time needed and costs incurred if intermediaries were involved (MOFED 2003, 44). Cooperatives and the union of cooperatives provide facilities to collect and provide storage services to farmers, and buyer can buy agricultural products from them. Cooperatives can also facilitate products standardization and grading, package them properly and supply them to the market MOFED 2003, 44). Cooperatives are expected create confidence among market participants “as it is very likely that they themselves and Government will institute measures to deal with any cases of fraud” (MOFED 2003, 44).

Practically also “cooperatives have played an important role in the delivery of inputs: in many areas they are the ones that purchase, store and distribute fertilizer and improved seeds” under EPRDF (Dessalegn 2008, 132). They also allowed peasants to purchase agricultural inputs on credit and provided some considerations for poorer peasants (Dessalegn 2008). Peasants were, however, dissatisfied with the timing of credit payment to cooperatives which was at harvest time when prices for agricultural products was lower benefiting urban based grain trader who buys cheap (Dessalegn 2008).

Unlike cooperatives under the Derg, EPRDF claims it set up cooperatives on a voluntary basis and that it reduced political interference in their works significantly. Still EPRDF white paper concedes “[t]here is still some political interference the motive of which is principally corruption and parasitism” (MOFED 2003, 45). It identifies, however, the lack of administrative and technical capacity as the major problem that cooperatives face (MOFED 2003). It raises an interesting problem that was identified by peasants too:

*One important point that needs to be underlined here is that private operators should be closely monitored to observe that they abide by the rules of free market! **that collusion and monopolistic tendencies** are not developing to the detriment of the emerging marketing system (MOFED 2003, 46, emphasis mine).*

In Dawo Woreda where cooperatives were more active compared to Sululta, the view of peasants was that their performance was sub optimal. “We did not benefit from cooperatives. The benefit generated was supposed to be used to construct shops and shared with peasants, but it was finished on per diem of those who run the cooperatives” (I6). As already mentioned, peasants in Dawo argue that those who run cooperatives and merchants work in collusion to benefit the later at the expense of peasants. They say that this was achieved by merchants raising the price of agricultural produces above the price offered by cooperatives once cooperatives start buying from peasants, and when peasants move from cooperatives to merchants seeking better price offered, merchants lower the price they offer below that of cooperative (FGD 6). Cooperatives, however, were said to have small capital-which they loan from banks- enough to buy grain for few days (FGD 6). A peasant who participated in one of the FGDs for the study adds:

We wish cooperatives buy our products than merchants, but they open their door to buy our products for just a day to pretend like they are doing their job. Cooperatives ask merchants about the price of agricultural produce. What is the point of cooperatives then? They should not consult merchants on prices (FGD 8).

Peasants also claim that cooperatives justify that the price they offer was lower than that of merchants because the profit generated by cooperatives will be shared with peasants who were members of the cooperative. But they got shareholder benefit of a few hundred Birr only once and since then they sell their grains to merchants (I8). Cooperatives were successful in providing and distributing fertilizer but not on price stabilization. A kebele chairman in Dawo adds:

Peasants themselves complain that “cooperatives work with merchants in order to exploit us”, “cooperatives that we established to serve us were afraid of merchants”, etc. There were occasions when cooperatives sold grain to merchants.

Merchants pushed cooperatives out market by manipulating prices, by taking losses at times. Thus, peasants were not fond of cooperatives except getting fertilizers there (I17).

An agricultural expert at Dawo explained that peasants were fearful that over production can depreciate price of agricultural products and cooperatives were supposed to solve that problem by buying from them when there is good harvest, store them and sell back when price is better. However, cooperatives were said to have failed to do so (I18). Another Agricultural expert adds that cooperatives don't buy from peasants continuously claiming either they don't have money or buyers for agricultural produces they store (I20). An agricultural expert who worked on cooperatives for two years added that cooperatives were not active, allowing merchants and brokers to make most of the profit from agricultural products since they had little capital, did not have easy access to credit and insufficient skilled workers (I21).

The lofty goals set for cooperatives by EPRDF have in large part failed to materialize except distribution of fertilizers. Cooperatives engage in buying and storing grains intermittently, and their function is mostly performed by merchants. The peasants are suspicious that such state of affairs is the result of collusion between merchants and corrupt individuals who run the cooperatives, the kind of behaviour explicitly condemned by EPRDF, indicating the gap between policy and practice.

Microfinance provides financial services like credit, savings and insurance to households that cannot afford formal financial systems for lack of collateral or due to low income (Taylor 2021, 544). Microfinance was seen popularly as crucial for development in rural areas since the 1990s. Microfinance could provide poor and low-income rural households excluded from formal banking systems with an opportunity to get credit and start enterprises. It was also seen as capable of empowering rural women “by directing small disbursements of credit directly into the hands of women borrowers” (Taylor 2021, 536). The initial enthusiasm about poverty reduction through microfinance has declined as evidence of significant change on this score was low, and nowadays it was seen as a mechanism for financial inclusion of rural areas “to better manage their livelihood portfolios, meet unexpected financial obligations and improve capacity for risk management” (Taylor 2021). In addition to providing credit, microfinance institutions also

facilitate micro-saving and micro-insurance, the latter seen as a mechanism to change the risk averse practice of smallholder farmers (Taylor 2021, 542).

The following discussions were based on data gathered in Dawo *Woreda*, since they are more active there than in peri-urban Sululta. Anecdotal evidence indicates that in Sululta town people have easy access to off farm sources of income that they do not rely on informal loans. In Dawo informal sources of loan are widespread, both in *Dega* and *Woyna Dega* areas, though more prevalent in the former than the latter. In Dawo microfinance institutions begun work in 1996 E.C. Before peasants took loans from individuals at 100% interest rate. And starting in 2015 E.C. few peasants were given credit by banks after providing new land certificate as “collateral” in an experimental manner (I17). Peasants can take loans on a maximum of half of their land, and if they fail to pay the land will presumably be rented to recover loan (I18). A kebele land administrator in Dawo tells us that a copy of the second level land certificate is given to microfinance institution, while the original is kept at Land Office of the *Kebele*, so that peasants could not rent that land until they pay their debt (I2). Asked what will happen to land used as collateral if someone defaults on his/her loan a bank officer claims that so far, they did not have peasants who defaulted on their loan, “but we have land certificates as collateral. The new land certificate itself states that it can be used for rent and loan, and we could hold their land till they pay back” (I14).

The general perception of peasants on microfinance is that if peasants use it properly it can be useful, while not few have ruined their lives and livelihood because of indebtedness that followed lack of skills to use profitably credit they took. There are peasants who left their residence since they did not find enough money to pay back the loan they took (I3; I20; FGD1). Those who properly used credit provided by microfinance institutions bought cattle, goat and sheep benefited and some have left poverty behind (I1). Peasants also take credit from microfinance institutions to buy fertilizer and other farm inputs (I3). In the past peasants were afraid of depositing their money at Banks, but culture of saving has improved over time (I20). A bank officer at *Siinqee*, formerly a microfinance institution, claims that model farmers and middle peasants do not take loans, and that they are encouraged to save. Rather it was to the poor

peasants that are identified as hard working that were given loans to rent land or buy oxen and are target for loans (I14).

Peasants argue that it is risky to take credit from microfinance institutions since agriculture by its nature is an unpredictable occupation. Sometimes the animals you buy on credit die. On the other hand, microfinance institutions were useful since their interest rate was far lower than the 100% interest rate peasants pay if they take credit from individuals (FGD1). For a woman in Dawo microfinance institutions have empowered women even if male dominance still persists:

I became the owner of cattle [haadha horiin ta'e] thanks to Wasasa [rural microfinance institution]. It was due to lack of knowledge of how to use the credit that some peasants go bankrupt. Taking credit from these institutions was better than paying double the money loaned to you to rich men. If you take 1000 birr, it becomes 2000 birr if you payback in a year, otherwise you give up some land or cattle or go into another contract to pay back 4000 birr next year, if still unable to pay it becomes 8000 birr and so on [informal lenders give loan at 100% compound interest rate]. Women have benefited from microfinance institutions. We take a few thousand birr and once we pay back that, the credit you can take increases. However, the practice of taking loan from informal sources still persists since men take money from them for drinking alcohol, without consulting us (FGD 5).

A major source of dissatisfaction of peasants with microfinance was that credit was forwarded as group not to individuals. This becomes problematic when members default on their loan, which must be covered by other members of the group. EPRDF justified its preference for group credit over use land as collateral for rural finance because what it claims an Ethiopian objective “where a large number of people are settled on fragmented plots of land, land is a poor instrument for the expanding banking services into rural areas whether it be private or under public ownership” (MOFED 2003, 25-26). In these situations, banks are said to face difficulty in recovering their loans in case of default, thus the preference for group credit (MOFED 2003). Rather than land, group credit was said to be better collateral in rural areas because of “the desire of group members to have access to credit and their willingness to execute and administer credit transactions as well as to bear moral pressure on members who would be delinquent in loan repayment” (MOFED 2003, 25-26). This assumption still shapes the preference of microfinance institutions in spite of the recent experimental use of second level land certificate as collateral. At *Siinqee* banks preference is still for loan guaranteed by group of peasants who know each other

and are from the same locality, even if the second level land certificates are used as collateral for land that is two or above hectares (I14).

A study of group credit among women show that it allows women members “to self-select only reliable group members and screen out credit risks”; “the group dynamics were expected to help ensure good conduct and instill financial discipline for fear of social stigma and shame attached to those who might default” and that it enhances “self-policing and enforcing repayment” (Taylor 2021, 539). However, group credit has at times created friction among peasants. Group members cover credit of defaulting members, but they take agricultural produce, animals or other movable property later to cover the cost they incurred (FGD 4). There are also cases of litigation and conflict among group members due to this (FGD 8).

Another problem with microfinance institutions for peasants was that they do not have access to credit during *Kiremt* season (from June to September). Microfinance institutions are said to justify this by claiming their budget is closed during *Kiremt*. This has forced some peasants take loans from informal sources at higher interest rates in cases of emergency since it does not take much time to secure such a loan (FGD1). A clearer answer was provided by one bank officer who served for many years at Oromia Credit and Saving Share Company, known locally as WALQO, a microfinance institution in Dawo, “during *Kiremt* they need loan for food consumption, if we give them loan, they will be unable to pay it back and they worsen their economic situation. Peasants are not well educated” (I14). Another officer *Siinqee* adds:

We don't give loan to peasants during Kiremt. We give them loan before Kiremt when they need money to buy fertilizer, rent land and buy oxen. They are supposed to be working on their farm during Kiremt. We don't give loans so that they buy food items but so that they can work and change their lives. If they buy food items, they don't have anything else with which to pay their debt. That will also pose problems for other members who guarantee the loan to our workers and peasants themselves because it is risky and wastes resources (I13).

The less than 20% interest rate by microfinance institutions compared to 100% by informal lenders was seen by some of the peasants as too much. Some peasants even claim microfinance institutions were owned by rich individuals in Busa, and the profit they make is pocketed by them. Taylor (2021, 241) writes that “[l]ocal powerbrokers set themselves up as gatekeepers for

microfinance initiatives, offering the ability to keep expanding debt portfolios and ensuring high repayment rates in return for new enrichment opportunities”.

For a successful financial inclusion of rural resident’s microfinance institutions have to consider not only providing credit but also some insurance services for agricultural activities and provision of loans for emergency needs of peasants including for food consumption lest the poor and marginalized among them be exploited by informal lenders. The need for financial services in rural areas will increase with further commercialization and capitalist penetration rural areas (Taylor 2021, 241). Some peasants “view loans from rural banks as a right and/or a subsidy” (MOFED 2003, 51) that there exists tension between imperative of running a profitable business and empowering rural poor, including women within microfinance institutions. Creating awareness, improving business skills of peasants and creative solutions must be sought microfinance institutions to run a successful business while empowering the peasants.

4.4. Women

Gender is a social concept that differentiate women from men, putting different expectation of roles on them (Mukherjee 2021, 121). Women in rural areas face different forms of exploitation of their labour, including the unpaid for works like fetching water and fuel, preparing meal, care for children and works on agriculture that are crucial for subsistence and reproduction of rural households. Women have also “weaker rights, access to and control over land and other resources compared to men” significantly affecting their capability to affect decisions in households, economic independence and security (Mukherjee 2021, 123). They also have lower control over how the surplus of the household was spent (Mukherjee 2021).

The role of women in economy and politics was largely determined by tradition in Ethiopia. Thus, “marriage and motherhood determine women’s relationship to work, property and other matters of public importance, and define their status as political beings in society” (Vaughan and Tronvoll 2003, 46). Women perform still perform most of domestic chores of grinding grain, preparing food, and fetching water and fuelwood that physically demanding (Vaughan and Tronvoll 2003). TPLF sought from its earliest days to traditional restrictions on the role of women thanks to its liberation philosophy and the need to mobilize women in its struggle with

Derg (Young 1997, 178). Some of the reforms it enacted were “raising the minimum marrying age; making dowries voluntary rather than obligatory; assuring women of their property rights; guaranteeing their rights in divorce actions” (Young 1997, 178).

After assuming power TPLF led EPRDF continued the attempt to allow women to have more role in society by providing education and creating awareness of women's rights. The use of court to decide on conflicts between men and women, and increased access to support including legal advice through women affairs bureaus in each *Woreda* have significantly improved the respect for women's right. Article 35 of the FDRE constitution lists the rights of women, among them sub article 7 provides that:

Women have the right to acquire, administer, control, use and transfer property. In particular, they have equal rights with men with respect to use, transfer, administration and control of land. They shall also enjoy equal treatment in the inheritance of property.

The women who participated in this research showed overwhelming support for EPRDF, unlike men. Now that TPLF is removed from power, one might assume women can freely criticize EPRDF. But they did not, and one possible explanation was that EPRDF has fundamentally changed power relation between men and women, one that led to betterment for the situation of women. This includes the right to equal ownership of property, including land, that was empowered women. A woman gives us her perception of what happened in biblical metaphor saying, “we used to be light under cover, under Meles we came into light (*ibsaa huubboo keessaa turre, barasaa ifatti baane*)” (FGD 6). Another women added

We went out (ala baane), talked about our problems freely at meetings, and our rights were respected under Meles. I started education under Derg but was forced into marriage by my parents during Derg. This changed with Meles. We got roads, electricity, and we stopped drinking water with dogs under EPRDF. Rights of children, women and youth were respected (FGD 6).

“To be let outside” is the common expression of women in describing what changed with EPRDF: to have jobs, to participate in meeting without male accompanying them, to choose what they wear: this are all seen as crucial change, a liberating one at that, it seems from the suffocating all round control men exercised over women before. They also some of the women still remained restricted to their home. By allowing women equally participated in meetings and training just like men, women claim that they learned a lot on family planning, health, educating

our children, saving, farming, etc. under EPRDF. This, “proved that women are human beings (*namatti makamnee, dubartiin akka nama taate barre*). Women were born to live only indoors just like mouse in the past, we were let outside and saw light [under EPRDF]” (FGD 8).

Women claim they were abused without any recourse available in the past. That woman equally shared property upon divorce has improved women's situation under EPRDF, if they have two houses women took one, and the same with land and cattle. “Before a woman after divorce was not allowed to take her cloth after she left her husband. Men were not happy with this change. If you are physically assaulted women can take their case to Woreda” (FGD 5). In the past women were beaten and abused, and “elders will intervene, reconcile her with the husband or return her to him if she leaves” (FGD 2). The traditional conflict resolution mechanism with its focus on preserving harmony and repairing interpersonal relations might have left women little options even in cases of abuses. Men seem to be scared of this new world and the ultimate recourse to court it provided women in case of abuse by their husbands “women can get divorce, claiming half our property. EPRDF created conflict and there were many litigations between men and women due to this” (FGD 9). Another man adds that “women learned about court under EPRDF. They got all the rights; however, we only prevented them from slaughtering animals [a traditional ritual performed only by men]” (I6).

In this regard it is crucial to note that the role of land certification “has significantly strengthened the property rights and bargaining power of women and promoted gender equality” by giving which women equality to enjoyment of land rights (Solomon 2015, 57). Young (1997, 185) also notes in relation to land reform carried out by TPLF during its struggle against the Derg that “the beating of women by their husbands which had frequently precipitated divorces, was reported to have almost disappeared after the land reform because men feared the loss of family land if their marriages ended”. Men inform us that they are afraid abusing their women, including physical assault which used to be considered as necessary to discipline their wives, due to the possibility of losing half of their property. Mukherjee (2021, 123) writes that “women who own immovable property are at much lower risk of marital violence”.

Another important change that women associate with EPRDF was the increased use of contraceptives which gave them more freedom and control over their lives. After saying that women cried when Meles died and she will cry again if asked to, one woman said, “he also gave

us pills” and all women present at the FGD laughed (FGD 6). The wider availability of contraceptives we are told allowed women to finish their school, “even if a girl loves a boy, she will not be pregnant, she will not throw a newly born baby into forest or river, and she can continue her education while loving someone. Human life was not wasted” (FGD 6). Even if the majority of women know about family planning and use contraceptives, some women still want to have many children, sometimes seeking to have sons when continuously having daughters.

That said, we cannot claim women have equal rights with men in spite of the improvements. The conservative culture which allows only men to plough, forces single, divorced, separated, or widowed women to give land they own to men in their community in the form of contracts or sharecropping, locally known as *Hirtaa*. TPLF’s attempt to solve this problem by teaching women to plough in Tigray during its revolutionary war run into the conservative peasant culture and was halted (Young, 1997: 180). Women also claim they did not benefit enough from the land certifications program since in spite of the law that both husband and wife have to consent to rent their land men still rent land without consulting with women. They don't have also much power in deciding on how the income of household is disposed. Their participation in politics also is limited due to cultural predilection of women to follow their husbands’ political preferences.

4.5. The Youth

Youth in both Sululta and Dawo face significant economic hardships that emanate from underemployment and unemployment. Illegal migration of the youth to Europe and Arab countries in large numbers is a manifestation of this. Scarcity and fragmentation of farmland due to population growth makes it difficult to absorb the youth in agricultural activities. EPRDF’s preference for labor intensive agriculture did to avert youth unemployment in rural areas. There was a significant conflict on land between youth and their fathers who were mostly heads of households. In Sululta not a few of the youth confront their parents for selling land (mostly catalyzed by forced eviction under EPRDF) for cheap that is currently fetching higher price. In Dawo, the youth yearn to have separate farm plots which the father resists.

By silently discarding ADLI in 2000s, EPRDF also left behind the possibility of extracting surplus from agriculture to fuel industrialization; rather it begun looking for external sources of capital, mostly FDI, for industrialization (Lavers, 2023). This left the agrarian question of labor

as the most relevant one, and problems rural youth in Ethiopia face are related mostly to it. Agrarian question of labour, Pattended (2021, 95) argues has three principal bases: “the first is concerned with dispossession and ‘popular struggles over land’, the second with state mediation of the capital–labour relation and the conditions of material reproduction and the third with the forms of wage labour”. Since there is no significant absorption of rural youth into cities and towns by providing meaningful employment in industries and services, conflict over land and intergenerational friction could increase. In Dawo there is some demand from the youth and those with no/little land for land redistribution (FGD 6). During one FGD we are told that:

There was no land redistribution since Derg. The youth are largely landless; they wait for the death of their parents to inherit land. Thus, they work on their parents’ plot or seek wage labor in towns. And some youth rent land from elderly peasants (FGD 1).

There was a program to give “government land” for group of unemployed youth that have organized themselves for different job creation schemes including farming in Dawo. However, the youth there claim:

it is given to relatives of those who have power at Kebele level. Even if legally, it should be passed to other groups after three years, actually it is passed to the same circle of relatives. And sometimes their wives and daughters. If you raise such issues, you will be beaten and be given labels like opposition supporter (FGD 1).

The youth in Dawo beautifully recited a song that, however, describes their difficult life that is forcing them to consider immigration to other countries as the only way out of it. They claim the song is popular, and the poem is roughly translated:

Washaa washeekoo.....Oh the playful one (refers to a girl's name)

Daawoo keechatti arginee siqaayii.....We saw suffering in Dawo

Asii fuudhiitii Kanaadaa nu kaayi.....Take us from here and put us in Canada (FGD, 1).

In Sululta town, there was a significant decline in agricultural activities, thanks to expansion of the town into rural areas without at the same time providing urban amenities to the rural areas absorbed into the town. Capital seems to be “seizing hold of land but not production as agriculture is sidelined for urban rents and knowledge-intensive production; rural land is

commodified while peasant labor power is marginalized” (Levien 2012, 964). This has affected all segments of local community, including women. Almost all individuals who participated in this study from Sululta claim at least one female member of their household was working in Arab countries in order to improve their own and their family’s economic lot. The number seems to be comparatively lower in Dawo. Some of them were married women who leave their children with their husband or parents to work in Arab countries. Wage labor on construction of urban housing and the few manufacturing plants, including agro-processing is increasing an important source livelihood for the youth in the area. An elderly peasant commented that “*Lafti agabuu bulee, dargaggoon dhagaa baachuu jalqabdee, rakkoon biyyatti gale*”, roughly translated “since we stopped cultivating our land, our youth began carrying stones and hardship came upon the land” (FGD 2). As to the attempt at creating employment for the youth by the town administration, corruption again shows its head, subverting its aims. One married man in 30s tells us:

We were told to organize ourselves into SMEs (Small and Micro Enterprises) to get funding from town administration, but individuals close Kebele officials used to benefit from it, not the poor unemployed youth. The only way you can improve your lot under EPRDF is through stealing (I22).

Recently the youth in Sululta tried to divide land covered by communal forest on their own initiative among themselves. More than 17 hectares of land in Qaso Weserbi Kebele was covered by communal forest (I23). The youth and peasants in the area fear their claim to these communal forests, which cover a large area of the town is loosening, this all the more so considering commercialization of land in the area.

That it was the youth that spearheaded much of the “Oromo protest” against EPRDF regime from 2014-2018 can be understood better if one takes into account the unemployment of large number of the youth. The neopatrimonial networks of the regimes were used to siphon into the pocket of government officials’ resources dedicated to creating gainful employment for the youth. That the Oromo protest (which will be dealt in detail in the next chapter) were led by the youth and was sparked by dispossession of peasant land by the regime confirm the continued importance of the political aspects of the agrarian question of labour. That population growth in Ethiopia shows no sign of abetting will make the task of the state to provide gainful employment for the youth all the more daunting one.

4.6. Conclusion

In this chapter we dealt with the local economy in Sululta and Dawo. In Sululta commercialization of land that was prompted by forced dispossession of peasants from their land has changed the local economy, as can be seen in decline in agriculture and emergence of some wage labor due to urbanization. Expropriation of peasant land was done in the name of “public purpose” and peasants were usually paid low compensation by state. The effect of this was peasants themselves began selling their land in bulk, fearing dispossession by the state. Also land commercialization was prompted and accompanied by the logic of “accumulation by dispossession” as those private businesspersons and investors who engaged in it turned the land into profitable asset by engaging in real estate business and building houses that were sold at far higher profit margin than they money spent to secure the land. Even empty land bought or taken from peasants were turned into profitable assets by “legally” registering and preparing maps for them with town administration.

In Dawo we have a more agricultural oriented local economy. The area is a major producer of Teff, a staple food in that widely marketed in Ethiopia. The major concerns of peasants in Dawo were the terms of trade that has was more balanced under EPRDF but moved against agricultural produces since 2018 and the price of fertilizer and other farm inputs began increasing under EPRDF and continued after 2018. The inability of cooperatives to actively buy agricultural produces was seen as giving urban based grain merchants to have the last sat over prices, militating against peasant interest. Microfinance institutions provided a major respite from informal money lenders, even if peasants were forced to turn to the later during *Kiremt* season since the former were afraid of forwarding loan during *Kiremt* season assuming peasants will use it for food consumption and will be unable to pay back the debt they owe them.

There was no qualitative significant peasant differentiation among peasants in both study sites. This was largely due to a more or less similar farm size cultivated by peasant households due to 1975 land reform whose effect continued under EPRDF. Model farmers have more similarity with other peasants, except that they cultivate more land and own more oxen than others. Some of them have tried to branch out their activities in town. In Dawo they own vehicles for transportation, flour mills and some houses in Busa, the district town. In Suluta they have built

homes, bought some land from poorer peasants, built storehouses for animal feed storage, and own some vehicles. It seems there was an incipient differentiation among peasants that so far has not led to the emergence of peasant strata that owns more land and exploits other peasants in its Marxist sense.

EPRDF regime embarked on two phases of land certification in rural areas like Dawo, though not in peri-urban areas like Sululta town. The first level land certification was less accurate, and peasants saw it with some suspicion. The second level land certification was accepted enthusiastically by peasants, since it was more accurate, and geo referenced and also peasants were made aware that land certificates were issued to give them more tenure security. Through land certification, the regime tried to reach some compromise with donors, civil societies and academics that advocated for privatization of rural land. Land certification arguably led to more tenure security, increased rural land renting, and led to some investment in rural land and environmental protection (even if we don't know how much) while allowing the regime to have domination over rural lands. As indicated in previous studies (Davies 2008), the majority of peasants who participated in this research were not against state ownership of rural lands so long as they have tenure security. Land certification has given some tenure security to peasants in Dawo, while the arbitrary application of “public purpose” to expropriate land from them continue to bedevil it. Tenure insecurity was all the more felt by peasants in peri-urban areas like Sululta who were not issued land certification and were also exposed to more land expropriation than others.

State control over land was a key plank of EPRDF's rural policy. It was used to control peasants. It also enabled the regime to prevent capital from seizing hold of rural lands, which it did not want, apparently for two reasons. For one, regime was concerned for social stability since privatization of land could result in large scale displacement of smallholder peasants, who were considered as social base of EPRDF, and this was more palpable under the more pro poor ADLI. On the other hand, the regime was not comfortable with merchants and urban dwellers, that were politically suspect in its eyes, gaining control over rural land and becoming new feudal lords that could allow them to challenge the regimes hegemonic drive. However, since early 2000s (due to the split within TPLF and the controversial national election in 2005) EPRDF seems to have promoted urban land leases (Labzaé and Sabine Planel 2021), and effect can be seen in peri-

urban areas like Sululta. This was done to buy the support of the nascent middle class and urban dwellers that supported the opposition during that election. Also, with PASDEP, the regime's overall agricultural and rural development took a more pro-growth turn.

The analysis in this chapter confirms that agrarian capitalism encouraged by EPRDF as an ambivalent and dialectical process. The analysis confirms that market engagement did not necessarily lead to emancipation; rather, it often facilitated exploitation through unequal power dynamics, particularly merchant capital domination and ABD. However, dismissing marketization entirely ignores the nuances demonstrated by the empirical data. In Dawo, the peasantry faced exploitation primarily through merchant capital's price domination over the *Teff* staple crop market. Peasants were compelled to sell their grain cheaply during harvest to meet immediate cash needs (taxes, inputs, education), only to buy cheaper maize for subsistence, confirming they were price receivers, not setters. In Sululta, exploitation manifested as large-scale Accumulation by Dispossession (ABD), where state power was leveraged to convert rural land into high-value urban real estate assets, bypassing legal protections afforded by certification. Despite exploitation, the gradual advance of market forces created specific opportunities for agency. Access to agricultural inputs increased; market for agricultural produce became more accessible thanks to expansion of rural roads; and extension programs improved productivity. Women, in particular, benefited from the institutionalized right to equal land ownership (enabled by certification) and gained independent income sources through diversification (dairy/hay sales in Sululta and securing credit through microfinance in Dawo). This indicates that agrarian capitalism simultaneously created new forms of vulnerability and provided new avenues for agency and accumulation.

Lastly, tenure security, which by many students of peasants' studies saw a key to increasing agricultural productivity, cannot be obtained without significant overhaul of the neopatrimonial political economy environment that prevailed under EPRDF (Davies 2008; Paulos 2007). Tenure insecurity must be seen within this wider framework. It can be further argued that the volatility of politics in Ethiopia has created an atmosphere of insecurity among the general populace. The epochal political and economic shifts in the country since the last half of 19th century that continued into the present, including the imposition of serfdom on southern peasantry, the 1975 land reform, and regime changes in 1991 and 2018 are all indicative of lack symbiotic state-

society relation in this country. It was this, “the political” under EPRDF, that next chapter deals with.

CHAPTER FIVE: LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND PEASANTS UNDER EPRDF

Introduction

This chapter discusses how peasants related with local governments, the part they played in political contestations under EPRDF and how that affected national politics. As state structures proximate to peasants, local governments were the point of contact for state and peasants. It was through local governments that EPRDF tried to control and “discipline” peasants. As such, it will be crucial to discuss the discourses and practices deployed by the regime at local level and how peasants interacted with them. This was meant to show us the “normal” relation between state and peasants or social order or “social statics” in the words of Herbert Spencer (Ruggiero and Nicola 2008, 3).

5.1. Local Government and Peasants

There were continuities and changes in the nature of local governments under imperial, Derg and EPRDF regimes. Local governments served as instruments of control over local people throughout the three regimes. This was due to the way peasants were positioned within the whole society, “with real power lying outside the community” which discourages “local assumption and exercise of power, except as an agent of these outside forces” (Foster 1967, 310-11). Local autonomy and leadership which can lead to cooperation among peasants was prevented by rulers of peasant societies “who see such action as a potential threat to themselves” (Foster 1967, 310-11).

The Ethiopian state has striven to weaken rural elites power vis-a-vis the state since the times Emperor Haile Sellasie. The Derg regime destroyed the power of landlords through its land reform and created a more or less free peasantry. This has created a situation whereby rural elites in Ethiopia became dependent on state for their power. By destroying hierarchical communal solidarity, Derg took away rural elites bargaining power, that could have allowed the later to make “more credible their threats/promises to control peasants and mobilize collective action (through the use of persuasion or coercion)” (Boone 2003, 29). Furthermore, by making the state the owner of land Derg also weakened the economic autonomy rural elites, thereby creating rural

elites that are weak allies of the state that to collaborate with state and has lower bargaining power (Boone 2003, 29). This trend continued under EPRDF.

That said there were attempts to improve local governance under these regimes to improve the economic production and respond to popular demands. The Haile Sellasie regime attempted to limit the power of feudal lords through a decree in 1941 and imposed uniform rate taxation in 1942 (Markakis 1986, 36). Derg established Peasant Associations (PAs) to implement 1975 land reform and these allowed peasant participation in local government, at least in the early days (Clapham 1988, 157-60).

EPRDF continued this process, allowing semblance of popular participation in the running local government. In practice, this was strategy of control. Once in power, the regime capitalized on the heavy-handed nature of Derg rule which was unpopular with peasants and the need for peace to gain legitimacy and consolidate its power. The focus of EPRDF in new liberated areas was disposing Derg affiliated individuals from power, disarming local population and fighting lawlessness, in contrast to Tigray where mobilizing the people for its war against Derg led to prioritization of implementation of land reform, organizing mass organizations and improving local administration.

TPLF led EPRDF pretended to have accepted liberalism due to the end of the Cold War. This includes cosmetic adoption of multiparty election, free market economy, decentralization and respect for human and democratic rights (Pausewang, Tronvoll, and Aalen 2002). However, its Marxist-Leninist leaning in party organization significantly blocked democratization of state-society relation promised by liberalization. Very important for subsequent discussions was that TPLF took many lessons from Lenin in organizing itself and later EPRDF, most important for our purpose Lenin's admonition that broad democracy was "*a useless and harmful toy*" for revolutionary party (cited in Leenco 1999, 98, emphasis Lenin's). Lenin's democratic centralism led to a practice within TPLF led EPRDF whereby "'selection' of trusted followers by the omniscient Central Committee became superior kind of democracy to one in which relatively less predictable election occurs" (Leenco 1999, 99). TPLF led EPRDF limited the pretense of

democracy to Addis Ababa where foreign observers were present, while considering the rural areas as its exclusive domains where no opposition was tolerated (Leenco 1999).

The nature of EPRDF rule in Oromia can be describe as authoritarian, deploying the party-state, loyal officials and their personal networks to govern, sidelining the constitutional autonomy of the region and democratic practices. As in other countries in Africa, TPLF indirect rule through OPDO has created “decentralized despotism” and entrenched neopatrimonialism “in which local chiefs were granted increased power with often weakened downward accountability” (Degrassi 2008, 114). From field work and others studies we understand from the very beginning TPLF/OPDO sought individuals who were loyal to it, ready to gather information on local people and opportunists who usually had lower education to run local governments in Oromia. EPRDF used prisoners of war it trained to clear Derg officials and control the parts of Ethiopia outside Tigray and Amhara (Markakis 2011, 233). As such, it was the lower intelligentsia that was preferred by TPLF led EPRDF to lead its “revolutionary democratic” struggle in much of the Oromia and Southern region (Markakis 2011).

EPRDF combined the use coercion and material incentives, the latter largely after the 2005 national election, to secure its power, that is, “patronage among elites” and “exclusion of the masses” (Kohli 1986, 20). The literature on Africa indicate that authoritarian regimes also recruit from among farmers loyal individuals whom they provide with access to resources to entrench their rule in rural areas (Bates 1981). Rural societies are prone to patronage due to “the function of such ties in protecting or insuring the poor peasant client against natural caprice, while in turn providing patrons with political support and perhaps material or financial tribute” (Degrassi 2008, 118). Even if this explanation runs the risk of considering rural Africa as primordial (Degrassi 2008), yet there is a possibility that the TPLF as it crafted state management strategy of EPRDF has gained some lessons in usefulness of patronage from its dealing Tigrayan peasantry during its war against the Derg. Leenco (1999, 119) quoting study by Duffield and Prendergast claims “no less than \$700 million worth of assistance was channeled across Sudanese border” into areas controlled by TPLF and EPLF. By assisting peasants under their control through public welfare programs afforded by such assistance, these organizations reversed the Asian model of guerrilla

warfare whereby peasants provided material support to military movements and also gained crucial support from peasants (Leenco 1999). We can only speculate on how much this level of aid greased the system as TPLF “weaved a closely knit network of party cells in every village and hamlet that rose in a pyramid, crowned with the party leadership” to wage a successful war against Derg (Markakis 2011, 244).

It seems the lessons learned in Tigray were transplanted to the rest of Ethiopia in time. Leenco, citing Vestal, writes “[t]urning out to vote and voting correctly was induced by the threat of withholding such essential government services as the ‘sales of sugar, edible oils, soaps, and salt at the Kebele shops-an especially effective inducement in the countryside’” (Leenco (1999, 123). The generous support provided by the West and international donors was held responsible for propping up the authoritarian rule of EPRDF after coming to power (Leenco (1999). Arguing against looking at only internal factors that made neopatrimonialism widespread in Africa, Degrassi argues international donors “collaborated to enforce policy conditionality and programs that strongly concentrated decision-making and financial control within small cliques of political elite and technocrats, despite token gestures of decentralization” (2008, 115).

Local governments infused with neopatrimonialism can serve as a bridge that unites the two distinguishable social fields in peasant societies: at the bottom “people in personal and traditional relationship to one another” and at the top “people in more impersonal and formal institutional relationship to one another” (Redfield 1956, 43). The bridge or hinge between “local life of a peasant community and the state” is usually provided administrators sent by state, priests, teachers and merchants (Redfield 1956, 43). In Ethiopia, since 1975 revolution we have “two parallel systems of organisation have been operating at the village level” (Poluha cited in Vaughan and Tronvoll 2003, 40). On the one hand we have locally organized and controlled associations, “whose activities are directed towards social and religious affairs” considered as “private (*yegil*) and state organizations “namely the *wereda*, *kebele* and *nus-kebele* (sub-*kebele*) committees, assemblies, and associations, along with other state or state-initiated organisations” which were “‘governmental’ (*yemengist*)” (Poluha cited in Vaughan and Tronvoll 2003, 40). What is important for us that these institutions and individuals bridging these two social fields partake in both personal and impersonal relations with their superiors and local people.

Under EPRDF, there were novel attempts at decentralization, at least at legislative level. The first phase of this constituted the Federal arrangement of the state after 1991 which reconfigured the state along linguistic lines. The second phase was launched in 2001 with the District Level Decentralization Program (DLDP), “increasing the administrative autonomy and capacity of district or woreda administrations”, while the third phase took place at Kebele since the mid-2000s included political and administrative reforms (Emmenegger et al 2011, 3).

It is crucial to scrutinize the nature of such decentralization that provide “formal-legal mandates for local government, or published laws defining administrative structure and procedure” since they are important only if they have concrete effects (Boone 2003, 32). Decentralization under EPRDF did provide for *spatial* deconcentration of the governmental apparatus whereby “many institutional layers of the national party-state are interposed between rural locality and capital city” and state is visible at local level through presence of party cells and state-run cooperatives at village level (Boone 2003, 30-31). On the *processural* dimension of decentralization which measures “de facto devolution of political authority” (Boone 2003, 31) there was no devolution of power to local authorities under EPRDF and we have centralized authority. This counter intuitive situation whereby an authoritarian regime decentralizes more than democratic ones have been interpreted as decentralization of centre–periphery relations or as an instrument of maintaining central control over peasants and rural resources (Emmenegger 2016, 263).

The “highland periphery” which was the focus of this study was administratively and economically integrated into Ethiopian state. Administrative integration preceded since it was foundation for extraction of resources from the “highland periphery”. Here we have dense state structure writ over which even if uneven is comprehensive: “inhabitants were all subject to the same laws, rules and regulations, enforced by the police and judicial branches and, if need be, the military”. In spite of their administrative and economic integration into Ethiopian state and subsequent attempts at reforming center periphery relations under Derg and EPRDF the “highland periphery” remained marginalized and exclude from state power dominated by elites from Northern Ethiopia and were administered by “auxiliary elite” i.e. a “class in the periphery enjoying a share of state power” (Markakis 2011, 7-8).

5.1.1 Woreda

Under EPRDF the administrative edifice was based on the *woreda* (Markakis 2011, 245). With an ideal size of 100,000 inhabitants, it was at *woreda* level that federal, regional and zonal governments are represented, and their functions coordinated. Authority to govern *woreda* “is invested in the *woreda* council elected for two years, and is exercised by its executive committee” whereby the council meets “to hear executive committee reports and approve the budget” (Markakis 2011, 245).

Beginning in 2002 Woredas were “empowered administratively by block grants that are directly transferred from the region, bypassing the zones” (Emmenegger et al 2011, 7). Afterwards woredas provided rural services to Kebeles including extension packages. As such they became “the most powerful local government entity” since *Kebeles* were given little discretionary power (Emmenegger et al 2011, 7). In rural areas, the *Agriculture and Rural Development Policy and Strategies* document authorizes *woreda* as the principal authority on rural development. This includes coordinating primary education, provision of potable water, road construction, agricultural extension program, preparing *woreda* plans and budgeting, etc. (MOFED 2003, 72). The same document states “there is a complete understanding in the government that the management and leadership capabilities at the *woreda* and *kebele* levels are decisive factors for the success of rural development” (MOFED 2003, 73).

While the creation of regional states was aimed at “answering” the “nationality question”, Woreda level decentralization was mainly carried out to “improved service delivery, deeper and more participatory governance, and promotion of economic development” (Tegegn 2014, 136). One of the consequences of EPRDF’s *Woreda* level decentralization was increasing penetration of local communities by state-party (Tegegn 2014). It also allowed *Woredas* to have discretionary power over block grants, however, Woredas could not raise revenue on their own, doing so only on behalf of regional governments. Thus, regions deliver more than half of their budget to *Woredas*, while close two third of the revenue of regional governments was collected by *Woredas* (Tegegn 2014, 152-162). Two years after the 2002 decentralization town administrations with *Woreda* status were given block grants and allowed to “use local revenue to

finance their municipal functions” (Tegegn 2014). However, Woredas suffer from lack of skilled manpower and resource to plan and implement local development initiatives.

While woreda level decentralization formally carried out to enhance participation of local community in governance and development, in practice it falls short of the lofty ideals. They continued to serve as tool of central government control over peasants. There was no local election since 2008 making it difficult to gauge the importance of *Woredas* in local self-governance. The general perception of peasants was that they have little influence over what happens at *Woreda* level. A peasant in Dawo claims that before 2005 election “officials from *Woreda* did not even consider you as a human being and if you raised a question, you will be considered as having ‘attitudinal problem’ (*rakkoo ilaalcha* in Afan Oromo)”, a phrase that can easily land you in opposition camp (FGD 6). *Woreda* officials can imprison anyone for complaining about real problems under the presumed support for opposition. When that did not work, they can create division among peasants. When peasants in Sululta took the issue of barring of peasants from getting a share of revenue from communal forest of the area to Oromia regional government, rather than addressing the problem, we are told *Woreda* officials “co-opted the outspoken individuals by sharing *benefit* with them, turning peasants against each other and silencing them” (I19). And this does not come as surprising since as there are genuine advocates against corruption, “some criticism of corruption and neopatrimonialism is self-serving, evaporating once some critics themselves obtain power” (Degrassi 2008, 120).

The *Woredas* were largely dependent on grant from Oromia region for their revenue, raising small amount on their own. They did not have enough expertise and skilled human resources to plan and implement local development initiatives. In terms of economic development, the perception in Sululta and Dawo was that town administration/*Woreda* was a place of corruption, in the former case in relation with land administration and in the latter embezzlement of public funds. Conjuring the familiar image from other studies of neopatrimonialism in Africa, youth in Dawo claim “All the budget meant for creating youth employment was all eaten at *Woreda*” (FGD 1).

5.1.2 Kebele and Sub Kebele Units

Kebeles were created as Peasant Associations during the 1975 land reform to mainly distribute land (Clapham 1988, 157; Emmenegger 2016, 268). Initially the peasant associations were places for self-governance of peasants, later they were completely controlled by Derg and became extended arm of the state and “operated as a tool of intelligence, since the local administrators worked as informers and spies, keeping the grassroots under surveillance” (Vaughan and Tronvoll 2003, 41). EPRDF strengthened *Kebele* and added *sub-kebele* organizations achieving an even deeper penetration of rural communities.

It was at *Kebele* level that peasants and state come into touch, the “reification and a site for everyday encounters between the citizenry and the decentralized government” (Emmenegger 2016, 268). *Kebeles* have “a unicameral legislative council acting as the highest representative organ, the executive cabinet whose members are elected council members, and the judicative social court composed of three judges” (Emmenegger et al 2011, 7). In addition, they their own militia unit and prisons which together allows *Kebele* “to enforce state-party dictates covering a wide spectrum of activities” (Markakis 2011, 247). *Kebeles* collect taxes, imprisoning those who default and forcing them to their animals and other properties and provide guarantee for fertilizer credit which they recover (Markakis 2011). They are also responsible for the “identification, registration and surveillance” *Kebele* residents as was “distribution of food aid, participation in food-for-work projects, and access to other giveaways” (Markakis 2011, 247).

Three reforms of were carried out at *Kebele* level under EPRDF. First, the number of *Kebele* council members was increased to 300 since April 2008 local elections, and during this election EPRDF staffed *Kebele* councils with hundreds of thousands of individuals loyal to it (Emmenegger et al 2011, 7;11). Second, to enhance *Kebele*’s administrative capabilities “more qualified civil servants as well as a kebele manager managers” were appointed and lastly “a sub-kebele structure that effectively fuses party and state personnel and interests was established in many rural areas of Tigray, Amhara, Oromiya and Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Region (SNNPR)” (Emmenegger et al 2011, 7;11).

TPLF was a nationalist front created by Tigrayan intelligentsia whose success against the Derg relied on mobilization of peasants in rural areas Tigray. Therefore, upon coming to power TPLF led EPRDF was wary of any insurgent movement that could successfully mobilize peasants against its rule. Moreover, TPLF led EPRDF's hegemonic aspiration and rejection of alliance with autonomous elites from other ethnic groups accounts for little democratization under the regime (Gudina 2003; Lata 1999). Local governments, thus, have significant implications for political control and surveillance of rural populations. As such, local governance in rural areas outside Tigray was characterized by "authoritarianism and upward accountability" (Segers et al 2008, 94).

In Oromia, a region rich in agricultural resource, with the largest population, and surrounding Addis Ababa, its violent incorporation into the Ethiopian state and economic and political marginalization of Oromos has long strained their relationship with the state. Despite the improvements of Oromo socio-cultural rights, unpopularity of OPDO seen as instrument of Tigrayans (another Abyssinia elite) and continuation of OLF insurgency exacerbated TPLF's fear of rural based rebellion in Oromia. This was a major factor that shaped local governance in Oromia region and was at the heart of state-society friction. TPLF ruled Oromia through OPDO, a party it created to displace and weaken OLF. Even if OLF "has waged a generally ineffectual 'armed struggle' against the government" since 1992, OPDO "has governed Oromia as if it were facing a serious military threat" imprisoning, torturing and harassing thousands of Oromo on charges of supporting OLF (HRW 2005, 1). Lacking support from educated and economically well-off members of the Oromo society, OPDO choose brutal crackdown and coercion against any opposition to its rule (Markakis 2011, 244-45).

Oromia being a region with over 85 percent of its population living in the countryside largely scattered in areas far from urban centers, *Kebele* and sub *Kebele* organizations were deployed OPDO to harass supporters of opposition parties (Markakis 2011, 27). Just before the 2005 national election, *sub kebele* organizations were set up in Oromia region "to monitor and control the rural population down to the level of individual households" (Markakis 2011). These *sub kebele* units are the *gott* which usually oversee between sixty and ninety households and *garee* (group in Afan Oromo), a subdivision of *gott*, with around thirty households (Markakis 2011).

Below the *gott*, there was a smaller group called *shanee* (five in Afan Oromo) made up five or six households overseen personally by a *garee* committee member (Markakis 2011, 36; Labzaé and Sabine Planel 2021, 84). Considered “informal” networks lacking official government documents that explain their function, their prerogative range from implementing development projects, input distribution, tax collection to organizing peasants for security purposes (Chinigò 2022, 96–97). They were part of an ambitious country-wide structure of “total” control of the society, a manifestation of totalitarian ambition of the regime at the time. Meles Zenawi, the architect this system, “when revolutionary democracy permeates all society, individuals will start to think alike, and all persons cease having their independent outlook. In this order, individual’s thinking becomes simply part of the collective thinking” (quoted in Gebissa and Mohammed 2018).

An EPRDF white paper calls *Kebele* “the grass roots executor of local development plans” as it identifies development projects and mobilize human and other resources to execute them (MOFED 2003, 71). And in line with the above claim, the government claims sub kebele units were also voluntary associations that facilitate development projects in rural areas, while peasants argue they were “imposed on them from above without any kind of consultation” (MOFED 2003, 31). In addition to mobilizing peasants for development projects like construction of irrigation systems, road repair and digging of wells and latrines which is usually involuntary, these sub kebele organizations have been used “to follow up what people do in their houses, where they get their money from, who they eat with, what politics they talk” achieving “a level of control and surveillance that was not possible under the kebele system alone” (MOFED 2003, 32-34). Through such a tentacle that reaches down into the rural world, both private and public conversations of peasants were closely scrutinized for any subversive undertones (MOFED 2003, 37).

The management of these sub *kebele* organs of the state was done largely by development agents (DAs) and party cells at local level whose members were assigned to lead these sub kebele organs (Markakis 2011, 247; Asebe et al 2019, 946). This was helpful for the government in ensuring that peasants accept extension packages, payback credit they take for fertilizer, engage in various development projects and tiptoe the party line on political issues .

In order to run such a system, EPRDF embarked on mass recruitment of members since 2005 election, increasing the number from 700 000 in 2005 to 5 million in 2010 and there is evidence that “access to public services and livelihood security is increasingly conditional on party membership” (Emmeneger et al 2011, 4). This was true for OPDO also, and economic interest was the overriding concern of the new recruits (Emmeneger et al 2011, 5-6). In Oromia region “bribing kebele officials is common and it excludes certain segments of the community –those with less financial means –from access to public services including urban and rural land” (Emmeneger et al 2011, 20). Deploying carrots (the many benefits that *Kebele* can dispense) and sticks (refusing to provide permissions and imprisoning those opposing the regime) tactics, *Kebele* and sub *kebele* officials had great power, “that is often self-serving, arbitrary, biased and abused”, over peasants (Markakis 2011, 250). This is similar to practices in other African countries, Van de Walle (2001: 120) argues control over state allows political elites to expand their network of support “through patronage, nepotism, and the granting of various exemptions, dispensations, and immunities from laws, taxes, and licenses”. At village level, the result is increased corruption in everyday practices (Van de Walle).

Now we turn to the views of peasants and government officials in Sululta and Dawo in relation to local government, their function and local elections under EPRDF. The view of almost all peasants was that there was no freedom or local democracy under the regime, in spite progress made in tackling poverty. They clearly understand the gap between their constitutional rights and the practice on the ground: “if you think it is your right and say something, they will take action. They will accuse you of having another hidden agenda [agent of those opposed to EPRDF]” (I2). *Kebele* and sub *kebele* government organs were there to ensure that people do not oppose any government directive or show any resistance. And if peasants resist (*didnaan*) anything, they will be accused of support for OLF, “get you into ‘politics’ and imprison you, creating a different problem for you” (FGD 2). The option for peasants was to listen to the government and never speak up even about concrete problems in their locality. It was mainly the sub *kebele* units that were mainly responsible for controlling peasants: “they control people through *shanee*, and people follow what they were told there by the leader of their group who get per diem for their job. Their major purpose was informing on people” (I21).

Lying to people about bringing development to people, pure water, roads, electricity, etc. also comes with the job of sub kebele units (I21). A *Kebele* official at Dawo claims peasants who don't participate in development projects were punished both under EPRDF and PP by their *Garee Misooma*. And "the punishment is financial at *Garee* level and if the peasant resists further, he/she will be brought Kebele and then the issue changes and becomes 'political'" (I2). A *Kebele* manager who served for over a decade at Dawo argues that there was nothing wrong with the structure of sub kebele units, since sometimes they were used for truly development purposes, for example, for environmental protection projects, to repair damaged roads and bridges, and that if manned by educated people they could have helped with development projects and also for party discipline. The problem was with implementation and that sub kebele units "were/are used mostly to control and trap people" (I3).

Personal and informal networks were widely used for local governance. Asked about the individuals who became officials of local governments, both *Woreda*, *Kebele* and sub *kebele* units we are informed they were "individuals with 'connection' (*nama nama qabu in Afan Oromo*) and loyal to the party" (FGD 7) and those with "a powerful relative (*nama fira guddaa qabu*) and submissive individuals (*nama jalee ta'e*)" (I3). People with talent and knowledge were sidelined, were even considered dangerous, and prevented from participating in meeting and talking to media since they were thought to be capable of mobilizing people against government (I3). This indicates some peasants view the source of power of local officials as their network/relationship with higher officials, not the local elections in which peasants participate.

Corruption at *Kebele* level and in Sululta's case even at sub kebele level was rampant and was the major attraction for individuals who seek positions there. It was for "benefit (*fayidaaf*)" that they supported the regime and became its officials (I2). Securing a position at one of the local levels was seen as a way to personal enrichment, and in Dawo "the majority of *Kebele* officials who were once poor have enriched themselves within two/three years, creating friction between peasants and government" (FGD 7). In Sululta individuals working at *Kebele* and sub kebele units benefited from illegal building of houses since they have the power to stop people from doing so unless they pay bribe, and "lower officials at *shanee* or *gare misooma* share the money

they secure from bribes with higher officials. Even if trustworthy individuals were chosen to head the lower organization, they get corrupted by and learn from those already working within the system” (I21).

Allegedly, positions at *Kebele* level in Sululta were so “beneficial” that an official can secure house and car in a year or two (I15) and “children of peasants who became Kebele leaders have enriched themselves so much so that you can’t find one without car” (FGD 11). Comparatively speaking it seems corruption was more beneficial and widespread in Sululta than in Dawo. Markakis (2011, 247) claims it was *Kebele* officials control over land and its distribution that puts them in such a powerful position that can easily corrupt individuals holding it. Land for agribusiness was in high demand putting “kebele officials in a mediating and potentially lucrative position” and this was clearly visible in peri-urban areas around Addis Ababa “where agricultural land is in demand for middle class housing” (Markakis 2011, 247).

Election for local government position was run by the party-state that peasants merely approved of individuals proposed by the government. In the words on one peasant “we did not exercise our right to vote for someone we like” (I6). During one of FGDs in Dawo one participant argued that “from Zone to *Kebele* it was only those close EPRDF who get elected. It was nonsense. They were not elected by people” (FGD 6). And the struggle of the youth that gave birth to “Oromo protest” was said to emanate from this and the fact that individuals with little education were running the government (FGD 6). Another participant, a former chairman of the *Kebele* (in Dawo) present at the FGD opposed this picture of local governance, retorting:

maybe it is due to lack of understanding that they saw local election that way. Election has its own procedure and principles because I know it. The party proposes its own individuals, but they are approved and elected by the people. People know individuals who can serve them, and it was these individuals that are proposed. Thus, the election was not arbitrary and merely based on loyalty to the party. Our job was to connect the ideas of people and government. We were elected by the community, stood for the people and defended their interest at Woreda level even against our superiors (Qaama Olaanu) (FGD 6).

Another participant in the same FGD, who was a former member of the Kebele executive committee, pointed out that since the electoral defeat EPRDF suffered in 2005 and its subsequent consultation with people, there was improvement in local governance, and the regime began choosing individuals with social credibility. In this connection, we should note that theorists of

the state like Poulantzas contend that the state in capitalist society maintains some autonomy from the ruling classes to protect them from self-destruction, not only by unifying those included in capitalism and disorganizing the dominated masses but also by making concessions to the masses (Marinetto 2007). As a result of popular struggles, the dominated classes can gain political representation which contributes their long term subjugation since state ‘re-establish the relationship of forces in favor of the bourgeoisie, sometimes in a new form’ (Poulantzas quoted in Marinetto 2007, 24).

Thus, following the highly contested election of 2005 that saw opposition parties garner significant support, EPRDF made concessions to the mass, including accelerating economic growth and improving local governance (Berhe 2020; Lavers 2023).

Even if individuals with good social standing were encouraged to join local governments after 2005, local elections remained uncompetitive. Giving further detail on how EPRDF put party loyalists while giving an appearance popular election, in a manner faithful to Leninist democratic centralism, civil servant in Dawo alleges that party members, before the so-called election, *propose* individuals they want to run *Kebele*. And “then they talk to him/her alone before election and persuade him/her to come to meeting pretending to be there just like everybody else” (FGD 10). At *Kebele* meeting they ask people to propose candidates and party affiliates who were in privy to the affair, go first and propose that individual. And since most people know there will be no significant change whether this or that individual run their *Kebele*, they go along. “People’s own judgment was despised, and they were treated as if they were blind and in need of being led by those with eyesight”, a practice that continued under PP “since it was only ERPDF’s name that was changed [to PP], not the individuals” (FGD 10). For an agricultural expert in Dawo this practice infuriated peasants, straining peasants’ relation with local government and state (I18). Elections at Kebele level were conducted by gathering people together and raising hand to propose candidates and choose from among them (FGD 1). There were no ballot boxes, and this probably creates pressure on peasants to go along with individuals from the ruling party in these “elections”.

The same practice existed in Sululta, with a further twist though. Here too, *Kebele* leaders were proposed by the party and then people chose them. A *garee misooma* argues that this has created suitable condition for corruption, since Kebele leaders were put in power and can be removed only by party, thus not accountable to people (I23). The Kebele council was also controlled by the party and “there are even accusation that Kebele leaders pay bribe to Sululta town administration officials to secure position” (I23). In Sululta corrupt Kebele officials can generate significant income bribes related to the issuing of I.D. cards, marital status certificates, land deals that this is a real possibility. A Human Right Watch report confirms the existence of similar practices in other parts of Oromia. Elections to *Gare* and *Gott* were “a simple show of hands for or against a slate of candidates chosen by the kebele” and a farmer from West Wollega interviewed by Human Rights Watch claims “[t]here was no voting...They [OPDO] just brought their people and said ‘this is the gott and this is the garee. Do you agree?’ People didn’t say anything and then they all clapped and it was finished” (HRW 2005, 31-32).

Since the revolution of 1974 peasants who were close to government were incorporated into administrative machinery of the state and gained “fresh control over leading local positions” (Emmeneger 2016, 269). Thus, local officials drive their power from state has fostered an environment of upward accountability to superiors than local people, straining state-society relations. Rather than dealing with peasants as citizens and answering their demands for development and democracy, influential individuals (and model farmers) were co-opted and individuals with some educations were selected as servants of the system and foisted on peasant society. Mobility within the system was ensured through “connection” with someone higher while “benefit” rather than public service animated the whole neopatrimonial system. The result was that loyalty of “public servants” under EPRDF was “focussed sharply upwards towards the system which has benefited them, rather than downwards in the public service of their constituents, who may often seem largely irrelevant to their rise to influence” (Vaughan and Tronvoll 2003, 44). The bureucratic patrimonialism prevalent in Ethiopia induced clients within bureaucracy to obey their patrons which “often seemed to imply not to take any initiatives on your own, not even act unless somebody in a superior position has told you to” (Poluha 2004, 188). Thus, peasant children who run local governments became estranged from the people they

came from, and peasants claim to have suffered at the hands of their own children serving the regime. The irony of the situation was not lost on peasants who participated in this research.

Passive resignation by peasants in the face of a powerful state and its local officials was another result of “democratic centralism” of EPRDF that stifled local autonomy and self-governance. In the eyes of many peasants, EPRDF rule was sustained less by consent and more through coercion, falling short of its hegemonic aspiration. A peasant from Sululta who says there was no love lost between EPRDF and peasants from the very beginning even when the regime brought peace and stability adds “they imposed their rule through gun and even if we didn’t like them, we accepted their rule and laid low. We knew they were harming us and stealing our land. They have more power and there was nothing we can do about it” (I15). EPRDF was also said to be “ready to rob and beat us (*nu zarafluufis, nu garafluufis duubatti hin deebine*)” (FGD 2) and yet peasants accepted their rule.

While cognizant of EPRDF’s authoritarian rule, some peasants still credit it for economic growth in rural areas. A peasant from Dawo who gives credit to EPRDF for its achievements in terms of development that includes introducing a new variety of potatoes, teaching peasants to use fertilizer, and paving rural roads says that the regime, however, violated human rights. “We were beaten and imprisoned for no reason. My brother wrote a book *Doobbii Jalalaa* (Thorn of Love) and informants told them, they threatened even to kill. My brother lost his salary for over a year. *They used to kick us like donkey!*” (I5).

Peasants tend to appreciate the relative security, absence of conscription of their sons for war, development under EPRDF, while criticizing absence democratic local government, violation of human rights and Tigrean domination of federal government. This tension is in line with Jessop’s observation agents can face a situation that “undermines at least some conditions of existence in at least some respects at the same time as it advances these and/or other preconditions in other respects” (Jessop 2008, 30).

The maxim of Ethiopian peasants was “[a]s long as one says nothing and makes no remarks, neither can one be punished for one’s actions” was and it poses a significant obstacle to

democratization of the country (Vaughan and Tronvoll 2003, 34-35). Following government directives was a way of defending yourself from possible harm that can come from it. Thus, “if the government tells peasants to come out, sing and dance, they will do that without question. If they are told to cry, they will cry as they did upon the death of Meles” (I20). The answer of an elderly peasant in his 70s to the question of what a government/state is sums up the feeling and fear of most peasants in their relationship with state:

Other than saying all government are good, what am I supposed to say. Why would I move away from my cattle and farming of my land? ‘Anyone who administers me today is my husband’ said the wife (“Dhirsi kan har’a na bulchu” jette niitiin). Other things are handled by God. Getting involved in government issues is difficult. I never saw a king like this one [PM Abiy]. He gave us rights (I9).

Thus, peasants were cowed by EPRDF regime to merely follow the guidelines of its “revolutionary democracy” that was passed onto them through its extended arms at local level, *Woredas, Kebeles* and sub Kebeles.

Table 5. **Kebele Mechanisms of Control: Incentives, Sanctions, and Surveillance**

Mecha- nism/Objective	Local Unit (Kebele/Gott/Gar ee)	Incen- tive/Reward	Sanc- tion/Punishment	Empirical Outcome
Political Mobiliza- tion & Control	Kebele Council; Garee/Shanee leaders (Post- 2005)	Prioritized ac- cess to subsi- dized inputs (fertilizer, seed), access to credit, political recogni- tion/social sta- tus.	Exclusion from food aid, arbitrary denial of ser- vices/permits, sei- zure of property for tax/loan default.	High compli- ance rates in sham elec- tions; forced attendance at development meetings; mass party recruitment post-2005.
Surveillance & Discipline	Garee Leaders; Model Farmers (as political brokers)	Per diem pay- ments for par- ticipation; op- portunities for self-enrichment and bribery (es- pecially in Sululta land administration).	Imprisonment, physical assault, political labeling (‘anti- development,’ ‘anti- peace’) for ques- tioning officials.	Pervasive sur- veillance down to the household level (‘who they eat with’); crea- tion of a cul- ture of fear and silence.

Resource/Rent Allocation	Kebele Executive/Land Administrator	Control over local job schemes (SMEs for youth), issuing house permits ('Qabiye Duri'), mediating illegal land deals in peri-urban areas.	Withholding legal maps/documents; subversion of compensation payments for expropriated land.	Rampant corruption, especially in Sululta where land commodification generated significant rent-seeking opportunities.
---------------------------------	-------------------------------------	---	--	--

Source: Develop by Author

5.2. Model Farmers and Local Governance

States do not govern over a homogenous peasant group. There are social, economic, political, and identity differences among peasants (Kearney 2018). The state's relationship with peasants is affected by class dynamics within peasant society and through its policies states influence those dynamics. One of the contributions of this study was to understand the interaction of Ethiopia's 'developmental state' with rural classes after 2005, as it pushed for market oriented and pro-growth economic policy by focusing on 'model farmers' and its implication for local governance.

Within peasant societies individuals with wealth and prestige often have more authority than state officials (Diaz and Potter 1967, 162-63). If political directives of the state have to be carried out, they need the consent of these individuals. Political decisions concerning peasants usually involve informal consultation with them since "peasant community is usually an intimate, face-to-face social unit, ignoring any of the important men might lead to the formation of bitter factions and cliques that might seriously disrupt village life" and formal meeting rubber stamp decisions made informally (Diaz and Potter 1967, 162-63).

State patronage of rural elites has been used for both political and economic purposes. States seek "to contain or forestall the open expression of rural dissent" and also ensure agricultural production and procurement (Hart 1989, 32). To that end dominant rural groups are maintained by states as "privileged yet dependent clients" serving as agents of state to maintain control in rural areas and helping in capitalist accumulation. The reward for their cooperation with the state is privileged access to state resources (Hart 1989).

States co-opt rural elites to serve to bridge the gap between the city and countryside. They play the role of ‘hinge groups which fulfill the necessary function of mediating between elites and peasantry, the two ‘halves’ of peasant societies’ (May and Potter 1967, 164). Crucial in this regard was the practice among African governments of ‘promotion of emergence of coteries of privileged, ‘modern’ farmers’ that were subsidized to encourage adoption of new technologies’ and also to serve allies of the government in rural areas (Bates 1981, 44; 49). This class of peasants plays a crucial role in rural governance, since they instill the feeling that there is no alternative to supporting government if one seeks to improve his/her economic fortune. Governments in Africa tried to secure the cooperation of rural populations using benefits: ‘through their conferral, they can reward compliance; and through their withdrawal, they can punish those who protest’ (Bates 1981, 119). If all of this fails, coercion can be used to quash any resistance to their rule in rural areas. In this environment, personal self-interest makes peasants comply with agricultural policies that can harm them as a whole (Bates 1981).

Model farmers played similar critical role for EPRDF rural governance. This was made possible because the EPRDF, as in the rest of Africa, preferred an agricultural policy option that encouraged farmer productivity by lowering the cost of farm inputs instead of increasing the price of agricultural products, due to fear of the rise in the cost of food for urban dwellers. Through control over farm input, crucially fertilizer, the EPRDF government was able to organize rural support for its rule. EPRDF also used model farmers to show that prosperity is possible for hardworking peasants who follow rural policy directives, including extension packages. They are role models to be emulated by other peasants, inculcating the idea that the economic welfare of one group of peasants should not necessarily be at the expense of other peasants, and therefore contribute to the stability of the rural world. This discourse is accepted as ‘real’ by both peasants and DAs who participated in this research. Their political support was also considered important in gaining the consent of other peasants to the rule of the regime, thus serving as political brokers ‘transmitting and interpreting state policy to the peasantry’ (May and Potter 1967, 164–65).

Model farmers became crucial for the EPRDF after the shift in its agricultural development and rural governance policies from the pro-poor economic policy under ADLI which focused on smallholder peasants toward pro-growth economic policies that began with the Plan for Accelerated and Sustained Development to End Poverty (PASDEP) in the early 2000s. Model farmers with flair for entrepreneurship became crucial to increase capitalist and market force penetration of rural areas and to gain legitimacy in rural areas after the controversial 2005 national election by tapping into the social status of the better-off peasants, who are increasingly incorporated into the state apparatus. The support of model farmers could be decisive in election, as EPRDF was to learn during 2005 national election when they took the “role of opinion maker and therefore ‘election maker’” (Lefort 2012, 684). EPRDF sought to regain support of this class of farmers by turning them into party members and often making party members model farmers (Lefort 2012). This makes sense since EPRDF relied on rural votes to sustain its dominant party position. It also goes with political culture of patron–client relationship in Ethiopia whereby rulers come to power and hold onto by “establishing links with other ‘strong men’ whom they have wanted as followers. The intention has been to make clients fulfil their wishes and to eliminate all competition to the patronage (Poluha 2004, 188). The model farmers supporting EPRDF secure the support of the authorities and a path to economic prosperity (Lefort 2012, 684).

TPLF already during its struggle against Derg “practiced the Leninist approach that viewed peasants as divided into classed, not as a monolithic social class” (Young 1997, 184-85; 195). Peasants were divided into rich, middle and poor peasants. Even if class difference was taken into consideration for mobilization of peasants in its war, TPLF did not encourage class among peasants except against (Young 1997). The place of rich peasants in TPLF's struggle was a source of considerable controversy since it saw their support for the revolution as suspect and wavering. Pragmatic reasons of getting as much support as possible led TPLF to embrace rich peasants and it was assumed their perspective could change in the course of the struggle. The rich peasants were considered as “easier to organise than other peasants because they were more conscious of the benefits to be gained from the Front's reforms, notably in security over their land” and once the nobility was displaced TPLF entertained possibility of rich peasants playing more role in administration of local communities (Young 1997, 136-37). Young (1997, 138) further

claims “available information suggests that rich peasants did gain local positions of power through the TPLF organisation of local administrations, but not in greater numbers than their negligible proportion of the population”.

In his study of a *Kebele* in the North Shoa Zone of Amhara State Lefort (2012) indicates that a group of “rural elite” known locally as *birokrasi* (from ‘bureaucracy’) for their role in local administration under Derg were ostracized by EPRDF after it came to power. This rural elite, “whose education, wealth and social influence put them at the top of the socio-economic hierarchy” was vilified by the regime and was a target of the 1997 land redistribution (Lefort 2012, 678). The new regime imposed “a new category of local administrators, generally poor young peasants who were judged to be naturally close to the new regime” (Lefort 2012). It was this ostracized rural elite that effectively acted as opinion makers in the 2005 election contributing to opposition support. In order to regain its hegemony and win the 2008 local elections EPRDF turned to and recruited party members from this elite, the enrolment being presented “as a purely economic advantage, offering attractive access to inputs, loans, etc.” (Lefort 2012, 691).

In Oromia, it seems similar pragmatism emerged after the 2005 national election. As one elderly peasant in Dawo put it “every man [and woman] of a name was somehow involved in Derg, and they were excluded from holding local position by EPRDF, this only changed when they lost the election” (FGD 6). Before EPRDF felt secure in its control of state organizations at lower levels which are formed with the involvement of peasants, and it was bothered more with middle and upper levels of government where intellectuals were involved (Vestal 1999, 78). In addition, potential involvement with Derg, it seems that rich peasants in Oromia were seen as suspect by EPRDF in that they can potentially support narrow nationalism. The EPRDF journal, *The People's Custodian*, argues that “only by eliminating the Oromo educated elite and capitalist class will the Oromo people be freed from narrow nationalism. Only the class division can account for the explanation of narrow nationalism” (quoted in Vestal 1999, 169).

It was in the aftermath 2005 national election that EPRDF turned towards “rich peasants” and recruited them into party membership to bolster its support in Oromia. The general view of

peasants on model farmers varies from the majority of those who consider them as hardworking peasants to those who see them as benefitting from their closeness to the regime. In Dawo, they are said to be successful because they buy sufficient farm inputs, like fertilizer, for their land and they even rent land to improve their income (FGD 1). They are also considered useful members of the community that provide employment for the rural poor, forward loans to other peasants in times of need (FGD 1). In Sululta too, model farmers were seen as:

strong and dedicated farmers, and for its politics EPRDF used to reward them and hold them closer than others. They were supported to become exemplary for other peasants. There was no political selection of model farmers since it could lead to conflict among peasants who know each other (FGD 2).

Hard work, saving, taking advice and training of government were seen as the key to becoming model farmers. EPRDF focused on model farmers because “they take risk, allow experiment on their farm plot and provide example for other peasants: thus, they were given priority in getting new seeds and fertilizer” (FGD 4). An agricultural expert at Dawo explained that it was natural that some individuals adopt new farm methods on their own after training while others have to observe it on others to adopt it and some do not accept it. “Thus, we prefer to begin new farm methods with the first group, and they need our support so that they don’t fail lest other fail to follow their example. The intention was not to favor model farmers but to fast disseminate modern farming among peasants” (I18).

Woreda officials in Dawo argue that at the beginning there was genuine attempt at using model farmers to inspire other peasants. Later on, false and exaggerated reports concerning productivity and wealth of model farmers and other farmers became a common practice because of *Kebele* officials’ involvement leading to confusion. This was also true for some media reports who mostly interview pre-selected model farmers. Some peasants did not follow the example of model farmers; the mobility and transitioning of peasants from poor to middle to model to investors was not as expected; there was big problem with saving as peasant spend their income the many weddings, christening, *Jaala* ceremonies; there was no sufficient study and evaluation on the economic trends among peasants; and there were cases where rich peasants exploit poor peasants (FGD 7). While some of the officials claim that model farmers were given priority in terms farm inputs and getting credits, others argue there was not much differential treatment of

peasants except few cases. The major problem for the latter was “that the enthusiasm of extension agents has been lost nowadays due to low salary and other social problems like housing”, crippling a crucial element of agricultural policy which was provision of technical support for peasants of all categories on modern farming (FGD 7).

Most model farmers are said to be not as wealthy as expected. A model farmer in Dawo claims “most model farmers remain in rural areas, did not transition to investment in towns, only owning houses there” (I9). A *Kebele* chairman in Dawo assert that the majority of model farmers “are still poor peasants merely with more oxen than other peasants and are stuck in subsistence farming” (I17). In his study in Amhara region mention above, Lefort (2012, 690) writes that even if there was an expectation that model famers fall in the category of rich peasants, the average level wealth of model farmers surveyed “is just above the ‘middle’”, their wealth in largely measure by livestock and the area of the land cultivated.

Others point out that it was the outspoken and those close to government among the peasants that became model farmers. On the other hand, some consider most model farmers as hard-working individuals even if “there were some who used their position in Kebele administration to become model farmers, including by taking land from vulnerable peasants” (I21). In Sululta we are told “whenever there was/is problem with supply of farm inputs, model farmers were given priority. Individuals who did not engage in agriculture were given awards as model farmers” (I23). A *Kebele* official argues that:

Not only model farmers are prone to have power at Kebele, but they are also given other favours too. For example, they are preferred for different research on seed production. The fertilizer, seed and pesticides for one hectare and above were provided by the government. And the government takes back only the amount of seed it provided, and the rest is taken by model farmers. There was dissatisfaction due to this by other peasants who argue they were not given such a chance even if they have land and the will to lend it for this purpose. This increases the inequality among peasants. The model farmers do not have only more wealth, they have also power and voice at Kebele and can help the government control people, thus their privilege (I2).

An agricultural expert with years of experience working in rural areas of Dawo state unambiguously that “there was a government directive that model farmers should lead Kebeles,

gott and *garee misooma* under EPRDF” (I21). In Amhara Region too, Lefort assert that “the vast majority of new kebele councilors elected in 2008 were either party members or ‘model farmers’” (Emmeneger 2011, 7-8). That model farmers were given priority in Kebele positions was considered by some as reasonable “since self-sufficient individuals were assumed to be capable of governing others. People prefer to appoint wealthy and mature individuals [*Bulee nu bulcha jedhee*] to lead their *Kebele*” (FGD 4). When it comes to leadership, “those with better understanding of policies were preferred and again model farmers come in handy. They can also give advice and help other peasants” (I18). An agricultural expert at Dawo adds that since model farmers have wealth, were considered to have social influence (*dhageettii qabu*) and trusted with community resource they were preferred to lead *Garee Misooma*, community court at *Kebele* and other positions (I20). Labzae and Sabine (2021, 72) point those farmers elected as local representatives “define social and farming good practices based on their understanding of the EPRDF motto”. However, there are some peasants who claim that educated individuals were the ones that mostly the lead *Kebeles*, not model farmers who are said to be busy with their farming (FGD 1).

From agricultural development and theoretical perspective, it seems ERPDF, in spite its Leninist class analysis of peasants and political utility, subscribed to modernization theories of development in its approach to model farmers. The EPRDF, however, seems to have recognized the limitation of the early version of modernization theory, dropping the idea that peasantry can be ‘developed out of existence’ through modernization (Davies 2008; Kearney 2018, 105–7). Thus, the regime’s rural policy tried to bring sustainable agricultural development that could provide employment to the increasing population and decrease rural-urban migration.

To achieve this goal, model farmers were used to break the fatalism and “The Image of Limited Good” that characterize world view of peasants. “Image of Limited Good” refers to peasants’ view of their total environment “as one in which all of the desired things in life such as land, wealth, health, friendship and love, manliness and honor, respect and status, power and influence, security and safety, exist in finite quantity and are always in short supply” (Foster 1967, 304). This means personal gain takes place at the expense of others. Writing about traditional Chinese peasants’ economic attitude Fei and Chang claim their thinking was one of “contentment ... an

acceptance of a low standard of material comfort” which is contrasted to “acquisitiveness” characteristic of “modern industry and commerce in an expanding universe” (cited in Foster 1967, 319-20). The attitude of contentment suits the social context of closed economy in which striving for prosperity was seen as disturbing existing social order, while in modern economy such an attitude is seen as reactionary.

The attitude of contentment could change if peasants view of the world is moved from an Image of Limited Good to that of open system with increasing opportunities which allows peasants to take initiatives for material improvement safely: “The brakes on change are less psychological than social. Show the peasant that initiative is profitable, and that it will not be met by negative sanctions, and he acquires it in short order (Foster 1967). Foster claims such a change is taking place because of expansion of national economies, emulative urges and influence of cities. For local entrepreneurs in this changing world an ideal of equality becomes a brake on their personal prosperity. Achievement “bursts forth in full vitality in a few new leaders, and others see the rewards and try to follow suit” (Foster 1967).

The EPRDF agricultural and rural development strategy justified model farmers from such a perspective. It claims that farmers are not ready for change unless they see it as practicable. It asks “Where should the practical experience necessary to convince farmers come from?” (MOFED 2003, 65-66). Its answer is a pioneer or vanguard group of farmers who comprehend the advantages of new programs and are ready to experiment. The government should give incentives and help them implement its rural development policies. Some farmers show such readiness out of political support for government, however, “the important thing is to select such farmers, give them the necessary technical or other support, encourage them to implement the pilot projects with commitment and thereby demonstrate that this is a key rural development strategy” (MOFED 2003, 65-66). The strategy paper adds that *Kebele* council members with social influence must play a leading role by actively implementing development policies of the government and mobilize the rest of society (MOFED 2003, 69).

It seems there is significant success in this regard since most peasants who participated in this research are convinced that model farmers are hardworking farmers who diligently implemented

advice of development agents, used modern farming techniques and used farm inputs that increases their productivity. They also seem to be convinced that economic gains of model farmers were not at the expense of other peasants but something to be emulated by others peasant. It was also claimed by peasants that their resistance to new farming methods promoted by the government declined after observing better agricultural productivity of model farmers. On the other hand, it appears that the discourse and practice around model farmers under EPRDF has led to a view that poverty and underdevelopment can be:

ascribed more to tradition than to the current structure of inequality (especially in terms of access to resources) that led to growing wealth for the few. Significantly, this threatens the visibility of local class relations and the marginalisation of the poor by projecting them as victims of tradition (Daniel 2020).

The seemingly conflicting picture about model farmers we get from literature (Abeje and Ezana 2011; Lefort, 2012) and field work can be reconciled by arguing that being a dedicated and enterprising farmer is a necessary condition but not sufficient one to becoming a model farmer under EPRDF: to be a model farmer also requires supporting the ruling party. The latter in turn justified the favorable treatment of model farmers within the neo-patrimonial context of a party not unknown for using material benefit to lure supporters. However, we cannot rule out the pragmatic necessity of using exemplary farmers to spread innovative farming methods as the reason for what apparently was seen as the privilege of this class of peasants.

5.3. Conclusion

After coming to power in 1991, the TPLF led EPRDF promised democratic rule in Ethiopia to garner the support of Western countries on whose economic aid its rule depended to a significant extent. The bulk of rural Ethiopia is populated by peasants who have been historically sidelined in political and economic decision-making by the elites that dominated the Ethiopian state. This trajectory of Ethiopian state domination of peasants continued under EPRDF. Local governments, like *Kebele* and *Woreda*, where the state and peasants largely interact, did not become sites of democratic and popular participation of peasants. The waves of formal decentralization of local governments under EPRDF resulted in spatial deconcentration of state apparatus, however, not allowing local governments real discretion and political autonomy. This was the case thanks to fusion of state and party, upward accountability and ‘democratic centralism’ of EPRDF, effectively undermining the successive legal and formal decentralization of power and resources to

local governments. Thus, the need to look beyond formal institutions to understand exercise of power at local level in peasant societies.

In the Oromia region, local governance remained undemocratic and more repressive than in other regions since OPDO faced a persistent legitimacy crisis and its rule was contested by OLF, opposition parties, and civil society organizations. That OPDO officials were recruited for (prone to) being corrupt, less educated, and ready to unleash brutality on the population of the region did not help matters. Local governance in Oromia was characterized by non-competitive elections and selection of local officials through personal networks maintained with higher officials. Local governments were mainly concerned with surveillance of peasants and implementing without questions policies of the all-knowing state, including through the cooptation of model farmers. There was no voluntary association of peasants and civil society organizations that could potentially have political nature. Rather we have ostensibly voluntary but in reality, government-controlled associations: rural micro-finance institutions, peasant cooperatives, and mass associations of youth and women affiliated with ruling party.

The preferred policy of the regime to keep the peasantry of the Oromia under its control was detaching them from more educated Oromo intelligentsia that could potentially mobilize them in armed rebellion against TPLF led EPRDF rule. It was only after the 2005 national election that saw Oromo peasants voting for opposition political parties that the EPRDF tried to improve local governance. The regime tried to increase state's infrastructural power by allowing individuals with social acceptance to run local government, through hiring educated and salaried *Kebele* managers, and encouraging 'model farmers' join the ruling in large numbers. Despite this, local governments continued to wield power over peasants through land administration, issuance of important documents, and determination of individuals that benefit from governmental support. Local governments also continued to help crush any form of peasant resistance to government policies through fines, imprisonment, physical beatings, and even death. Individuals who resisted the government were labeled 'anti-development' and 'anti-peace', meaning supporters of opposition parties and armed groups that deserve these punitive measures. This tactic was used by the regime to silence peasants in Sululta as it evicted them from land without properly compensating them, and in Dawo as it imposed on them local officials of its choosing, that were not seen as representing them. Local elections remained sham affairs that merely approved individuals prese-

lected by the party. Even though peasants appreciated agricultural and rural development brought by the TPLF led EPRDF (to be sure more so in Dawo than in Sululta), they remained skeptical of the regime they saw as dominated by Tigreans and that did not allow them to elect individuals of their choosing to run local governments. Overall, the regime was unable to provide democratic local governance, which allowed representation and gave voice to peasants. This contributed to its downfall as peasants supported a social movement against the regime known as ‘Oromo protests’ (2014-2018), bringing to an end TPLF domination of Ethiopia.

CHAPTER SIX: PEASANTS AND POLITICAL CONTESTATION UNDER EPRDF

Introduction

Different social groups, including peasants, engage in political contestations. Their engagement is shaped by the nature of state and the interests it represents; the strategies, resources, and relation (to that social group) of contending political forces; and perception of impact of public policies on the interests of the targeted social group. Authoritarian nature of EPRDF, lack of genuine participation peasants in local government, crisis of legitimacy of ruling party, violations of rights and the abuses peasants suffered at the hands of officials, and (un) popular policies of economic development led to growing discord between peasants and state managers. This led at times to peasants' open defiance of the regime's rule through elections and participation in protests, in addition to the everyday resistance they mounted against their more powerful overlords. The 2005 national election and the Oromo protest were taken as cases to explore the role of peasants in resistance to the regime. These are cases of "social dynamics" in the words of Herbert Spencer that brought social change (cited in Ruggiero and Nicola 2008, 3). In this connection it is important to note from outset that crisis within political system usually leads to its reorganization, not its demise, through "the redefinition (or restructuring) of the forms of institutional separation between the economic and political systems and their relationship to lifeworld (Jessop 2008, 7). This chapter covers peasants' participation in key political contestations under EPRDF, that (re)shaped state-society relation in Ethiopia.

After presenting the views and participation of the peasants in the 2005 national election, the chapter discusses 'Oromo protest' as a social movement and the role of peasants in it. An in-depth treatment of 'Oromo protest', by combining theoretical insights and empirical findings, was included considering its novelty in Ethiopian political culture and the political change it engendered since 2018. As such it has a significant impact on the trajectory of national politics and can be considered as watershed events in state-society relations under EPRDF. Regime survival, hegemony aspiration and totalitarian control were the driving force behind the political thinking, discourse and practices of TPLF led EPRDF dominated Ethiopian state. At the same time, various classes, social groups, and state managers were engaged in political contests as "the state is neither a unified subject nor a neutral instrument but an asymmetrical institutional terrain

on which various political forces...contest control over the state apparatus and its distinctive capacities” (Jessop 2008, 31).

6.1. Peasants and Political Contestation under EPRDF

State and social groups engage not only in cooperative political relations but also conflictual, competitive and contested relations. The “political” refers to “institutions, issues and ‘actors’ which essentially engage in power relationships in a given situation” as such it essentially “relational, dialectical, contingent, and more often than not, it involves conflict within identifiable arenas of interaction” (Solomon 2007, 35). The hegemonic aspiration of TPLF led EPRDF was not totally accepted in Ethiopia in general and Oromia region in particular. It was contested by students, opposition political parties and civil society organizations like Macca and Tulama Association. The Oromos were politically marginalized under EPRDF, notwithstanding existence of OPDO ostensibly representing them within EPRDF. The Oromos were “the single group that is most exposed to control and repression” (Pausewang 2009, 2) thanks to existence of OLF. Through low key insurgency OLF kept a feeling of its “presence awake in the Oromo peasantry”, without seriously challenging the security forces of the regime (Pausewang 2009, 5). Student protests in universities and high schools in Oromia region have kept the spirit of resistance to the regime alive. In 2000 “students across Oromia demonstrated in protest of the government’s failure to effectively combat fires that ravaged huge swathes of forest in Bale” and the government used force to put down the demonstrations (HRW 2005, 22). And in 2004 students protested student the decision of Oromia regional government to move its capital from Addis Ababa to Adama, the regime claiming the protests were organized by OLF (HRW 2005). Subsequently, the regime dismissed some 380 Oromo student from Addis Ababa University and when high school students protested this decision “eleven students were killed by the government soldiers and a total of seven thousand students and teachers were arrested” (Mohammed 2009, 36). The wider attempt to challenge the regime first began by contesting national elections that were enshrined within the FDRE constitution.

6.2. The 2005 Contested National Election and Representation

Representation is a modern political concept that came into vogue with attempts to make governments amenable to popular will. In its original Latin word representation “covered a vast semantic field”, and meant “to portray, describe, narrate, and duplicate—to make present

something that is not and cannot be so” (Mastropaolo 2011, 2273-2274). In the political world representation “exists so that those governed can govern indirectly. It thus creates a minimum level (considered to be the only realistic one) of self-government” (Mastropaolo 2011, 2273-2274). Representation is crucial for democracies in large modern states more than any other type of political system. In democracies “electoral representation is crucial in expressing the will of the people, even if the claims of elected officials to act in the name of the people unavoidably become an object of contestation by citizens” (Kurian 2011, 1463). It was this tension that “activates the communication between state institutions and society” (Kurian 2011, 1463).

After coming to power in 1991 EPRDF promised to institute multiparty democracy and allow competitive elections to determine the government of the country. New political parties emerged, and the existing ones prepared to compete with EPRDF. In what would be an indication of what the future holds for multiparty democracy, the approaching of 1992 regional election led to harassment of OLF and its ejection from transitional government. The EPRDF won 96.6 per cent of the vote and “achieved its goal of gaining a mandate to consolidate its rule ‘in the name of peace and stability’” (Aalen 2002, 7-8). Since then, “political process in Ethiopia became polarized and entrenched, with the TPLF led EPRDF in power confronted by a broad-based, but uncoordinated, opposition” (Tronvoll 2000, 16). What over time emerged in practice was “electoral authoritarianism”, that gives an “appearances of inclusivity, pluralism and competitiveness deceive and hide the flouting of the liberal democratic principles of freedom and fairness” (Merera 2011, 667). The 1993 EPRDF document distributed to its cadres, *Revolutionary Democratic Goals and the Next Steps* states:

We can attain our objectives and goals only if Revolutionary Democracy becomes the governing outlook in our society, and only by winning the elections successively and holding power without letup can we securely establish the hegemony of Revolutionary Democracy. If we lose in the elections even once, we will encounter a great danger (quoted in Vestal 1999, 72–73).

In the 1995 election that no opposition party contested, EPRDF took more than 90 percent of the seats, and it was considered by independent observers as neither competitive nor fair (Merera 2011, 669-70). The next election in 2000 was contested by opposition parties but again EPRDF won more than 90 percent of the seats (Merera 2011). And the “severe violations of the election law and intimidation and harassment of the opposition were reported, particularly in those areas

where competition was present” observed during 2000 election forced opposition political parties to withdrew from local election that took place next year (Aalen 2002, 8).

It was only in the May 2005 national election that EPRDF faced real competition. This was due to the opening up of political space brought by domestic and international pressure on the regime (Merara 2011). Also, EPRDF underestimated support that opposition parties could potentially garner. It assumed that support from Tigrayans, peasants, ethnic minorities and PDOs it created would suffice to win the election. However, “the peasants of the northern and western countryside and ethnic minorities started to vote for alternative parties, despite the administrative and economic hold that the ruling party was exercising” (Abbink 2006, 180).

The major opposition parties were Coalition for Unity and Democracy (CUD) mainly supported by urban dwellers, business classes and peasantry in northern highlands, and the United Ethiopian Democratic Forces (UEDF) which has support of ethnic groups in south and west of the country (Abbink 2006, 181-82). In the pre-election period there was violence, intimidation, even killing of candidates for opposition political parties, and selective registration of voters that excluded the youth who were considered to be prone to support the opposition (Merara, 2011; Abbink, 2006). In spite, there was a significant boost for opposition was brought through televised debates and mass rallies that on election day people turned out in large numbers to cast their votes (Merara 2011).

The opposition took almost all the seats in the capital and alarmed by the support given to opposition, the government claimed victory “even before more than 50% of the count was complete” (Merera 2011, 671). The opposition rejected this claim and called for demonstration which the incumbent saw as an attempt to overthrow it through a Ukraine type “orange revolution”. In the election related violence that followed “dozens of people were killed, thousands were wounded, while several thousand were herded into the prisons” by security forces (Merera 2011, 672). An election that appeared to have created a euphoric moment among the country’s populace ended up leading to rising frustration. This was a watershed event in the electoral history of the country as the opposition took 30 percent of parliamentary seats. The election saw few surprises also as key officials of the regime, including former OPDO chief

Kuma Demeqsa, Defence Minister Abadula Gameda, Information Minister Bereket Simon, and OPDO chairman Juneddin Saddo were defeated by opposition candidates, to be reinstated only after controversial reelection (Abbink 2006 184). After the election some of the CUD members refused to join parliament and while the majority joined (Merara 2011).

We now turn to the study sites, to get an idea of what the election looked like in those areas, how people there saw it, and where peasants stood in that election. In Dawo there was overwhelming support for Oromo National Congress (ONC) during 2005, led by Merera Gudina, a veteran opposition leader and lecturer at Addis Ababa University. This was the case in spite of intimidation by the incumbent, arresting opposition supporters, students who campaigned for the opposition and their parents. Some who were thought to support the opposition were “imprisoned for over a decade and never returned to our Woreda since then” (I2). One election observer testifies:

Almost all people supported ONC. Of more than one thousand people who voted in our Kebele, only 36 voted for EPRDF. I was there and this was the reality then. There huge mobilization and the way ONC campaigned was strong: “TPLF is robbing you”, “Why are Oromos unable to rule the country?”, “We have to be Aba Biya [own our country, Oromia]”. The whole country [Woreda] was moved even if the campaign did not reach rural Kebeles and was focused on Busa town. Peasants understood there was no change, life was stuck to “hand to mouth” level. The peasants themselves were awakened (I3).

A kebele security and militia head back then paints for us an image of cosmetic change that the election was and that it did not change the authoritarian nature of the regime. This was metaphorically put as “*Oogdii baddaan laqlaqaa, keessi biyyeedha*” (I17) a sentence difficult to translate into English but similar to the expression “tip of the iceberg”, the tip referring to election while the regime at its core is undemocratic. Explaining why peasants supported the opposition, he adds that many promises were made to peasants, and little was delivered to peasants and that there was no significant improvement. “Peasants were not powerful to have voice (*dubbachuuf humna hin qaban*) and if they voiced their concern they faced huge trouble. And peasants thought ‘if I withheld my vote, may be something will change’” (I17). And as a result, there were few changes in governance and the government apologized publicly for its past deeds. We are informed that peasants were also frustrated by lack of genuine participation by them in choosing their *Kebele* leaders, thanks party control over the process “they wanted to

propose individuals they wanted to *Kebele* positions. That was a big problem in their eyes” thus their support for ONC that promised self-rule (I18).

It was said that educated individuals and students were responsible for mobilization of peasants and “providing fuel for opposition” (I21). “The middle system [local governments] was very terrible because it was manned and led by under educated *Dabales* (cadres) who barely finished grade 2 or 5” who showed loyalty to EPRDF by “informing on, imprisoning and even murdering people considered to be against the regime. Loyalty was the key criteria. People were infuriated by this system that they voted for the opposition” (I21). ONC also promised to solve practical problems facing peasants that they supported it, “people voted for ONC (*farda filate*, horse was the symbol of ONC). We voted for ONC because they raised with our problems and promised to solve them. ONC also promised to provide fertilizer on loan basis and also at lower price” (FGD 1).

However, EPRDF was said to have won in Dawo by rigging votes, “only few individuals voted for EPRDF, they stole it and claimed victory” (FGD 6). In a way that reminds us of the feeling of having little control over outside world observed among peasants throughout the world, we are informed by one peasant “we voted for Merara, but they made him fail” (FGD 9). Hinting at one of the reasons why ONC was stolen its victory, a civil servant at Dawo claims the self-interest of local officials to be responsible:

local officials sent their supporters to marketplaces, streets, and even election sites to put pressure on people to vote for EPRDF. People knew government was behind these individuals. Whatever the intention of the government was at top, local officials were afraid of losing jobs and position and intimidate voters (FGD 10).

On the other hand, some claim there were peasants genuinely believed in the changes brought by EPRDF, particularly in terms of development they voted for the incumbent and that “some peasants were pressurized by their youth to vote for opposition parties” (I20).

In Sululta, the 2005 election was competed by ONC, CUD and EPRDF. CUD was able to compete due to the closeness of Sululta to Addis Ababa, its stronghold. There are variations in the account of locals as to whether it ONC or CUD that was major contender of EPRDF here.

While the majority claim it was ONC, some claim CUD was the one. One explanation for the later claim put forward was that most of the peasants in Sululta go to the capital for market and it was there that they mostly hear political news, thus the influence of CUD (I16). Another participant adds that both CUD and ONC were strong contenders, and yet that most people voted for ONC (I21). A *Gare Misoma* leader in Sululta alleges that EPRDF, CUD and ONC were the major contenders there:

Money was also involved in the election. The government bought off some CUD and ONC supporters. It was CUD that got more attention here because the government didn't keep its promises. ONC did try to mobilize people, but members were imprisoned, and its candidate threatened with imprisonment if they were elected (I23).

Merera (2011 674) himself a leader ONC writes that “EFDUF [a coalition to which ONC belongs] lost many of its original candidates as a consequence of ‘under-the-table’ payments, while others were beaten, and some were arrested and detained”.

Just like in Dawo, allegedly EPRDF stole votes and won in Sululta even if the opposition had overwhelming support: “EPRDF supporters stood at ballot box and told people to vote for EPRDF. Afraid they will not get services from government people voted for EPRDF. Since most peasants cannot read and properly sign, their vote was also manipulated” (I21). On the election day, “we were told to be in line for voting in the middle of night, ‘vote before daybreak and directly go home’. They did this so that there was no discussion among us on whom to vote for” (FGD 2). Even the election observers were said to “stand near you, tell you to vote for the bee [EPRDF symbol] claiming ‘it will feed you honey’. If you ask question or show doubt that could land you in trouble” (FGD 11). In an uncharacteristic and forthcoming way, one election observer in Sululta in 2005 election tells us that:

people voted under intimidation. We told people to vote for EPRDF. We were told to do so after taking training for a week at Sululta Woreda and forced people to do the same. They even asked us to conduct the voting in a forest away from the election station so that opposition observers will not come. I resisted successfully after telling them it can lead to violence and fighting among people since it is far away. People supported the opposition parties and CUD over others. But those votes were thrown out and replaced by votes for EPRDF (FGD 2).

Again, we are informed that it was the youth that mobilized peasants to support opposition parties in Sululta (FGD 2). In addition, media played crucial role “in rural areas people listened to Radio and ONC argued against taking land from peasants at lower compensation, and peasants liked that” (FGD 2). On the other hand, OPDO agitated people against ONC claiming “those with ‘*Farda Leexaa*’ were not Oromos and do not know Oromo culture’ to them” (I21) *Farda Leexaa* means horse without seat for human rider in *Afan Oromo*. As a symbol of ONC it was implicitly insinuated by OPDO that ONC did not know Oromo culture, in which horses adorned with beautiful seat for people, and as such were central to social rituals and symbol of status in many parts rural Oromia.

The overall picture that we get about the election in Sululta in 2005 was that people were opposed to the regime. One *Aba Gada* explains people opposed EPRDF “because they used to beat anyone who resisted their rule. There was physical violence and beating and no rights respected after EPRDF consolidated its power” (FGD 2). And yet there was little they can do when EPRDF won the election, “it was through overwhelming force of the government and poverty that people put their head down, accepted their rule while waiting for an opportunity” another *Aba Gada* adds (FGD 2).

The strategy of the government since 2005 was aimed at reducing the political space for both opposition and the emerging civil society organizations through new legislation. Some of these were the Amended Electoral Law (No. 532/2007); the Political Parties Registration Proclamation (No. 573/2008); the Freedom of Mass Media and Access to Information Proclamation (No. 590/2008); the Anti-Terrorism Law (No. 652/2009); the Registration and Regulation of Charities and Societies Proclamation (No.621/2009); and the Electoral Code of Conduct for Political Parties (No. 662/2009) (Merara 2011, 673). In addition, human rights violations increased as indicated by the reports of Human Right Watch, Amnesty International and US State Department. There was political repression, extra-judicial killings, pretrial detentions, tortures, curtailment of freedom of expression, the press and association under the regime.

After forcefully quelling protests against election results and consolidating its power, EPRDF embarked on increasing its membership more than eight-fold, “in some areas blatantly linking

public employment, promotion, and preferment to party membership” (Merara 2011, 672). The mode of governance was “reconstituted anew as one of neo-patrimonial governance reverting to old modes and techniques of control and an ideology of power as a commodity possessed by a new elite at the centre” (Abbink 2006, 193). In subsequent national elections in 2010 and 2015 EPRDF took almost all the seats of the parliament. EPRDF, as a party that consciously chose “democratic centralism” (Abbink 2006, 665) was thought to stay in power for foreseeable future.

EPRDF saw support for the opposition in this election “as ‘protest votes’ against its weak performance rather than support of the policy alternatives presented by the opposition” (Mulugeta 2020, 239). It also embarked on expansion of party that “went beyond focusing on groups which had supported the party in the past (i.e. smallholder farmers and lower-level civil servants) and was expanded to include recruiting rich peasants” (Mulugeta 2020, 239). Public meeting on shortcoming of EPRDF were held throughout the country and the government promised to bring about good governance to make up for its past practices that led to “protest votes”.

In spite the failings of election to bring about democratization in Ethiopia, it appears that election by itself has educational value for democratic and human rights and that the protests that removed TPLF from central power were inspired in part by rejection of fake elections held by EPRDF and out of knowledge that people have the right to decide their government. Furthermore, some participants in this study intuit that the 2005 election and subsequent reform by EPRDF that brought to power more educated individuals that are more accountable to people at local levels paved the way for Oromia regional government officials to side with people when Oromo protest engulfed the region. An elder from Dawo explains:

Before the 2005 election they [EPRDF] engaged with peasants with little knowledge. Elders with knowledge and educated people were shunned until the 2005 election. A year later they held three weeks meeting with us asking why we did not vote for EPRDF. We asked them: “Why are the Oromos as the largest group not governing the country?”; “Why are you moving the capital Oromia region from Addis Ababa to Adama?”, etc. Afterwards EPRDF brought people close to itself by increasing membership and organizing people. That was how they survived. In spite of the development they brought, people did not accept EPRDF rule from the beginning because in their mind they thought that Tigreans were

against them. It was because they were government and brought development that people tolerated them (FGD 6).

It was claimed that the government started to reflect on its weakness and failure and took some corrective measures including listening to people only after 2005 election. To be heard on local affairs that impinge on their life was a key value of peasants: it is a human need and also ingrained in Oromo political culture. In hindsight, it seems that despite the narrowing of political space at nation level after the 2005 election, local governance reforms by the EPRDF had narrowed some of the gaps between state and society. This, in turn, allowed popular protests and intra-EPRDF fights to bring an end hegemony of TPLF.

6.3. Oromo Protests

In the aftermath of 2005 national election, EPRDF stifled the space for formal opposition parties and turned the ballot box into “an instrument of legitimization rather than a tool of democratic expression” (Merera 2011, 676). That left no avenue for political contestation channeled through formal and representative institutions of the country that constitution provided for.

The totalitarian ambition of TPLF led EPRDF and the neopatrimonial network built from “its circle of trusted people, loyalists, and former comrades in the armed struggle” that was used for political and economic control were not compatible with peaceful and electoral transfer of power (Abbink 2006, 174). The formal and electoral contestation targets the parliament and the executive that was formed from the party that wins the majority in the parliament. However, the substance of politics in Ethiopia was informal as “most of the political decision-making appear to take place outside [the formal institutions]” and behind-the-scenes (Abbink 2006, 174). Abbink succinctly puts the dilemma for officials from federal to kebele level of relinquishing power peacefully since they “are appointed because of loyalty to the party; they have income, privileges, and jobs to lose and will not voluntarily give them up, because unemployment, insecurity, or poverty is waiting” (Abbink 2006, 177). Though neopatrimonialism is a necessary explanation for the lack of democratization under EPRDF, there are additional factors that should be taken into account to get a full picture of it. These include the role of a vanguard party that follows “revolutionary democracy”, professionalism of the bureaucracy, inherited strong state and significant donor support for the regime (Abbink 2006, 196). That said, “the logic that

subsumes these elements mentioned above is that of neo-patrimonial rule- the country and its politics are treated as the privileged domain of power holders who operate in an informal and often non-transparent manner”, thereby reducing the possibility of change within the formal institutions assumed to bring democratization (Abbink 2006, 196).

It was in this context that armed struggle was seen by those opposed to the regime as one option to dislodge it from power and some opposition party leaders who participated in the 2005 election took that road. However, those who took arms against the regime were no match to its security apparatus. It was a social movement triggered by unpopular policies of the regime and fueled by many years of repression that did the job of ending TPLF’s hegemony.

The general name of political contestation that lasted from 2014-2018 is “Oromo protest” both in media usage and academic writings (Allo 2016; BBC 2016; Lavers 2023, 262; Lyons 2019, 180). Amidst continued protests and fear state collapse, Gebissa described it as ‘unprecedented in the country’s history, it is unprecedented in Africa... that people could sustain protest for three years and there is no sign it is abating’ (Gebissa and Mohammed 2018). The protests were at first directed at The Master Plan and were concentrated in universities and high schools; thus, they were more specific goals. The protests were absent for eighteen months due to heavy-handed measures taken by the government to maintain order before May 2015 election (Lavers 2023, 263). Despite EPRDF sweeping victory in the election, the second phase of the protests begun on 19 November 2015 in the town of Ginchi. Since then, the protestors demand was expanded beyond the Master plan to include better economic opportunities and an end of TPLF domination of central power and the protests continued after the government withdrew The Master Plan in mid-January 2016 (Forsén and Tronvoll 2021; Lavers 2023).

In this study, ‘Oromo protest’ is treated as social movements due to its use informal networks of individuals and groups, common beliefs and solidarity, mobilization around contentious issues, and “*the frequent use of various forms of protest*” (Porta 2011, 2431 emphasis added). Social movement as “a sustained series of interactions between the state and challenging groups” could serve as an alternative and rival to representative and formal institutions in renegotiating relation of state to civil society (Jenkins and Bert 1995, 5). Social movement (SM) can further be defined

as “conscious, concerned, and sustained efforts by ordinary people to change some aspect of their society by using extra-institutional means”, while protest refers to “the act of challenging, resisting, or making demands upon authorities, powerholders, and/or cultural beliefs and practices by some individual or group” (Goodwin and Jasper 2015, 3). Social movements are sustained over time and are mostly done by ordinary citizens (Goodwin and Jasper 2015).

The classical theories of social movements stressed the importance of social structure in creating grievances that lead to SM. Marxists held class relation under capitalism that exploited and alienated the working class as responsible for social movements (Shigetomi 2009 3). Works by Durkheim argue that “people feel grievances and anomy and challenge the existing system when rapid changes in society make them feel insecure about their pre-existing expectations of society” (Shigetomi 2009 3). These theories do not explain why some grievances turn into social movements while others do not and why individuals join SMs. Thus, the emergence of modern theories of social movements.

The following discussion will elaborate how a social movement in Oromia region, popularly known as “Oromo protest” seized on political opportunities that were present in spite of repression by the regime, how it mobilized people, the framing of the movement, the use of collective identities and the role of peasants in it by drawing on insight from more recent theories of social movements. The political and economic marginalization of Oromos since the emergence of modern Ethiopian state, which continued under TPLF led EPRDF regime was major cause of Oromo protest. The immediate cause of Oromo protest was the plan to expand the capital city Addis Ababa into Oromia regional state. The government argued that “Addis Ababa-Finfinne Integrated Development Plan” will provide for integrated development of infrastructure and social services between the capital city and Oromia regional towns and rural areas in its vicinity. The protesters, however, claimed that it will lead to eviction of Oromo peasants from their land and that the plan was a subterfuge for annexation of territories of Oromia region into Addis Ababa (Forsén and Tronvoll 2021, 9).

6.3.1. Political Process Theory and Political Opportunities

Pluralist theories of state of ignored social movements as “irrational outbursts” and “substitute community sought by socially dislocated and marginalized individuals” (Jenkins 1995, 19). There is evidence that social movements were mainly results of political engagement of the better organized segment of society (Jenkins 1995). Neopluralist theories of social movements emerged out of critiques of pluralism but still accept pluralist assumption of neutral state adjudicating between different interests within civil society. They argue that “protest stemmed from state failure, primarily ‘linkage failure’ in terms of oligarchic tendencies and exclusion from the political representation system” (Jenkins 1995, 19).

Among social movement theories, political process theorists focus on ‘groups who have been systematically excluded from political power’ (Goodwin and Jasper 2015, 11). They focus on interaction of social movement with the state (Shigetomi 2009). They explain origin of social movement by opportunities afforded by the state, such as lessening repression and alliance of factions within the government with social movement (Goodwin and Jasper 2015, 6–10; Jenkins 1995, 21–25).

Political opportunities that emerged under EPRDF were seized up on by ‘Oromo protest’ organizers. The first crucial opportunity was the death of EPRDF strongman, Meles Zenawi, in 2012. After that the elites of EPRDF ‘lacked unity of purpose beyond self-preservation, and the rife personal rivalry between them exacerbated the problem’ (ICG 2019). This provided an opportunity for OPDO and ANDM leaders to challenge TPLF dominance (ICG 2019).

That OPDO did not get any of the coveted for ministerial positions after death of Meles might have nudged it in that direction. OPDO was repeatedly criticized by opposition parties and wider public for not securing (deputy) PM position or key cabinet positions despite having the largest seat in the parliament, driving home its subservient position in EPRDF. OPDO members did not secure positions of Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Ministry of Foreign Affairs and minister of Ministry of Defense after Meles’ death. It seems that two more deputy prime minister positions, that did not have constitutional basis, were newly created afterwards, one of which was occupied by OPDO candidate in a kind face saving exercise.

The second crucial opportunity was emergence of new leadership under president of Oromia, Lemma Megersa, in 2016. The popular perception of OPDO as a puppet of TPLF changed as he ‘became a symbol of hope for the Oromo movement, much due to his interest in listening to the grievances of the Oromo protesters and his ‘Oromo first’ rhetoric’ (ICG 2019).

The third opportunity was border conflicts between regional states (Tigray and Amhara; Oromia and Somali) which led to further intra-EPRDF friction. The public resignation Abadula Gemedo, over violence against protesters, then the speaker of parliament and the reluctance of the security forces of Oromia region to use force led to further divisions within EPRDF (Forsén and Tronvoll 2021). These actions by OPDO gave legitimacy to the demands of protesters and loosened repression that allowed mass mobilization (Oberschall 2008, 99). The organizers of the Oromo protests, that is, Oromo youth and diaspora, who had little chance of capturing state power, formed a working relationship with the new leadership of the OPDO to sustain the protests and change the balance of power within EPRDF by providing tacit support to the OPDO (Forsén and Tronvoll 2021, 13).

6.3.2. Mobilization, Framing and Collective Identity in Oromo protest

Resource mobilization theory was developed to solve the problem of ‘free riders’ in social movements (Shigetomi 2009). Resource mobilization theorists argue emphasize ‘the capability of social movement organizations to mobilize resources successfully for those movements’ (Shigetomi 2009, 3). Resources do not mean only material things but also ‘non-material items such as authority, moral commitment...national sentiments and historical tradition’ (Oberschall cited in Montagna and Ruggiero 2008, 87). Gerard and Oliver (2008, 133) argue a small group of highly motivated individuals with resources can mobilize critical mass using social networks.

The organization of Oromo protests remains obscure, in part due to the repressive nature of the regime and the dearth of scholarly works on it. The Arab Spring arguably inspired Oromo protests. Østebø claims Oromo protests ‘emerged as a spontaneous grassroots social movement’ (quoted in Forsén and Tronvoll 2021, 7). However, others argue Oromo protests were organized

from its inception under the auspices of OLF (Aga; Burayu cited in Forsén and Tronvoll 2021). The reality of it lies in the middle of these divergent views. The coordination of protests across cities and towns indicates that protests were organized (Gardner 2018; Gebissa 2019). On the other hand, the participation of the masses in Oromia and the unprecedented scale of the Oromo protests show that there was an element of spontaneity.

An important mobilizing structure used by Oromo youth or *Qeerroos* who spearheaded the protests were university campuses and student organizations. The university campuses ‘provided a common meeting ground for possible participants, as well as vehicles and arenas for communication’ (Forsén and Tronvoll 2021, 12). With most farmers having at least one child in these universities, universities anchored ‘an urban-centered protest movement in the rural areas’ (Forsén and Tronvoll 2021, 12).

That the youth spearheaded the protests was in part the result of EPRDF’s strategy of ‘coercive distribution’ that tried to create an environment in which citizens depend on it through the mass distribution of resources (Albertus cited in Lavers 2023). Despite significant economic growth, the regime was unable to deliver employment opportunities for the youth, whose frustration was mostly directed at the government that ‘had so visibly taken responsibility for the distribution of land, jobs and most other services’ (Lavers 2023, 273).

The wider society, including peasants, supported and participated in the protests. Participation in the protests entailed a significant risk that we need further explanation. Framing process theory focus on the way organizers of social movements frame issues ‘in a way that resonates with or makes sense to potential recruits and the broader public’ (Goodwin and Jasper 2015, 6). Collective identity can be used as such to mobilize people (Shigetomi 2009). In terms of framing the Oromo protests, Jawar Mohammed, a savvy social media user and the owner of private satellite TV, Oromia Media Network (OMN) played a crucial role (Gebissa 2019). He and his team were responsible for creating slogans, catchphrases, or demands that resonated with the concerns of most Oromos, deploying social media activism to that end. Social media activism, however, was more effective in urban than rural areas (Forsén and Tronvoll 2021).

Oromo nationalism that was dealt with in previous chapters was also used as mobilizing structure during Oromo protest. The Oromos, “ever so fragmented, have a shared sentiment of victimhood and marginalization, and thus their wish for more political recognition and influence is a motive for mobilization” (Forsén and Tronvoll 2021, 11). The perception that Oromos were marginalized politically, economically and culturally in Ethiopia was used to energize Oromo protest (Forsén and Tronvoll 2021, 4-5). By combining the use of TV, social media and Oromo nationalism, “Oromo people rediscovered their unity as a nation and rallied around clearly articulated political demands” during the Oromo protest. The Oromo protesters “opposed not only what they perceived as continued TPLF domination of federal political, economic and security institutions, but also what they viewed as the pliant and corrupt OPDO, which they accused of selling off Oromia’s resources – land in particular” (ICG 2019, 3).

6.3.3. Peasants and Oromo Protest

The Oromo protest was spearheaded by the Youth or *Qeerroo*. However, it does not mean other segments of society were not involved. Oromo was a truly mass movement, as such peasants were also involved in the protests. The issue that most resonated with peasants was that land dispossession of Oromo peasants under EPRDF. Since both Sululta and Dawo were areas close to Addis Ababa, the former all the more so, the possibility of their inclusion into the capital on government terms that usually involved little or no compensation for lands taken from peasants was acutely felt as unjust and worth resisting.

The peasants understood that “accumulation by dispossession” that was the hallmark Ethiopia's capitals expansion into surrounding rural areas would destroy their livelihood. In areas of peripheral capitalism, characterized by the predominance of agrarian capitalism, formation of local mainly merchant bourgeoisie and incomplete proletarianization among other things (Amin 1977, 333) another form of revolution was besides the class based one was on the agenda, “that of the peoples (i.e. not specific classes)” due “the unequal development immanent in capitalist expansion” (Harvey 2005, 172-73). These struggles usually take ad hoc and flexible form and are organized by civil society. Like Zapatista struggle by indigenous and peasant populations in Mexico they struggle against “encroachments of capitalist imperialism and the constant threat of dispossession of whatever assets they do control by state-led actions (Harvey 2005, 175).

The organizers of Oromo protest framed the planned expansion of the capital into Oromia as something that could leave in its wake similar results to previous expansion of the capital: eradication of Oromo culture and language and economic marginalization and impoverishment of Oromo peasants so displaced. The benefits from the expansion were said to benefit the dominant Northern ethnic groups just as in the past, the Amhara and Tigrayans at the expense of Oromos whose fate was to become guards, daily labourers and janitors in the expanding urban milieu. According to an Aba Gada in Sululta “it was thanks to Jawar that the youth understood about the Master Plan, peasants rose in anger, participated in the protests and averted it. He told us that the land of Oromo peasants will be taken by non-Oromos” (FGD 2). Another participant in Sululta argues that:

It was Jawar Mohammed who brought Qeerroo together and united Oromos (Oromoo afaan tokko godhe) against Woyane [another name for TPLF]. Before Oromos did not have free media, while people were killed by the night and forced into disappearance by the government, government media tell you about development and increased wheat production (I21).

A government official Dawo explains that public opinion before Master plan already such that people assumed members of one ethnic group (Tigrayans) were benefiting from Finfinne Zuria Zone. It was when people were told Master Plan reached Ambo, Woliso and Adama that they assumed “now they [Tigrayans] are trying to sell us (*nu gurguruuf deemuu*) [land and people included]”. “When a government officials threatened to put Oromos ‘in their proper place’, people interpreted his words as forcing through the plan in spite the protests. Peasants were actively involved due this fear” (I21). It was top TPLF official, Abbay Tsehayye who was supposed to have uttered the above words, and the audio was aired on the then popular US based OMN television channel.

In Sululta, the protests were not only the result of imagined future dispossession of land but that of accumulated grievance for lands previously taken from peasants forcefully and for low compensation there (I23). Even if it was the youth who started the protests, people including peasants supported them as were government officials unhappy with this situation. It was due to the united opposition that the protests were successful: “students with high school and above education made their peasants families understand the problem, the latter trusted their educated

children and supported the youth as some government officials did, at times even encouraging them” (I23).

A young man in Dawo claims his parents who were peasants used to say “Okay” to things that come from above (*qaama olii*) even when they were not happy with it inside themselves. And then “the peasants were told that that Master plan covers even Dawo and they were afraid they land was going to be taken, and that they are going to starve, thus not only the youth but their parents to were opposed to Master Plan and supported the protests” (I2). Peasants also assumed “rightly or wrongly that the Master Plan will incorporate all towns including Waliso and they were shocked by it” (I18). Furthermore, peasants in Dawo knew from experience that they could be paid a little as compensation for development projects and that the money would be gone in a short time, say 5 to 10 years:

There were peasants who were removed from their land for floral cultivation in Dilala Woreda, nearby Dawo, for a little compensation that later fell into poverty. Peasants were in touch with each other, and those from Dawo expected the same fate with Master Plan. Thus, it was not protest of the youth only, peasants also resistance (I3).

Another peasant in Dawo adds:

We were told by students- who we thought knew better and we didn't know much- that EPRDF was selling our land to investors, and we were angered by this. We were told by some officials concerning the Master Plan that our land will be leased as it was in towns, and we assumed this might be a good thing just like the land certificates. But later on, we understood, thanks to those with education, that we might lose our land and thus supported the students (FGD 4).

The Master Plan was presented by EPRDF officials as a plan to better coordinate development activities and infrastructure projects between the capital and surrounding towns and rural areas, not as territorial incorporation of the latter into the former. But those opposed to the plan claimed incorporation was the real intent of the plan. Another peasant in Dawo describe the reason why their parents supported the youth as students’ agitation for self-rule by Oromos, Oromo leadership at federal level, against police brutality, illegal arrests, arbitrary killings, and exploitation of Oromia region to enrich Tigray. And “We agreed with them and supported their protests. Even if the parents were not involved, the youth had their support” (FGD 6). In Sululta too we are informed “the protests were spearheaded by the youth, but parents also supported the protests. It was about Oromumma and Masterplan. Thus, the community as whole supported it”

(I4). A peasant who claims he was happy that TPLF fell, “I could have overthrown them alone, if I could”, claims everyone including the peasant supported the protests because “No one loved them [TPLF] and we were forced through muzzle of the gun to remain under their rule [*Giddii afamuziin jala bulle, malee jallannee jala bulle seetee?*] or maybe they ruled us through sorcery” (I1).

That said there are some skeptical voices on the participation of peasants in the protests. Even if peasants knew the repression of the government some thought election was better alternative to change government since many youths were killed during the protests (I21). “Peasants in Sululta were poor, busy with their lives and pressurized by government officials to reign in their youth” (I21). Students of social movement also claim, “biographical availability” as crucial condition for participation in social movements, “those with few family or work obligations—especially young people—were available to devote time to movement activities” (Goodwin and Jasper 2015, 54). For one government official in Dawo:

Peasants travel to Finfinne [Addis Ababa] and comeback and they didn't know about its boundary and problems thereby. It was mostly educated individuals and retired soldiers who mobilized peasants. Some peasants even used to ask, “I don't have any business in Addis, why should I care [about Master Plan]?” (I20).

Peasants were not as active participants as the youth in Oromo protest because peasants lack the kind of social network available to Oromo youth, outside the control of state institutions. As already mentioned, high schools and universities were some of the areas where the youth came to know and interact with each other, and these spaces were used by *Qeerroos*. The sub *kebele* organizations like *Gott* and *Garee Misooma* were deployed to organize peasants to serve the ends of the regime and disorganize and preempt any potential opposition. The surveillance of peasants by repressive states had made resistance through “weapon of the weak” the only available option to them. Indeed, EPRDF attempted to organize students into groups it controlled. It could be *Qeerroos* use of social media and their youthful rebellion that circumvented these attempts and made them leaders of Oromo protest. Still further research needs to be done to identify social networks and recruitment tactics used to mobilize and organize the youth.

We can argue that the support of the community, including by peasants to Oromo protest was crucial for its success. Malseed writes that for social movements to become successful resistance “there should be an atmosphere of communal acceptance and support, like-mindedness of action

and consistency with commonly held ideas of social justice” (cited in Asebe and Teshome 2022, 12). It was usually “shrinking economic opportunities and exclusionary patterns of reward” that usually lead mass popular protest against illegitimate regimes (Davies 2008, 104). The economic inequality generated by economic growth, large youth unemployment and unpopular dispossession of land from peasants created such an atmosphere under TPLF led EPRDF, ushering mass protests that displaced TPLF from central power.

6.4. Political Action and Peasants

Against the expectation of many social scientists, capitalists and development planners, peasants have survived into the contemporary world (Vanhaute 2021). The state had been the key organization in determining how peasants live their lives, and now in the 21st century capital and market forces in their neoliberal imagining has come to affect their lives more and more (Mcmichael 2008). However, their capability to shape their world has been limited due to their marginalization in political and economic decision making. They are not only poor but also powerless, “[o]r at least they look upon themselves as powerless, for only in rare peasant revolutions, when they break out of their customary behavior patterns, have they been a force in world history” (Foster 1967, 8).

Peasants’ lack of control over their world has forced them to seek mechanisms that maximize the little opportunities available to them, usually on an individual or household basis. One such mechanism has been forming patron-client relations with powerful and wealthy individuals like city dwellers, religious leaders, landlords. The patrons, variously called “hinges”, “gate keepers”, or “brokers” mediate between peasants and the wider society (Foster 1967, 8).

Peasants’ participation in politics is arguably affected by two aspects of their social organization, strong inclination towards autonomy and short-term ends sought in forming coalitions that are thus unstable. Peasants’ fragmentation into “small local segments and the diversity and vagueness of their political aims” has limited their political impact and leading some students of peasants’ to characterize them as “a social entity of comparative low classness” (Shanin 1989b, 357). The strong tendency towards autonomy on part of peasants was made possible by their ability to being self-sufficient, leading rulers in pre capitalist societies to adopt “direct and harsh

political control” of peasants (Shanin 1989b, 357). On this basis, Marx and Russian Marxists, while they have understood the potential of peasantry to act in changing social order when promised land, they saw their inability to organize themselves and remain so as a crucial handicap to their involvement in politics.

The political strength of peasants, on the other hand, emanates from their dispersion in rural areas, their numbers and the fact that they are major food producers (Shanin 1989b). On the basis of these characteristics of peasants as social entity, Shanin, a prominent scholar of peasant studies on whose work much of the following discussions draw, suggest there are three types of political action available to peasants. The first was “autonomous class action”, whereby peasants form their own nationwide organization, leaders, ideology in course of conflicts (Shanin 1989b, 360). The ‘Green International’ parties in Eastern Europe of 1920s, the peasant unions in Russia in 1905 and China of 1926, the Zapata movement in Mexico fall in this category, however, this form of political action has become less frequent (Shanin 1989b).

The second form of political action by peasants is “guided” in the sense that external power-elite that unites peasants for political action (Shanin 1989b). This second form of political action is especially important for peasants (Shanin 1989b). Russian cossacks, French Bonapartism or Mao’s people’s army are some examples. These external groups usually have their own organization, ideology and leadership. For these groups “the peasantry is an object of leadership or manipulation”, since the aim of the struggle is defined by these external groups (Shanin 1989b, 357). TPLF, formed and led by urban based Tigrayan intelligentsia, provided such an external group that guided and mobilized Tigrayan peasantry in the struggle against Derg (Young 1997). After assuming state power in 1991, TPLF led EPRDF claimed against urban based opposition that it alone represented the interest of peasants in Ethiopia, the peasantry unable to voice its concern or shape public opinion in the debate (Pausewang 2009). The mobilization by largely urban based opposition political parties, ONC and Oromo Federalist Democratic Movement (OFDM) were crucial in peasants voting for opposition and against the regime in 2005 national election. Many participants in this study hold the view that 2005 election was “politically awakening” for them. The “Oromo protest” that ejected TPLF from central power seems also to fall into this category as it was largely led by educated youth known as *Qeerroo* (some of which

were affiliated with OLF) and Diaspora based Oromo activists and intelligentsia, even when the support of peasants and their participation in key demonstrations like the one after *Irreecha* massacre were crucial turning points in that protest.

The third form is “amorphous political action” which typical of peasants’ engagement in politics (Shanin 1989b,, 361). This can take different forms, one being local riots that emerge suddenly due accumulated frustration and the other was peasant passivity. In this later form government orders and policies are rendered void “by their spontaneous, stubborn and silent non-fulfilment by peasantry” (Shanin 1989b, 361). It was the repressive nature of EPRDF rule which makes this a less risky and probably widespread route to political action by peasants. The regime used combination of material incentives, coercion, societal norms to keep peasants its subordinate subjects (Poluha 2002). In addition, government employment of spies and “the widespread use of unpredictability and severe punishments... that even the lowest official has access to, and the right to use, harsh sanctions against ordinary people so long as the accusations against them are conveyed in the right terms” (Poluha 2002, 134). Thus, peasants have learned the best way to survive was “to delegate both initiative and responsibility to government officials” (Poluha 2002, 134).

Repression, including through state structure that reached almost every rural household, not satisfaction with economic development registered by the regime’s developmental state model was responsible for absence open rebellion under EPRDF before the outbreak of protests in Oromia and other regions (Labzaé and Sabine Planel 2021, 83). James Scott claims that “agrarian peace [...] may well be the peace of repression (remembered or anticipated) rather than the peace of consent and complicity” seems to true of EPRDF rule (cited in Labzaé and Sabine Planel 2021, 83). “A farmer toils with dirt and dust. We are not people of paper and pen”; “We [ordinary farmers] must accept whatever comes. A donkey and a farmer should consent to take orders”; and “Who would listen to a farmer? We are looked down upon by everyone” are some of the reactions of peasants gathered by Daniel (2020), in all probability reflecting the wider powerlessness they felt under EPRDF rule.

Passive resistance of peasants to ERPDF rule and policies existed in spite of or because of the repressive nature of the regime that makes open defiance a riskier approach. Peasants engaged in “low scale criticism” of the regime and also “tried to escape debts, missed as many meetings as they could, adapted to land registration by keeping parcels hidden from the surveyors, and more generally avoided top-down mobilization state structures” (Labzaé and Sabine Planel 2021, 84-86). The researcher was unable to gather data on the issue of passive resistance by peasants due to prevailing political insecurity in Oromia region at the time of the research. Peasants don't see much difference in personnel manning local government after the 2018 reforms. The more open political atmosphere that prevailed at the beginning of the reform has been closed due to confrontation between government and Oromo Liberation Army, the later largely operating in rural areas of Oromia, including those close to the study sites. Even if the peasants were specifically asked if there was passive resistance on their part under EPRDF, they were not willing to speak of any resistance to government, indicative of the continued fear of government on their part. Anecdotal evidence in Sululta indicates that peasants encroach on government owned land, collect firewood from communal and government owned forests, engage in foot dragging when asked to work on development projects and resist contributing money requested for various reasons by local government. They also tried to preempt government dispossession of their land for which they were paid low compensation by selling it at better prices to businesspersons and individuals.

A more pragmatic and low-key resistance to the regime's attempt at political mobilization and dispossession of peasants from land was the less risky path available to peasants under EPRDF. Passive resistances of this form were usually individual actions that did not lead to collective action thanks to state penetration of daily routines of peasants through local government structure, including sub *kebele* organizations. Passive resistances are individual actions that did not lead to collective action, having ‘a de-politicizing effect on peasant voices, by denying them any legitimacy to take part in political settlements outside of state-party structures’ Labzaé and Sabine Planel (2021, 90). Thus, it has little chance of alleviating marginalization of peasants, and the increasing regulation of peasant lives and livelihood by market forces and governments. As such we should not put much emphasis on passive resistance as they have little chance of alleviating the political marginalization and economic exploitation of peasants. It seems, in the

long run, the political weakness of peasants outweighs their strength. Shanin (1989b) writes “[t]he peasantry proved no match for smaller, closely knit, better organized and technically superior [political] groups, and has, time and time again, been double-crossed or suppressed politically or by force of arms”.

6.5. Conclusion

TPLF led EPRDF led government was one of the strongest authoritarian regimes in sub-Saharan Africa. It weakened rival political parties and stifled activities of civil society organizations. EPRDF also practiced ‘democratic centralism’ preventing the emergence of alternative centers of power in the regional states despite federalism. It sought to build a dominant party system maintained by vote of peasants secured by economic policy that improved their living standard. In Oromia region, the OPDO faced a persistent legitimacy crisis as it was seen as subservient to the TPLF, and its rule was continuously contested. When the EPRDF opened political space 2005 election, opposition parties exploited the opportunity by campaigning against the Tigrean domination and the repressive nature of the regime to win significant support. Many peasants in both Dawo and Sululta provided support for ONC and CUD in that election, agitated by educated youth and their frustration over lack of genuine participation in local governments. After the election, the EPRDF narrowed political spaces, making armed struggle and social movement alternatives to challenge the regime. Oromo protest was triggered by fear large-scale eviction of Oromo peasants under the Master Plan. Peasants in Sululta supported since they were already victims of land dispossession and feared its intensification, while peasants in Dawo were afraid future eviction if the Master Plan in was implemented. Thanks to mobilization by the youth, the protests became a social movement that sought an end to TPLF rule. The rise of new OPDO leadership that made tactical alliance with Oromo protests removed the TPLF from central power, ushering in the ascendancy of OPDO to national power. There is a shift toward a neoliberal economic policy under the new dispensation, nevertheless, its effect on democratization of state-peasant relations remains to be seen.

CHAPTER SEVEN: SYNTHESIS, CONCLUSION, AND POLICY FORESIGHT

7.1. Synthesis

This thesis has critically examined the political economy of state-peasant relations in Ethiopia under the Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) regime from 1991 to 2018. It argues that the EPRDF's agriculture and rural development policies were driven by twin objectives: political control and economic development, with the political imperative of regime survival consistently overriding economic development when contradictions arose. This prioritization resulted in authoritarian rule over the peasantry and the gradual sowing of the seeds of agrarian capitalism, market penetration, and incipient class differentiation in the Ethiopian countryside. The negative impact of these developments on the life world and livelihood of peasants led them to exploit opportunities to resist the regime, notably through voting for opposition political parties in elections and supporting social movements. The study fills a critical gap in scholarly attention by focusing on the peasantry, a social group often overlooked in analyses dominated by ethno-national factors, despite EPRDF placing them at the heart of its governance strategy. By applying a critical political economy approach and critical realist relational paradigms, the research offers a holistic picture of the power imbalances and structural inequalities that characterized state-peasant interactions. The research draws on empirical evidence from two distinct case studies in Oromia National Regional State—Dawo Woreda, a rural area, and Sululta town, a peri-urban area—to provide a nuanced, contextualized understanding of these dynamics.

The EPRDF regime's agricultural and rural development policies, including Agricultural Development-Led Industrialization (ADLI) and subsequent strategies like the Sustainable Development and Poverty Reduction Program (SDPRP) and the Plan for Accelerated and Sustained Development to End Poverty (PASDEP), were fundamentally shaped by a dual objective: fostering economic growth and, more critically, maintaining political control and regime survival. When these objectives conflicted, political imperatives consistently took precedence over genuine economic development. This prioritization led to authoritarian rule over peasantry, even as it facilitated market penetration and nascent agrarian capitalism. The regime's rhetoric positioned itself as the sole representative of peasant interests, yet peasants were cognizant of their political domination and lack of economic autonomy. This became particularly

evident after the 2005 national election, where the regime faced stiff competition. In response, EPRDF shifted its focus from poor peasants towards wealthier “model farmers” massively recruiting them into the ruling party not just for their economic potential but also to solidify its rule and undermine opposition. This reorientation of agricultural policy was deeply intertwined with and instrumentalized for political survival and consolidation of power, especially after the 2001 split within TPLF and the electoral challenge of 2005. The “developmental state” rhetoric, while promising sustained growth and poverty reduction, often served as a legitimizing facade for continued authoritarian control and resource allocation through patronage. This eventually erodes the very economic legitimacy the regime sought to build, leading to popular discontent and eventual challenges, as seen in the Oromo protests. This contributes to the broader understanding of authoritarian developmental states, suggesting that their long-term viability is compromised when political instrumentalization of the economy prevents the emergence of truly autonomous economic actors and institutions, ultimately leading to political instability.

Despite significant policy efforts like ADLI, which aimed to transform agriculture, the study found that Ethiopian agriculture largely remained paleo-technic, relying on human and animal labor, and failed to fundamentally shift from a subsistence-oriented sector to a truly productive, market-oriented one. Consequently, Ethiopian farmers largely remained “peasants” characterized by reliance on family labor and production primarily for household needs rather than profit maximization. There was limited qualitative class differentiation in the Marxist sense, with “model farmers” primarily distinguished by greater access to inputs and oxen rather than by engaging in capitalist exploitation of labor. In both Dawo and Sululta, the primary mode of agricultural labor remained family-based, with wage labor being infrequent and typically employed only during peak harvest seasons or for specific, capital-intensive irrigation projects. While market forces increasingly influenced peasant livelihoods, particularly in Sululta where off-farm activities and dairy production for the Addis Ababa market became significant, the underlying logic of peasant production remained focused on securing family needs rather than maximizing profit. This aligns with Chayanov’s “neopopulist” theory, which posits that peasant economic behavior is driven by the balance between family needs and the subjective drudgery of labor, rather than the profit motive of capitalist firms. This indicates that market penetration, while present, had not fundamentally altered the logic of peasant production, suggesting a “disarticulation” between the capitalist system and the peasant mode of production. The state’s

continued ownership of land, preventing its full privatization, and the limited absorption of rural labor into industrial sectors inadvertently reinforced the subsistence orientation of peasant farming. This created a situation where peasants were increasingly dependent on the market for inputs and cash, but not transformed by its profit-maximizing logic, leading to vulnerability rather than capitalist dynamism. For example, in Dawo, peasants sold their primary cash crop, *Teff*, to cover expenses like education and taxes, often buying cheaper maize for their own consumption, demonstrating their reliance on the market for cash rather than purely for profit. The persistence of the peasant mode of production, despite state efforts and market exposure, implies that conventional models of agrarian transition, such as a rapid shift to commercial farming, may not be universally applicable or may have unintended consequences. The lack of significant class differentiation also challenges Marxist predictions of inevitable polarization in the countryside. This highlights the need for rural development strategies that acknowledge the unique socio-economic logic of peasant households, focusing on strengthening their resilience and improving their terms of engagement with markets, rather than solely pushing for a capitalist transformation that may displace them without providing adequate alternatives.

The relationship between the state and peasants under EPRDF was characterized by pervasive coercion and domination, rather than genuine consent or democratic participation. This was primarily exercised through local government structures (*Woredas*, *Kebeles*, and sub-*Kebele* units like *gott* and *garee*), which served as instruments for state penetration, surveillance, and enforcement of party-state directives. Local officials, often chosen for loyalty rather than merit, fostered upward accountability, leading to widespread corruption and arbitrary rule. Despite formal decentralization efforts, these initiatives did not lead to genuine local autonomy or democratic participation. Instead, they resulted in a “spatial deconcentration” of state apparatus that enabled deeper penetration and control of rural communities. This indicates that structural reforms alone are insufficient for democratization in the absence of fundamental shifts in political culture and accountability mechanisms. The “democratic centralism” of the EPRDF, a Leninist organizational principle, ensured that power flowed from top to bottom, effectively undermining any semblance of local self-governance. Local officials, often less educated cadres, were recruited based on their loyalty and willingness to enforce party lines, rather than their capacity to serve local interests. This created a system where local officials were accountable upwards to the party-state rather than downwards to the populace, fostering corruption and arbitrary rule,

turning local governance into a mechanism for resource extraction and political repression. Peasants frequently reported instances of intimidation, arbitrary arrests, and even physical violence for perceived opposition or non-compliance with government directives. The pervasive control and lack of genuine voice for peasants, despite some economic improvements, led to widespread skepticism and passive resistance. Peasants often resorted to “foot-dragging, dissimulation, desertion, false compliance, pilfering, feigned ignorance, slander, arson, sabotage” as everyday forms of resistance against state demands. This suppressed discontent, combined with specific grievances like land dispossession, erupted into larger social movement, known as “the Oromo protests”. This highlights that even seemingly stable authoritarian regimes, by denying genuine local democracy and accountability, accumulate grievances that can eventually destabilize the political system. It underscores the importance of local governance as a critical arena for state-society relations and a potential flashpoint for broader political contestation.

EPRDF’s land policy, while maintaining state ownership and implementing land certification in rural areas like Dawo to enhance tenure security, paradoxically became a major source of peasant grievance and political contestation, particularly in peri-urban areas like Sululta. The state’s “accumulation by dispossession” through expropriation of land for “public purpose” with minimal compensation, and its subsequent commercialization for private gain, fueled widespread resistance and ultimately contributed to the TPLF’s loss of dominant power. In Dawo Woreda, land certification, particularly the second phase using modern measurement technologies, was largely accepted by peasants as it increased their tenure security and provided legal proof of ownership. However, the situation in Sululta Town presented a stark contrast. Sululta, a peri-urban area, was deliberately excluded from land certification programs, leaving it in a “legal limbo” where land was neither fully urban nor rural. This legal ambiguity was exploited by the state and politically connected elites to expropriate peasant land under the vague pretext of “public purpose”. This process was perceived by peasants as a return to a feudal-like system, where “investors” replaced the old landlords. Thus, state’s domination over peasants was not monolithic but contingent on the spatial context (Dawo vs. Sululta) and mediated through specific mechanisms of extraction (merchant capital vs. accumulation by dispossession). The Master Plan for Addis Ababa, which threatened to expand the capital into surrounding Oromia territories, was widely perceived as a direct threat to Oromo peasants’ land and cultural identity. This perception ignited widespread protests, particularly among the youth and peasants in

affected areas like Sululta, who had already experienced land dispossession. Even peasants in Dawo, fearing similar future evictions, joined the protests, demonstrating the unifying power of land-related grievances. This finding reinforces the critical importance of land tenure security and equitable land governance for political stability in agrarian societies. It demonstrates that land is not merely an economic asset but a deeply symbolic and political resource, especially in ethnically diverse peasant societies. Policies perceived as unjust land grabs, particularly when intertwined with ethnic grievances, can serve as powerful catalysts for social movements capable of challenging even entrenched authoritarian regimes. The Oromo protests, triggered by land dispossession, ultimately led to the displacement of the TPLF from central power in 2018, signifying a major shift in Ethiopian politics.

The EPRDF regime achieved notable social improvements, particularly in women's rights (e.g., equal land ownership, increased access to contraceptives) and famine prevention through safety net programs. However, these gains were uneven, and deep-seated challenges such as persistent rural poverty, high rates of child stunting, youth unemployment, and the erosion of peasant “lifeworlds” due to increasing market penetration and systemic imperatives continued to plague the rural population. Women, in particular, expressed overwhelming support for the EPRDF, attributing significant improvements in their lives to the regime’s policies. The land certification programs, especially the second level, were found to have positively impacted women's land rights and decision-making power in farming. However, these positive developments coexisted with persistent and profound challenges for the majority of the peasantry. Rural poverty remained widespread, with a significant portion of the population still food insecure and reliant on food aid. Youth in both Dawo and Sululta faced severe underemployment and unemployment, leading to widespread illegal migration to other countries in search of economic opportunities. The scarcity and fragmentation of farmland, exacerbated by population growth, made it difficult for agriculture to absorb the growing youth population. In Sululta, the rapid urbanization and land commercialization, while creating some wage labor opportunities, also led to the marginalization of peasant labor power as land became more valuable for urban rents than for agricultural production. This created a “dual economy” where the benefits of the modern sector did not sufficiently “trickle down” to the majority of the peasantry, exacerbating existing inequalities and creating new social tensions, particularly between the youth and their parents. Development was not uniformly pro-poor or emancipatory but rather selective, benefiting certain groups (e.g.,

“model farmers”, urban elites) while leaving others vulnerable. The failure to absorb the growing rural youth population into productive employment, coupled with land scarcity and fragmentation, highlights an unaddressed “agrarian question of labor”. This implies that sustainable development in Ethiopia requires a comprehensive strategy that goes beyond economic growth figures to address the structural issues of rural poverty, land access, and youth employment. Neglecting these deep-seated social vulnerabilities risks continued social fragmentation and political instability, as the frustrations of the marginalized youth can be channeled into future political instability.

Table 6. **Dawo vs. Sululta: Differential Outcomes of State-Peasant Relations (1991–2018)**

Dimension	Dawo Woreda (Rural Highland)	Sululta Town (Pe-ri-Urban)	Analytical Implication
Primary Economic Logic	Subsistence/Cash-Crop Production (Teff); exploitation via Merchant Capital .	Diversification (Dairy/Hay); extraction via Accumulation by Dispossession (ABD) and real estate rent-seeking.	State power imposition is spatially differentiated: agricultural extraction in rural core versus asset appropriation at the urban periphery.
Land Governance/Tenure	Tenure security enhanced by Land Certification (2nd Phase), preventing fear of internal redistribution.	Tenure severely insecure; certification denied; land seized via 'Public Purpose' clauses.	Land policy is an instrumental political tool: granting security for compliance versus institutionalizing insecurity for capital accumulation.
Political Contestation Trigger	Frustration over local cadre incompetence; youth unemployment; anticipation of eviction (Master Plan).	Accumulated grievance over past land expropriations and corruption; youth unemployment.	Land-related grievances, particularly ABD, served as the unifying class catalyst for the Oromo Protests, linking local economic fear to national political shifts.

7.2. Conclusion

TPLF started as a liberation front that was organized by intelligentsia of Tigray and it rode to power in 1991 by mobilizing Tigrayan peasantry. After coming to power, it worked hard to keep the peasantry of the areas it controlled detached from intelligentsia that could potentially mobilize them against TPLF's hegemonic aspirations. On the other it sought to win the support of peasantry to legitimize its rule and win the ostensibly multiparty national elections it organized to garner the support of Western countries on whose economic aid its rule depended on to a significant extent. The regimes aim vis a vis peasant was maximally getting the active support of peasants for its political and economic goals and minimally to satisfy the demands of peasants to prevent them from actively support the opposition. The regime assumed that the basic demands of peasantry can be met since these were thought to be mostly about getting access to land, farm inputs, relatively stable price for agricultural produces and providing a modicum of good governance at local level.

Therefore, EPRDF implemented one of the largest extension programs in sub-Saharan Africa, largely providing agricultural inputs (seeds, fertilizer, herbicides, etc.) and training programs to improve productivity of peasants. Large number of extension workers, known as Development Agents (DAs) were trained and deployed in rural areas of the country. But their work on improving peasant productivity was encumbered by their other function, that of serving as political agents that mobilize peasants to provide political support for the regime. Overall, peasants in Dawo and Sululta saw the extension program of EPRDF in a more positive light. They claim that they saw it at first suspiciously but were persuaded of its usefulness as they saw that it increases agricultural productivity. The major problem of extension program in their eyes was that they did not get enough farm inputs (fertilizer, improved seeds, herbicides, and etc.) at affordable price.

However, the regime was unable to fundamentally transform agriculture from subsistence orientation into a more productive, market-oriented sector of the economy. Such transformation, Wolf (1966) has posited requires existence of frontier space that serves as safety valve for population displaced by modern farming and base of power independent from peasant agriculture (military, commercial, overseas trade and industries). Even if there was not much desire on the part of the regime to displace peasants from heavily populated highlands, there was an attempt to

use sparsely populated lowlands occupied by ethnic minorities in Benishangul Gumuz, Gambella and South Omo Valley for large scale commercial farming, that in the end was found to be wasteful. The regime was provided with huge sums of foreign aid and FDI poured into the country with the adoption of a developmental state model. EPRDF also tried to develop the industrial sector to provide alternative source of revenue for the state, as can be seen in GTP I and GTP II. Thanks to the neopatrimonial nature of the regime, these resources were not efficiently and effectively used to transform agriculture and other sectors of the economy to an extent required, in spite of some economic growth scored under the regime. Moreover, while EPRDF touted its economic strategy as agriculture centered, investment in agriculture did not exceed 10% of public spending, at time dropping to 7% (Davies 2008). Thus, under EPRDF Ethiopia remained within the category of countries “in which peasants who cultivate the land with their traditional tools not only form the vast majority of the population, but also furnish the funds of rent and profit which underwrite the entire social structure” (Wolf 1965, 12).

It was for this reason that this study employed the term peasants, even if some students of Ethiopian society prefer to use the term small holder farmers to peasants. They seem to presume because of their production for the market, peasants have been transformed into farmers. However, this study indicated that peasants did not relate to market in such a way to maximize their profit. They relate to market based on their household's need for cash: educational, consumption, healthcare, taxation expenses. Farmer is strictly speaking someone whose economic activities are largely shaped by profit motive, in its capitalist sense. Chayanov's argument that peasants take into account the drudgery of farming and family demography in their production, not profit maximization expected of them in liberal economic thinking seems to be true of Ethiopian peasants. Also, almost all of them employ largely family labour, making them peasants. Wage labour was employed only during peak harvest and on few of the irrigation schemes run by town folks in Dawo.

Coercion and domination, not hegemony, was a feature of the EPRDF's relation with peasants throughout the country including in its stronghold Tigray. But it was more so in areas carved for capitalist predation than others. Such relation of domination with peasants was manifest in Dawo case, justified by fear that state absence could create fertile ground for rebel movements in Oromia. Coercion was employed even more in Sululta case, where just like Gambella,

Benishangul Gumuz, the preferred state approach in Sululta was “accumulation by dispossession”.

Domination of peasants emanate from the nature of a regime that operates at the periphery of the global capitalist system, trying to extract as much “surplus” as possible from peasants and at the expense of peasants, pastoralists and agropastorists in the form of land grab and “accumulation by dispossession” for the benefit of the few elites loyal to the regime. One needs to consider that the regime was trying to pass on hundreds of thousands of hectares of land to the highest bidder among global investors seeking to produce food for export while more than ten million individuals were surviving through food aid in the country. The powers that be at global level had turned blind eye so long as the regime satisfied their demands: global capitalist accumulation and “fighting terrorism” in Horn of Africa.

EPRDF was capable also capable exercising brutality against peasants and the wider society thanks to its cadre and collaborators that have shown themselves to be capable of unleashing “the great beast, the capacity for outraged, uncontrolled, bitter, and bloody violence that lurks beneath all the norms of legal and institutional behavior in normal society” (Vestal 1999, 166). It as if widespread poverty creates “reserve army” of “willful executors” of the various nefarious policies concocted by regime bent on survival at whatever cost. The working formula of these “executors” seems to be doing any horrible deeds against society so long as it takes them out of poverty, come what may to the society/community and away way with moral considerations. Some have duped about the benign nature of the regime, people even when they know it was not, others have imprisoned, beaten and tortured and murdered local people and social activists who resisted the regime in the name fighting and weeding out “anti-development” and “anti-peace” elements. Moral decay and societal fragmentation are considered a feature society in transition, that seems to be true of Ethiopia under EPRDF: traditional value that held society together as glue is being replaced by capitalist values while the latter has not secured its hold over society as a whole.

The regime was characterized as neopatrimonial in this study since there was an attempt to replace the personal patron client relation with a more centralized patronage under the auspices of the state. Because of its more bureaucratic nature, some have called EPRDF regime bureaucratic patrimonialism, which still was “preoccupied with satisfying short-term exigencies

– a perpetual form of disaster prevention, with neither the resources nor breathing space to adequately consider longer-term goals” (Davies 2008, 250-51). It was due to its neopatrimonial nature that control over land and peasants remained crucial for the regime: to secure vote of peasants and generate revenue for patronage. It should be noted that many neopatrimonial regimes in Africa, as EPRDF was, were supported and sustained by aid from Western countries (deGrassi 2008).

Considered in wider global economy, Ethiopia under EPRDF resembles Tsarist Russia that Marx fruitfully described as internationally weak state whose economy was dominated small holder peasant agriculture linked to global markets and at the same time trying to industrialize the economy under the guidance interventionist state and foreign capital (Akram-Lodhi and Kay 2010a, 183). In this kind of economy capitalism is promoted at the expense of peasants.

The dilemma for those in charge of authoritarian states in largely agrarian society inserted in capitalist world system is that they need to extract surplus from peasants to finance international trade and supply urban centers with food and at the same time are required to maintain the support of peasants to create stable political system and remain in power amidst competition from other elites vying for power. The two imperatives do not necessarily go together. This was the dilemma for TPLF led EPRDF and more so after it adopted developmental state model since 2000s in country characterized by “competing ethnic nationalism” and will probably remain so for foreseeable future. The government increased its rhetoric of “developmental state”, of poverty posing existential threat to the country and of fighting rent seeking, all while patronage networks were expanded to attract new members to a party after 2005 national election and corruption was entrenched within the state apparatus. These trends seem to run at counter purposes that one cannot easily divine the intention of the regime: may be the government thought “corruption greases the wheel of bureaucracy and thus encourages development” or more probably development projects were put in place to generate revenue to be disbursed to clients of the regime, thus ensuring regime survival whatever the long-term feasibility and sustainability of the “development” and concomitant corruption.

Ironically, it has to be said, for a regime that ostensibly stood for the interest of peasants, TPLF led EPRDF desire to encourage commercialize rural lands occupied by peasants in the vicinity of Addis Ababa that led to TPLF's loss of its dominant position in the country. The expansion of the capital into these rural lands was used by its coalition partner OPDO, the youth, Oromo diaspora and the opposition to mobilize the masses including the peasants around the argument that the plan will displace large number of Oromo peasants from that area. Oromo nationalists and faction of OPDO opposed TPLF based on what had been the fate Oromo peasants with previous expansion of the capital: pauperization on large scale, dislocation from their ancestral land and replacement Oromo language and culture by Amharic language/Amharization and the same fate awaits the Oromo peasants living on large areas to be included under the master plan.

We can say a deeper logic of capitalist accumulation was at work in shaping state-peasant relations under EPRDF. There is a (dis)articulation between capitalism and peasant mode of production. In rural areas like Dawo peasant land tenure were strengthened to encourage cheap food production for growing urban areas. In peri-urban Sululta, state encouraged dispossession peasant land for seizure by capital. Ethnicity was not the only identity shaping state-society relations under EPRDF, even if political contestations were largely framed around it, as observed during Oromo protests and other contestations under ethnic based federal dispensation. The focus of EPRDF on the modern sectors with adoption of developmental state and the need to pacify the dwellers of the capital that opposed it in 2005 election by making cheap land available to them led to significant scale expansion of the capital. Real estate speculators in collusion with corrupt government officials were the driving forces behind the commercialization of land in rural areas around the capital. The resistance to the first round of “Master Plan” in 2013 was concentrated in few universities in Oromia. Rather than seriously entertaining the complaints of Oromos, the government chose to castigate the resistance as “archaic” and “backward looking”, “reactionary” on state owned media. They pushed for reinstating of the same plan in 2015 and that led to widespread protests that pushed TPLF from the center of power. Thus, peasants’ (dis) content with state policy and market forces need to be given further consideration in understanding state-society relations in Ethiopia.

On a more positive note, there was a significant improvement women's rights under EPRDF in terms of educating women, ensuring their equal ownership of land and other properties, and fighting harmful traditional practices like genital mutilation. But rural women still suffer from uncompensated labor, unequal access to resources and harmful traditional practices. They suffer more than men from economic underdevelopment of the country including access to health services, education and food insecurity. What can be seen as a significant improvement seen from lower standard of women's position within society when EPRDF took over should not be a reason for complacency since there is long way to go before women are liberated from social, economic and political barriers that still stifle women's wellbeing, flourishing and freedom in Ethiopian society. There was also significant improvement of tenure security of peasants through first level and second level land certification programs that were considered as one of the most cost effective, participatory and inclusive land titling in sub-Saharan Africa. EPRDF was capable of preventing famine, unlike its predecessors Imperial and Derg regimes. This was a significant achievement considering population growth in Ethiopia and vagaries of climate change. However, the prevalence of underweight children in the country was 37%, while stunting stood at 47% in 2004 (PASDEP 2006, 30). The more recent figure for stunted children under five years was 37% (Asres et al 2021). And rurality continues to signify poverty. This is a significant failure for a country in which agriculture remains the major economic activity.

Under EPRDF, the “lifeworld” of peasants in its Habermasian sense was continuously eroded and colonized by “systemic imperatives” of state structures that reached rural households and since 2005 by market forces that increasingly penetrated rural. The new government of Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed has taken a more liberal leaning turn in its economic and political approach. This new government launched a “Homegrown” Economic Reform agenda and endorsed by Cabinets in December 2020 which gave emphasis to private sector development. Market forces will in all probability play more role in the lives of peasants and further erode the “lifeworld” of peasants under the new dispensation, without offering them some of the state protection that existed under EPRDF. This can be seen in the terms of trade that are turning against agricultural products under the new government. There is still a large peasant economy along the intensifying capitalist relations, the dynamic relation between these will shape state-society relations for foreseeable future. Alas, peasants will remain the bulk of Ethiopian

population under a more neoliberal dispensation: poor and powerless segment of society unless significant democratization and economic transformation takes place.

Table 7. **Contribution to Knowledge**

Dimension	Contribution
Empirical	Provides rich, comparative, contextual detail on state-peasant relations in the Oromia “highland periphery,” demonstrating how spatial context (rural vs. peri-urban) dictated the mechanisms of state control and accumulation (merchant exploitation vs. ABD).
Theoretical	Refines the application of Critical Political Economy by synthesizing Marxist and Neo-Populist frameworks to define the politically embedded small-holder and operationalizes authoritarian developmentalism through specific, observable causal mechanisms (local governance, patronage).
Methodological	Validates a cross-case comparative and micro-study design for investigating contingent state-society relations under authoritarianism.

Source: Developed by Author

7.3. Foresight and Policy Implications: Navigating the Liberalizing State

The popular protests that unseated the TPLF-dominated EPRDF did not eliminate the structural challenges of poverty, youth unemployment, or inadequate governance. Instead, the political transition under the PP marked a pivot toward a more explicitly **neoliberal** economic strategy, evidenced by the 'Home-Grown Economic Reform Plan' and the push for privatization.

This shift signals a change in the dominant form of pressure on the peasantry, moving from centralized party-state coercion to heightened **market vulnerability**. The empirical evidence already indicates worsening terms of trade for agricultural producers since 2018, suggesting that the PP regime, unlike the EPRDF, may prioritize urban and merchant interests over the agrarian sector. This vulnerability is compounded by political volatility, notably the ongoing insurgency by the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA) in Oromia, which uses the structural grievances of landlessness and disenfranchised youth as a mobilizing base.

The analysis yields several key policy imperatives:

Depoliticizing Rural Institutions: The fusion of state and party at the *kebele* level must be dismantled to achieve genuine decentralization and downward accountability. Extension services and cooperative leadership must be professionalized and depoliticized, focusing strictly on technical support and market function, rather than serving as political patronage networks.

Reforming Land Governance: While land certification successfully enhanced tenure security in rural Dawo, the ambiguity and exclusion of peri-urban land (Sululta) facilitated ABD. Legal frameworks must be reformed to incorporate peri-urban zones fully, ensuring equitable market-value compensation for expropriated land and clarifying property rights for the growing landless youth population.

Addressing the Agrarian Question of Labor: The failure of the state to absorb the growing rural youth population into productive industrial employment (the “agrarian question of labor”) remains the most severe threat to long-term stability. Future policy must focus strategically on localized industrialization and infrastructure to create off-farm employment, thereby alleviating pressure on fragmented land holdings.

References

- Aalen, Lovise. 2002. *Ethnic Federalism in A Dominant Party State: The Ethiopian Experience 1991-2000*. Chr. Michelsen Institute.
- Aba Dula Gameda. 2019. *Heroes of Development: Do Not Kill Vision, but Save It*. Addis Ababa: Eclipse Press. In Amharic.
- Abbink, Jon. 2006. “Discomfiture Of Democracy? The 2005 Election Crisis In Ethiopia And Its Aftermath”. *African Affairs* 105 (419): 173–199.
- Abeje Berhanu and Ezana Amdework. 2011. *Peasant Entrepreneurship and Rural Poverty Reduction: The Case of Model Farmers in Bure Woreda, West Gojjam Zone*. Addis Ababa. FSS Monograph No. 8.
- Abiyu Gelata. 2003. “OLF and TPLF: Major Issues and Outcomes of A Decade Of Negotiations Since 1991”. *The Journal Of Oromo Studies* 10 (1-2): 67-90.
- Akram-Lodhi, A. Haroon and Cristóbal Kay. 2009. “Neoliberal Globalization, the Traits of Rural Accumulation and Rural Politics: The Agrarian Question in The Twenty-First Century”. In *Peasants and Globalization: Political Economy, Rural Transformation and The Agrarian Question*, Eds.A.HAkram-Lodhi, and C. Kay, 327-350. London: Routledge.
- _____. 2010a. “Surveying the Agrarian Question (Part 1): Unearthing Foundations, Exploring Diversity”. *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 37(1): 177-202.
- _____. 2010b. “Surveying the Agrarian Question (Part 2): Current Debates and Beyond”. *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 37(2): 255-284.
- Akram-Lodhi, A. Haroon, Cristóbal Kay and Saturnino M. Borras, Jr. 2009. “The Political Economy of Land and the Agrarian Question in an Era of Neoliberal Globalization”. In *Peasants and Globalization: Political Economy, Rural Transformation and The Agrarian Question*, Eds.A.HAkram-Lodhi, and C. Kay, 226-250. London: Routledge.
- Akram-Lodhi, A. Haroon, Kristina Dietz, Bettina Engels and Ben M. Mckay. 2021. “An Introduction to The Handbook of Critical Agrarian Studies”. In *Handbook of Critical*

- Agrarian Studies*, Eds A. H. Akram-Lodhi, Kristina Dietz, Bettina Engels and Ben M. McKay, 1-8. Massachusetts: Edward Elgar Publishing Limited.
- Alavi, Hamza. 1989. "Peasantry and Capitalism: A Marxist Discourse". In *Peasants and Peasant Societies: Selected Readings*, 2nd Edition, ed. Theodor Shanin, 185-196. Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd.
- Allo, Awol. 2016. "The Oromo Protests Have Changed Ethiopia." <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2016/11/21/the-oromo-protests-have-changed-ethiopia>.
- Ambreena, Manji. 2006. *The Politics of Land Reform in Africa: From Communal Tenure to Free Markets*. London: Zed Books.
- Amin, Samir. 1977. *Unequal Development an Essay on The Social Formations of Peripheral Capitalism*. Sussex, England: The Harvester Press Limited.
- Aregawi Berhe. *A Political History of the Tigray People's Liberation Front (1975–1991): Revolt, Ideology and Mobilisation in Ethiopia*. PhD Thesis: Vrije Universiteit.
- Asafa Jalata. 1993. *Oromia and Ethiopia: State Formation and Ethno-national Conflict, 1868-1972*. Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers.
- _____. 1998. "The Emergence of Oromo Nationalism and The Ethiopian Reaction". In *Oromo Nationalism and the Ethiopian Discourse: The Search for Freedom and Democracy*, Ed Asafa Jalata, 1-26. Lawrenceville, NJ: The Red Sea Press.
- Asebe Regassa and Teshome Emana. 2022. "Urban Development and The Making of Frontiers In/From Addis Ababa/Finfinne, Ethiopia". *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 00(0): 1-17.
- Asebe Regassa, Yetebarek Hizekiel and Benedikt Korf. 2019. "'Civilizing' The Pastoral Frontier: Land Grabbing, Dispossession and Coercive Agrarian Development in Ethiopia". *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 46 (5): 935-955.
- Asnake Kefale. 2010. "Narratives of Development And Developmentalism In Ethiopia: Some Observations". Accessed From, <http://Www.Nai.Se/Ecas-4/Panels/41-60/Panel57/Asnake%20kefale%20-%20abstract.Pdf>. [July12, 2011].

- Aspen, H. 2002. "Models of Democracy: Perceptions of Power, Government and Peasantry in Ethiopia". In *Ethiopia: The Challenge of Democracy From Below*, eds. Bahru Zewde and S. Pausewang, 61-102. Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet.
- Asres Mengesha, Hailu S, Birhane M, Belay MM. 2021. "The Prevalence of Stunting and Associated Factors among Children Under Five years of age in Southern Ethiopia: Community Based Cross-Sectional Study". *Annals of Global Health* 87(1): 111, 1–14.
- Bahru, Zewde. 2001. *A History of Modern Ethiopia: 1855 - 1991*. Oxford: James Currey Press.
- Bates, Robert H. 1978. "People in Villages: Micro-level Studies in Political Economy". *World Politics* 31 (1): 129-149.
- _____. 1981. *Markets And States in Tropical Africa: The Political Basis Of Agricultural Policies*. Berkeley: University Of California Press.
- _____. 2008 *When Things Fell Apart: State Failure In Late-Century Africa*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bayart, Jean-François, and Stephen Ellis. 2000. "Africa in the World: A History of Extraversion." *African affairs* 99(395): 217–67.
- BBC. 2016. "What Do Oromo Protests Mean for Ethiopian Unity?"
<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-35749065>.
- Beka Girma. 2016. *Urban Expansion and Its Socio-Economic Impacts on the Livelihood of the Farming Community in Sululta*. MA Thesis: Addis Ababa University.
- Berhe, Mulugeta Gebrehiwot. 2020. *Laying The Past To Rest: The EPRDF And The Challenges Of Ethiopian State-Building*. London: Hurst & Company.
- Berman, Bruce J. 1998. "Ethnicity, Patronage and The African State: The Politics Of Uncivil Nationalism". *African Affairs* 97: 305-341.
- Bernstein, Henry and Terence J. Byres. 2001. "From Peasant Studies to Agrarian Change". *Journal of Agrarian Change* 1 (1): 1-56.

- Bernstein, Henry, Harriet Friedmann, Jan Douwe van der Ploeg, Teodor Shanin and Ben White. 2018. "Forum: Fifty Years of Debate on Peasantries, 1966–2016". *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 45 (4): 689-714.
- Bernstein, Henry. 1979. "African Peasantries: A Theoretical Framework" In *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 6(4): 421-443.
- _____. 2006. "Is there an agrarian question in the 21st century?". *Canadian Journal of Development Studies* 27 (4): 449–460.
- _____. 2010. *Class Dynamics Of Agrarian Change*. Halifax and Winnipeg: Fernwood Publishing.
- Bidwai, Praful. 2021. "Is Indian Agriculture Feudal, Semi-Feudal or Capitalist?". In *The Agrarian Question: A Reader*, Ed Murthy, Ramana, 70-80. London: Routledge.
- Bleijenbergh, Inge. 2010. "Case Selection". In *Encyclopedia of Case Study Research*, eds. Albert J. Mills, Gabrielle Durepos, and Elden Wiebe. London: SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Boone, C. 2003. *Political Topographies of the African State*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- _____. 2013. *Property and Political Order in Africa: Land Rights and the Structure of Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Borras, Saturnino M, Cristóbal Kay, and A Haroon Akram-Lodhi. 2007. "Agrarian Reform and Rural Development: Historical Overview and Current Issues." In *Land, Poverty and Livelihoods in an Era of Globalization*, Routledge, 1–40.
- Bosma, Ulbe and Eric Vanhaute. 2021. "Frontiers, Regimes and Learning from History". In *Handbook of Critical Agrarian Studies*, Eds A. H. Akram-Lodhi, Kristina Dietz, Bettina Engels and Ben M. McKay, 9-14. Massachusetts: Edward Elgar Publishing Limited.
- Bramwell, Bill. 2007. "Power and Tourism Policy Relations in Transition." 34(3): 766–88.
- Brand, Ulrich, Mathias Krams, Valerie Lenikus, and Etienne Schneider. 2022. "Contours of Historical-Materialist Policy Analysis." *Critical Policy Studies* 16(3): 279–96.
- Brittanica (2022) "State Monopoly on Violence", 11 June, 2021.

<https://www.britannica.com/topic/state-monopoly-on-violence> .

- Byres, T.J. 1996. *Capitalism from Above and Capitalism from Below: An Essay in Comparative Political Economy*. London: Macmillan.
- Castells, M. 1992. "Four Asian Tigers with A Dragon Head: A Comparative Analysis of The State, Economy And Society In The Asian Pacific Rim". In *State and Development in The Asian Pacific Rim*, Eds Henderson, R. and J. Applebaum. London: Sage Publications.
- Chabal, Patrick and Jean-Pascal Daloz. 1999. *Africa Works: Disorder as Political Instrument*. Oxford: James Curry.
- Chabal, Patrick. 2009. *Africa: The Politics of Suffering And Smiling*. London: Zed Books.
- Chanie, Paulos. 2007. *What One Hand Giveth, the Other Hand Taketh Away: Ethiopia's Post-1991 Decentralisation Reform under Neo-patrimonialism*. PhD Thesis. The Hague: Institute of Social Studies.
- Chinigò, Davide. 2022. *Everyday Practices of State Building in Ethiopia: Power, Scale, Performativity*. Oxford University Press.
- Clapham, Christopher. 1988. *Transformation and Continuity in Revolutionary Ethiopia*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- _____. 1990. "The Political Economy of Conflict in the Horn of Africa." *Survival* 32(5): 403–19.
- _____. 2015. "The Era of Haile Selassie". In *Understanding Contemporary Ethiopia: Monarchy, Revolution and Legacy of Meles Zenawi*, eds. Gérard Prunier and Éloi Ficquet, 183-208. London: Hurst & Company.
- _____. 2017. *The Horn of Africa: State Formation and Decay*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Cohen, Herman. 2000. *Intervening in Africa: Superpower Peacemaking in a Troubled Continent*. London: Macmillan Press Ltd.

- Cousins, Ben. 2022. "Social Differentiation of The Peasantry (Marxist)". *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 49 (7): 1387-1398.
- Creswell, J. W. and John, David. C. 2018. *Research Design. Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*. London: Sage Publications.
- Curini, Luigi and Robert J. Franzese. 2020. "Introduction" In *the SAGE Handbook of Research Methods in Political Science and International Relations*, eds. Luigi Curini and Robert Franzese, xl-xlii. London: Sage Publications.
- Daniel Mulugeta. 2020. *The Everyday State in Africa Governance Practices and State Ideas in Ethiopia*. New York: Routledge.
- Davies, Steven. 2008. *The Political Economy of Land Tenure in Ethiopia*. PhD Thesis: University of St. Andrews.
- Dawit Alemu and Kassahun Berhanu. 2018. "The Political Economy of Agricultural Commercialisation in Ethiopia: Discourses, Actors and Structural Impediments". APRA Working Paper 14, Future Agricultures Consortium.
- DDFNH. 2017. "Dead Donkeys Fear No Hyenas". <http://www.deaddonkeysfearnohyenas.com/>
- De Soto, Hernando. 2000. *The Mystery of Capital: Why Capitalism Triumphs in The West And Fails Everywhere Else*. London: Bantam Press.
- Degrassi, Aaron. 2008. "'Neopatrimonialism' and Agricultural Development in Africa: Contributions and Limitations Of A Contested Concept". *African Studies Review* 51: 107-133.
- Deininger, Klaus and Daniel Ayalew Ali, Tekie Alemu. 2011. "Impacts Of Land Certification on Tenure Security, Investment, And Land Market Participation: Evidence From Ethiopia". *Land Economics* 87 (2): 312-334.
- Dépelteau, François. 2018. *The Palgrave Handbook of Relational Sociology*. Springer.
- Dejanvry, Alain. 1989. "Peasants, Capitalism and The State In Latin American Culture". In *Peasants and Peasant Societies: Selected Readings*, Ed Shanin, Theodor. 2nd Edition, 391-404. Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd.

- Desai, Meghnad. 2001. "Capitalism". In *A Dictionary of Marxist Thought*, eds. Tom Bottomore, 71-75. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd.
- Dessalegn Rahmato. 1985. *Agrarian Reform in Ethiopia*. Uppsala: Scandinavian Institute of African Studies.
- _____. 1993. "Agrarian Change and Agrarian Crisis: State and Peasantry in Post-Revolution Ethiopia". *Journal of the International African Institute* 63 (1): 36-55.
- _____. 2006. "From Heterogeneity to Homogeneity: Agrarian Class Structure in Ethiopia Since The 1950s". In *Land and The Challenge of Sustainable Development In Ethiopia*, Eds Dessalegn Rahmato and Taye Assefa, 3-19. Conference Proceedings. Addis Ababa: Forum For Social Studies.
- _____. 2008. "Ethiopia: Agriculture Policy Review". In *Digest of Ethiopia's National Policies, Strategies and Programs*, Ed Taye Assefa, 129-152. African Books Collective.
- _____. 2009. *The Peasant and The State: Studies in Agrarian Change in Ethiopia 1950s-2000s*. Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University.
- Deutsch, Kenneth and L. Joseph R. Forniery. 2009. *An Invitation to Political Thought*. Thomson Wadsworth: Australia
- Devetak, Richard. 2013. "Critical Theory". In *Theories of International Relations*, eds. Burchil, Scott and Andrew Linklater, Richard Devetak, Jack Donnelly, Matthew Paterson, Christian Reus-Smit and Jacqui True, 162-186. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Diaz May and Jack Potter. 1967. "Introduction: The Social Life of Peasants". In *Peasant Society: A Reader*, Eds. Jack M Potter, May N. Diaz and George M. Foster, 154-167. Boston: Little, Brown and Company.
- Donati, Pierpaolo. 2015. "Manifesto for a Critical Realist Relational Sociology." *International Review of Sociology* 25(1): 86–109.
- Donham, D. and James, W. (Eds.). 2002. *The Southern Marches of Imperial Ethiopia*. Oxford: James Currey Press.

- Dye, Thomas R. 2017. *Understanding Public Policy*. Fifteenth Edition. Boston: Pearson.
- Edgar, Andrew. 2006. *Habermas: The Key Concepts*. New York: Routledge.
- Ege, Svein. 2019. *Land Tenure Security: State-Peasant Relations in the Amhara Highlands, Ethiopia*. James Currey.
- Ekeh, P.P. 1975. "Colonialism and The Two Publics in Africa: A Theoretical Statement". *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 17 (1): 91-112.
- Emirbayer, Mustafa. 1997. "Manifesto for a Relational Sociology." *American Journal of Sociology* 103(2): 281–317.
- Emmenegger, Rony and Sibilo Keno, Tobias Haggman. 2011. "Decentralization to The Household: Expansion and Limits of State Power in Rural Oromiya". *Journal Of Eastern African Studies* 5(4):733-754.
- Emmenegger, Rony. 2016. "Decentralization and The Local Developmental State: Peasant Mobilization In Oromiya, Ethiopia". *Africa* 86 (2): 263–87.
- EthioGIS MapServer. 2022. "EthioGIS MapServer Ethiopia: Web Service for On- and Offline Mapping", 5 May, 2021. <https://www.ethiogis-mapserver.org/dataDownload.php> .
- Ezekiel Gebissa. 2019. In Defense of Jawar, A Brilliant and Dedicated Agent of Change. <https://www.ethiopia-insight.com/2019/11/09/in-defense-of-jawar-a-brilliant-and-dedicated-agent-of-change/>
- Fallers, L. A. 1967. "Are African cultivators to be considered "peasants"?" In *Peasant Society: A Reader*, eds. Jack M Potter, May N. Diaz and George M. Foster. Boston: Little, Brown and Company.
- Fantu Cheru and Siegfried Pausewang. 1992. "Economic Reconstruction and the Peasants in Ethiopia: Two Papers Presented at the Symposium on the Ethiopian Economy, with a Postscript". Working Paper D 1992:3. Chr. Michelsen Institute. Department of Social Science and Development. DERAP - Development Research and Action Programme.
- FDRE. 2005. *Proclamation 456/2005: Rural Land Administration and Use*. Addis Ababa: FDRE.
- Fiseha, Assefa. 2024. "Ethiopia: Federalism's Failure?" *Journal of Global South Studies* 41(2): 153–204.

- Flick, Uwe. 2007. *Designing Qualitative Research*. London: SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Forsén, Thea and Kjetil Tronvoll. 2021. "Protest and Political Change in Ethiopia: the Initial Success of The Oromo Qeerroo Youth Movement". *Nordic Journal of African Studies* 30 (4): 1-19.
- Foster, George M. 1967. "Peasant Society and the Image of Limited Good". In *Peasant Society: A Reader*, Eds. Jack M Potter, May N. Diaz and George M. Foster, 300-323. Boston: Little, Brown and Company.
- _____.1967. "Introduction: What Is a Peasant?". In *Peasant Society: A Reader*,eds. Jack M Potter, May N. Diaz and George M. Foster, 2-14. Boston: Little, Brown and Company.
- Friedman, F. G. 1967. "The World of 'La Miseria'". In *Peasant Society: A Reader*, Eds. Jack M Potter, May N. Diaz and George M. Foster, 324-335. Boston: Little, Brown and Company.
- Gallin, Bernard. 1967. "Chinese Peasant Values Toward the Land". In *Peasant Society: A Reader*, Eds. Jack M Potter, May N. Diaz and George M. Foster, 367-375. Boston: Little, Brown and Company.
- Gamst, Frederick C (1970) "Peasantries and Elites without Urbanism: The Civilization of Ethiopia". *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 12 (4): 373-392.
- Gardner, Tom. 2018. "'Freedom!': The Mysterious Movement That Brought Ethiopia To A Standstill." The Guardian. <https://www.theguardian.com/globaldevelopment/>
- Gebissa, Ezekiel, and Jawar Mohammed. 2018. "Fear of State Collapse and Prospect of Democratic Transition in Ethiopia." <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=szg0XDwFzTw&t=57s> (September 24, 2023).
- Gebru Tareke (1991) *Ethiopia: Power and Protest: Peasant Revolts in the Twentieth Century*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Gerard, Marwell and Pamela Oliver 2008. "The Critical Mass in Collective Action". In *Social Movements: A Reader*, Eds Ruggiero, Vincenzo and Nicola Montagna, 128-144. London: Routledge.

- Giddens, Anthony. 1984. *The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration*. Univ of California Press.
- González-Ocantos, Ezequiel. 2020. "Designing Qualitative Research Projects: Notes on Theory Building, Case Selection and Field Research" In *The SAGE Handbook of Research Methods in Political Science and International Relations*, eds. Luigi Curini and Robert Franzese, 104-120. London: Sage Publications.
- Goodwin, Jeff and James Jasper. 2015. *The Social Movements Reader: Cases and Concepts*. Third Edition. West Sussex: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.
- Google Maps. 2022. "Dawo", 25 April, 2021. <https://www.google.com/maps>.
- Greco, Elisa. 2021. "Qualitative Research in Handbook Of Critical Agrarian Studies". In *Handbook of Critical Agrarian Studies*, Eds A. H. Akram-Lodhi, Kristina Dietz, Bettina Engels and Ben M. McKay, 251-257. Massachusetts: Edward Elgar Publishing Limited.
- Greenstein, Claire and Layna Mosley. 2020. "When Talk Isn't Cheap: Opportunities and Challenges in Interview Research". In *The SAGE Handbook of Research Methods in Political Science and International Relations*, eds. Luigi Curini and Robert Franzese, 1167-1189. London: Sage Publications.
- Grifith, Keith. 1992. *The Economy of Ethiopia*. London: The Macmillan Press Ltd.
- Gudina, Merara. 2003. *Ethiopia: Competing Ethnic Nationalisms and the Quest for Democracy, 1960-2000*. N.P Shaker Publishing.
- Harrison, G. 2001. "Peasants, the Agrarian Question and Lenses of Development". *Progress in Development Studies* 1 (3): 187-203.
- Hart, Gillian. 1989. "Agrarian Change in The Context Of State Patronage". In *Agrarian Transformations: Local Processes and the State in Southeast Asia*, Eds Gillian Hart, Andrew Turton, Benjamin White, Brian Fegan and Lim Teck Ghee, 31-52. Berkeley: University Of California Press.
- Harvey, David. 2003. *The New Imperialism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Harvey, L. 1990. *Critical Social Research*. London: Unwin Hyman.

- Herbst, Jeffrey. 2014. *States And Power in Africa: Comparative Lessons in Authority and Control*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Holcomb, Bonnie and Ibssa, Sisay. 1990. *The Invention of Ethiopia: The Making of a Dependent Colonial State in North Africa*. Trenton, NJ: The Red Sea Press.
- Holden, S., and Tewodros T. 2008. “From Being Property of Men to Becoming Equal Owners? Early Impacts of Land Registration and Certification on Women in Southern Ethiopia”, Research Report Prepared For Unhabitat, Land Tenure And Property Administration Section.
- HRW. 2005. “Suppressing Dissent: Human Rights Abuses and Political Repression in Ethiopia’s Oromia Region”. *Human Rights Watch* 17 (7A).
- Huntington, Samuel. 1993. “Political Development in Ethiopia: A Peasant Based Dominant-Party Democracy?”. Report to USAID/Ethiopia.
- _____. 2006 (1968). *Political Order in Changing Societies*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Hussein Jemma. 2010. *Politics And Property Rights Regimes in Land In Arsi Negele And Hetossa, South-Central Oromia, Ethiopia: Late 1880s-2006*. PhD Thesis: Norwegian University of Life Sciences.
- Hyden, Goran. 1980. *Beyond Ujama in Tanzania: Underdevelopment and Uncaptured Peasantry*. Berkeley: University of California Press
- _____. 2013. *African Politics in Comparative Perspective*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- ICG. 2019. “Managing Ethiopia’s Unsettled Transition”. Brussels, Belgium: International Crisis Group.
- Jan, Muhammad Ali and Barbara Harriss-White. 2021. “Agricultural Markets”. In *Handbook of Critical Agrarian Studies*, Eds A. H. Akram-Lodhi, Kristina Dietz, Bettina Engels and Ben M. McKay, 171-177. Massachusetts: Edward Elgar Publishing Limited.
- Jenkins, Craig and Bert Klandermans. 1995. “The Politics of Social Protest”. In J. Craig., *The Politics of Social Protest: Comparative Perspectives On States And Social Movements*, Eds Jenkins And Bert Klandermans, 3-13. Minneapolis: University Of Minnesota Press.

- Jenkins, Craig. 1995. "Social Movements, Political Representation, And the State: An Agenda and Comparative Framework". In J. Craig., *The Politics of Social Protest: Comparative Perspectives On States And Social Movements*, Eds Jenkins And Bert Klandermans, 14-38. Minneapolis: University Of Minnesota Press.
- Jessop, Bob. 2008. *State Power: A Strategic-Relational Approach*. Polity.
- Jessop, Bob and Ngai-Ling Sum. 2023. "The Cultural Political Economy Approach to Public Policy." In *Handbook on Critical Political Economy and Public Policy*, Edward Elgar Publishing, 36–48.
- Kassahun Berhanu and Colin Poulton. 2014. "The Political Economy of Agricultural Extension Policy in Ethiopia: Economic Growth and Political Control". *Development Policy Review*. 32 (S2): s197-s213.
- Kassahun Berhanu. 2012. "The Political Economy of Agricultural Extension in Ethiopia: Economic Growth and Political Control". FAC Political Economy of Agricultural Policy in Africa (PEAPA).
- _____. 2016. "Political trajectories of Ethiopia's Post-1991 Agrarian transformation efforts". *Eastern Africa Social Science Research Review* 32 (2): 1-22.
- Kearney, Michael. 2018. *Reconceptualizing the Peasantry: Anthropology in Global Perspective*. Routledge.
- Kerblay, Basile. 1989. "Chayanov and the Theory of Peasant Economies". In *Peasants and Peasant Societies: Selected Readings*, 2nd Edition, ed. Theodor Shanin, 176-184. Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd.
- Kohli, Atul. 1986. *State and Development in the Third World*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Kurian, George. 2011. "Representative Democracy". In *The Encyclopedia Of Political Science*, Ed Kurian, George, 1462-65. Washington, Dc: Cq Press.
- Labzae, Mehdi and Sabine Planel. 2021. "'We Cannot Please Everyone': Contentions Over Adjustment In EPRDF Ethiopia (1991-2018)". *Irsh* 66: 69-91.
- Landsberger, Henry A. 1974. *Rural Protest: Peasant Movements and Social Change*. London:

Palgrave Macmillan.

Lavers, Tom. 2012. "Patterns of Agrarian Transformation in Ethiopia: State-Mediated Commercialisation and The 'Land Grab'". *Journal Of Peasant Studies* 39 (3-4): 795-822.

_____. 2023. *Ethiopia's 'Developmental State': Political Order and Distributive Crisis*. Cambridge University Press.

Lata, Leenco. 1998a. "The Making and Unmaking of Ethiopia's Transitional Charter". In *Oromo Nationalism and the Ethiopian Discourse: The Search for Freedom and Democracy*, Ed Asafa Jalata, 51-78. Lawrenceville, NJ: The Red Sea Press.

_____. 1998b. "Peculiar Challenges to Oromo Nationalism". In *Oromo Nationalism and the Ethiopian Discourse: The Search for Freedom and Democracy*, Ed Asafa Jalata, 125-152. Lawrenceville, NJ: The Red Sea Press.

_____. 1999. *The Ethiopian State at the Crossroads: Decolonization and Democratization or Disintegration?* Lawrenceville: Red Sea Press.

_____. 2003. "The Ethiopia-Eritrea War". *Review Of African Political Economy* 30 (97): 369-388.

_____. 2004. *The Horn of Africa as Common Homeland: The State and Self-Determination in the Era of Heightened Globalization*. Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press.

Lefort, Rene. 2007. "Powers – Mengist – and Peasants in Rural Ethiopia: The May 2005 Elections". *Journal of Modern African Studies* 45 (2): 253-272.

_____. 2010. "Power—Mengist—and Peasants in Ethiopia: The Post-2005 Interlude". *Journal of Modern African Studies* 48 (3): 435-460.

_____. 2012. "Free Market Economy, 'Developmental State' And Party-State Hegemony In Ethiopia: The Case Of The 'Model Farmers'". *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 50: 681-706.

_____. 2012. "Free Market Economy, 'Developmental State' and Party-State Hegemony In Ethiopia: The Case Of The 'Model Farmers'". *The Journal of Modern African Studies*. 50 (4): 681-706.

- _____. 2015. "The Ethiopian Economy: The Developmental State Vs. The Free Market" In *Understanding Contemporary Ethiopia: Monarchy, Revolution and Legacy of Meles Zenawi*, eds. Gérard Prunier and Éloi Ficquet, 357-394. London: Hurst & Company.
- Lerche, Jens. 2021. "The Agrarian Question Under Neoliberalism and Land Reforms in India". In *The Agrarian Question: A Reader*, ed. R.V. Ramana Murthy, 144-167. New York: Routledge.
- Levien, Michael. 2012. "The Land Question: Special Economic Zones and The Political Economy of Dispossession in India". In *The New Enclosures: Critical Perspectives on Corporate Land Deals*, Eds White, Ben, and Saturnino M. Borras Jr., Ruth Hall, Ian Scoones, Wendy Wolford. London: Routledge.
- Levine, Donald. 1972. *Wax and Gold: Tradition and Innovation in Ethiopian Culture*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Li, T. M. 2007. *The Will to Improve: Governmentality, Development, And The Practice Of Politics*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Littlejohn, Gary. 1977. "Peasant economy and society". In *Sociological Theories of the Economy*, ed. Barry Hindess, 118-156. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Lyons, Terrence. 2019. *The Puzzle of Ethiopian Politics*. Lynne Rienner Publishers, Incorporated.
- Maccoby, Michael. 1967. "Love and Authority: A Study Of Mexican Villagers". In *Peasant Society: A Reader*, Eds. Jack M Potter, May N. Diaz and George M. Foster, 336-346. Boston: Little, Brown and Company.
- Marinetto, Michael John Paul. 2007. "Social Theory, the State and Modern Society: The State in Contemporary Social Thought." : 1-177. <http://orca.cf.ac.uk/32412/>.
- Markakis, John and Nega Ayele. 1986. *Class and Revolution in Ethiopia*. Trenton: The Red Sea Press.
- Markakis, John. 1974. *Ethiopia: Anatomy of A Traditional Polity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- _____. 2011. *Ethiopia: The Last Two Frontiers*. New York: James Currey Press.

- Marshall, Catherine and Gretchen B. Rossman. 2016. *Designing Qualitative Research*. London: SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Marx, Karl. 1950. "The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte". In Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Selected Works, Vol. 1*. Foreign Languages Publishing House.
- _____. 2010. *Capital, Vol. 1. Marx and Engels Collected Works, Vol 35*. Lawrence & Wishart.
- Mastropaolo, Alfio. 2011. "Representation". In *International Encyclopedia of Political Science (Vol. 1)*, Eds Badie, B., Berg-Schlosser, D. and Morlino, L., 2273-2285. London: Sage Publications.
- May, Diaz, and Jack Potter. 1967. "Introduction: The Social Life Of Peasants." In *Peasant Society: A Reader*, eds. Jack M Potter and N May. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 154-67.
- McClurg, Scott D, and Joseph K Young. 2011. "Editors' Introduction: A Relational Political Science." *PS: Political Science and Politics*: 39-43.
- Mcmichael, Philip. 2008. "Peasants Make Their Own History, But Not Just as They Please . . .". *Journal of Agrarian Change* 8 (2-3): 205-228.
- Merara Gudina. 2003. *Ethiopia: Competing Ethnic Nationalisms and the Quest for Democracy, 1960-2000*. N.P Shaker Publishing.
- _____. 2011. "Elections and Democratization In Ethiopia, 1991-2010". *Journal Of Eastern African Studies* 5 (4): 664-680.
- Migdal, Joel S. 1988. *Strong Societies and Weak States: State-Society Relations and State Capabilities in the Third World*. Pinceton: Princeton University Press.
- Mintz, Sidney W. and Eric R. Wolf. 1967. "An Analysis of Ritual Co-Parenthood (Compadrazgo)". In *Peasant Society: A Reader*, Eds. Jack M Potter, May N. Diaz and George M. Foster, 174-199. Boston: Little, Brown and Company.
- Mitra, Ashok. 1977. "The Terms of Trade, Class Conflict and Classical Political Economy". *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 4 (2): 181-194.

- MoFED. 2003. *Agriculture and Rural Development Policy and Strategies*. Addis Ababa: MoFED.
- Mohammed Hassen. 2009. "Oromo Nationalism, and the Continuous Multifaceted Attack on the Oromo Cultural, Civic and Political Organizations". In *Exploring New Political Alternatives For The Oromo In Ethiopia*, Ed Pausewang, Siegfried, 26-39. Workshop Report: Cmi Reports.
- Mohun, Simon. 2001. "Preobrazhensky". In *A Dictionary of Marxist Thought*, ed. Tom Bottomore, 440-441. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.
- Mosley, Layna. 2013. *Interview Research in Political Science*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Mukherjee, Avanti. 2021. "Gender". In *Handbook of Critical Agrarian Studies*, Eds A. H. Akram-Lodhi, Kristina Dietz, Bettina Engels and Ben M. McKay, 120-130. Massachusetts: Edward Elgar Publishing Limited.
- Mulugeta Gebrehiwot Berhe. 2020. *Laying The Past to Rest: The EPRDF And The Challenges Of Ethiopian State-Building*. London: Hurst & Company.
- Neuman, W. Lawrence. 2013. *Social Research Methods: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*. Edinburgh Gate: Pearson Education Limited.
- OECD/PSI. 2020. *Rural Development Strategy Review of Ethiopia: Reaping the Benefits of Urbanisation*. Paris: OECD Publishing.
- Onder, Nilgun. 2010. "Class Analysis". In *Encyclopedia of Case Study Research*, eds. Albert J. Mills, Gabrielle Durepos and Elden Wiebe, 146-149. London: SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Oosthuizen, Ann. 2020. *Land To the Tiller: An Interview with Zegeye Asfaw*. Morfo Books: Oxford.
- Osaghae, Eghosa E. 2003. "Colonialism And Civil Society in Africa: The Perspective of Ekeh's Two Publics". Paper Presented at *The Symposium on Canonical Works and Continuing Innovation In African Arts And Humanities*. Accra, Ghana.
- Osmond, Thomas. 2014. "Competing Muslim Legacies Along City/Countryside Dichotomies: Another Political History of Harar Town And Its Oromo Rural Neighbours". *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 52 (1): 1-23.

- PASDEP. 2006. *Ethiopia: Building on Progress: A Plan For Accelerated And Sustained Development To End Poverty (PASDEP) (2005/6-2009/10)*. Addis Ababa: MoFED.
- Patnaik, Utsa, Sam Moyo, and Issa G. Shivji. 2011. *The Agrarian Question in the Neoliberal Era: Primitive Accumulation and the Peasantry*. Fahamu/Pambazuka.
- Pausewang, Siegfried. 1973. *Methods and Concepts of Social Research in a Rural Developing Society: a Critical Appraisal based on Experience in Ethiopia*. München: Weltforum Verlag.
- _____. 2009. "The Oromo Between Past and Future: Introduction". In *Exploring New Political Alternatives For The Oromo In Ethiopia*, Ed Pausewang, Siegfried, 1-13. Workshop Report: Cmi Reports.
- Pausewang, S., K. Tronvoll, and L. Aalen. 2002. *Ethiopia since the Derg: A Decade of Democratic Pretension and Performance*. ed. Kjetil Tronvoll And Lovise Aalen Siegfried Pausewang. London and New York: Zed Books.
- PDC. 2020. *Ten Years Development Plan: A Pathway to Prosperity, 2021-2030*. Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia. Planning and Development Commission.
- Poluha, Eva. 2002. "Learning Political Behaviour: Peasant-State Relations in Ethiopia". In *Contesting 'Good' Governance*, eds. E. Poluha and M. Rosendahl, 101-136. London: Routledge.
- _____. 2004. *The Power of Continuity: Ethiopia Through The Eyes Of Its Children*. Nordiska Afrikainstitutet.
- Porta, Donatella della. 2011. "Social Movements." In *International Encyclopedia Of Political Science (Vol. 1)*, Eds Badie, B., Berg-Schlosser, D. and Morlino, L., : Sage Publications, , 2432–43.
- Prunier, Gérard. 2015. "The Ethiopian Revolution and The Derg Regime". In *Understanding Contemporary Ethiopia: Monarchy, Revolution and Legacy of Meles Zenawi*, eds. Gérard Prunier and Éloi Ficquet, 209-232. London: Hurst & Company.
- Redfield, Robert. 1956. *Peasant Society and Culture: An Anthropological Approach to*

Civilization. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press,

- Ruggiero, Vincenzo and Nicola Montagna. 2008. "Introduction". In *Social Movements: A Reader*, Eds Ruggiero, Vincenzo and Nicola Montagna, 1-11. London: Routledge.
- Rutakumwa, R., Mugisha, J. O., Bernays, S., Kabunga, E., Tumwekwase, G., Mbonye, M., & Seeley, J. (2020). Conducting in-depth interviews with and without voice recorders: a comparative analysis. *Qualitative Research*, 20(5), 565–581.
- Scherrer, Christoph, Ana Garcia, and Joscha Wullweber. 2023. "Introduction to the Handbook on Critical Political Economy and Public Policy." In *Handbook on Critical Political Economy and Public Policy*, Edward Elgar Publishing, 1–18.
- Scott, James S. 1985. *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*. New Haven: Yale University Press
- _____. 1998. *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Scupin, Raymond. 2016. *Cultural Anthropology: A Global Perspective*. Boston: Pearson.
- SDPRP. 2002. *Sustainable Development and Poverty Reduction Program*. Addis Ababa: MoFED.
- Segers, Kaatje and Joost Dessein, Sten Hagberg, Patrick Develtere, Mitiku Haile, And Jozef Deckers. 2008. "Be Like Bees – The Politics of Mobilizing Farmers for Development in Tigray, Ethiopia". *African Affairs* 108 (430): 91–109.
- Selg, Peeter, and Andreas Ventsel. 2020. *Introducing Relational Political Analysis: Political Semiotics as a Theory and Method*. Springer.
- Shanin, Theodor. 1972. *The Awkward Class: Political Sociology of Peasantry in a Developing Society- Russia, 1910-1925*. London: Oxford University Press.
- _____. 1989a. *Peasants and Peasant Societies: Selected Readings*. 2nd Edition. Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd.
- _____. 1989b. "Peasantry in Political Action". In *Peasants and Peasant Societies: Selected Readings*, Ed Shanin, Theoder, 357-366. 2nd Edition. Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd.

-
- 1989c. "Short Historical Outline of Peasant Studies". In *Peasants and Peasant Societies: Selected Readings*, Ed Shanin, Theodor, 467-475. 2nd Edition. Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd.
- Shigetomi, Shinichi. 2009. "Rethinking Theories on Social Movements and Development". In *Protest and Social Movements in the Developing World*, Eds Shinichi Shigetomi and Kumiko Makino. Edward Elgar: Cheltenham, UK.
- Shivji, Issa G. 1976. *Class Struggles in Tanzania*. London: Heinemann.
- Skocpol, Theda. 1979. *States and Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia and China*. Cambridge University Press.
- Solomon Fikre Lemma. 2015. *The Challenges of Land Law Reform, Smallholder Agricultural Productivity And Poverty In Ethiopia*. PhD Thesis. University Of Warwick.
- Solomon, Mebrie. 2007. "State-Society Relationships and Human Rights in Ethiopia: A Critique Of A State-Centred Approach." University of Manchester.
- Stake, Robert. 2005. "Qualitative Case Study". In *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*, eds. Norman. K Lincoln and Yvonnas. S. Lincoln, 443-466. London: Sage Publication
- Taylor, Ian. 2018. *African Politics: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Taylor, Marcus. 2021. "Microfinance and Rural Financial Inclusion" In *Handbook Of Critical Agrarian Studies*, Eds A. H. Akram-Lodhi, Kristina Dietz, Bettina Engels and Ben M. McKay, 536-46. Massachusetts: Edward Elgar Publishing Limited.
- Tegegne Gebre-Egziabher. 2014. "Decentralization and Regional and Local Development: Trends and Policy Implications". In *Reflections On Development In Ethiopia New Trends, Sustainability And Challenges*, Eds Dessalegn Rahmato, Meheret Ayenew, Asnake Kefale and Birgit Habermann, 134-168. Addis Ababa: Forum for Social Studies.
- Terje Østebø 2020 Analysis: The Role Of The Qeerroo In Future Oromo Politics <https://Addisstandard.Com/Analysis-The-Role-Of-The-Qeerroo-In-Future-Oromo-Politics/>
- Teshale Tibebe. 1995. *The Making of Modern Ethiopia: 1896-1974*. Lawrenceville, NJ: The Red Sea Press

- Thomson, Alex. 2022. *An Introduction to African Politics*. Routledge.
- Thorner, Daniel. 1989. "Peasant Economy as a Category in History" In *Peasants and Peasant Societies: Selected Readings*, 2nd Edition, ed. Theodor Shanin, 62-68. Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd.
- Tomkinson, Joanne Kathryn. 2019. *Late Development in The Age of Neoliberalism: The Political Economy Of Stateled Development In Ethiopia And Vietnam*. Phd Thesis. Soas University of London.
- Tronvoll, Kjetil. 2000. "Ethiopia: A New Start?" A Minority Rights Group International Report.
- USAID. 2014. "USAID/Ethiopia Land Tenure Administration Program (ELTAP) And Ethiopia Land Administration Program (ELAP)". USAID. <https://data.usaid.gov/Economic-Growth/Ethiopia-Strengthening-Land-Tenure-and-Administrat/bp97-nsyb/data>
- USAID. 2016. "Ethiopia Strengthening Land Tenure And Administration Program End line Report An Impact Evaluation Of The Effects Of Second-Level Land Certification Relative To First-Level Certification". USAID. https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/pa00m3zp.pdf
- USAID. 2018. "Impact Evaluation Of Land Certification Projects In Ethiopia". USAID. https://cloudburstgroup.com/2021/06/25/impact-evaluation-of-usaids-ethiopia-land-tenure-administration-program-and-ethiopia-land-administration-program-elap_eltap_ie/
- Van De Walle, Nicolas. 2001. *African Economies and The Politics Of Permanent Crisis, 1979-1999*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Van der Ploeg, Jan D. 2013. *Peasants and the Art of Farming: A Chayanovian Manifesto*. Winnipeg: Fernwood Publishing.
- _____. 2017. "Differentiation: Old Controversies, New Insights". *The Journal of Peasant Studies*.
- Vanhaute, Eric. 2021. *Peasants in World History*. New York: Routledge.
- Van Ingelgomin, Virginie. 2020. "Focus Groups: From Qualitative Data Generation to Analysis" In *The SAGE Handbook of Research Methods in Political Science and International Relations*, eds. Luigi Curini and Robert Franzese, 1190-1210. London: Sage Publications.

- Vaughan, S. and K. Tronvoll. 2003. *The Culture of Power in Contemporary Ethiopian Political Life*. Stockholm: SIDA Studies 10.
- Vaughan, Sarah. 2003. *Ethnicity and Power in Ethiopia*. PhD Dissertation. The University of Edinburgh
- Vaughnan, S and Mesfin Gebremichael. 2011: “Rethinking Business and Politics In Ethiopia: The Role Of Effort, The Endowment Fund For The Rehabilitation Of Tigray”. Research Report: UK Department for International Development (DFID).
- Vestal, Theodore M. 1999. *Ethiopia: A Post-Cold War*. London: Praeger.
- White, Benjamin. 1989. “Problems in the Empirical Analysis of Agrarian Differentiation”. In *Agrarian Transformations: Local Processes and the State in Southeast Asia*, eds. Gillian Patricia Hart, Andrew Turton and Benjamin White, 15-30. Oxford: University of California Press.
- Wolf, Eric R. 1966. *Peasants*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J: Prentice Hall, Inc.
- _____. 1999. *Peasant Wars of the Twentieth Century*. New York: Harper and Row.
- Young, John. 1997. *Peasant Revolution in Ethiopia: The Tigray People’s Liberation Front, 1975–1991*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Pattenden, Jonathan. 2021. “Labour” “An Introduction to The Handbook Of Critical Agrarian Studies”. In *Handbook of Critical Agrarian Studies*, Eds A. H. Akram-Lodhi, Kristina Dietz, Bettina Engels and Ben M. McKay, 91-98. Massachusetts: Edward Elgar Publishing Limited.
- Yigremew Adal. 2006. “Rural Women’s Access to Land in Ethiopia”. In *Land and The Challenge Of Sustainable Development In Ethiopia*, Eds Dessalegn Rahmato and Taye Assefa, 19-42. Conference Proceedings. Addis Ababa: Forum For Social Studies.

Appendix 1

Guiding Questions for Interviews/FGDs.

The following questions will be used to elicit data concerning peasant-state relations under EPRDF through interviews/FGDs.

- 1) What is state? What are the powers and functions of state? Which actors and institution are part of the state? How is EPRDF government different from its predecessors, Derg's and Haile Sellasie's governments?
- 2) How did EPRDF establish its power in the countryside (in your *Woreda*) after the collapse of Dergue? Who are the people who became leaders of your *Kebele* at that time (rich/middle/poor peasants or others)? Did you observe any change in preference for *Kebele* leadership later on?
- 3) What were the changes to your community (landownership, opportunity to grow your farm, grow prosperous) after EPRDF came to power? What are major policies and programs of EPRDF towards peasants? How did you see those policies? How did most peasants respond to these policies (Resist/ Accept/neglect) and what actions (inaction) did peasants take?
- 4) What changes did you observe in terms of government approach (more authoritarianism/more democratization) during its 27 years in power? After 2000? After 2005 election? after the turn of Ethiopian millennium, 2008?
- 5) How do you characterize peasants' relation with EPRDF? What are the functions of *Kebele* and *Woreda*? What kind of politics did EPRDF follow? How is EPRDF's politics different from that of Derg and Haile Sellasie?
- 6) How do you characterize peasants (lack of) participation in the 2005 Ethiopian National Election? How did peasants view the ruling party and opposition parties? Whom do you think most peasants supported? Can we say wealth difference played any role in preference of different peasant groups (rich, middle, poor/landless peasants)? And why?
- 7) Did peasants play any role in the protests against EPRDF that lasted from 2015-2018 and brought "reformist" groups within EPRDF to power? Which strata/class of peasants (rich peasants/model farmers, middle peasants, poor/landless peasants) were actively/passively involved, if peasants were involved at all? What was the peasants' view of the protests?
- 8) How do you evaluate peasants' relation with market after EPRDF came to power? Was

there an increased or decreased dependence? What are the reasons for your answer? How do you evaluate increased/decreased market presence for welfare of peasants?

- 9) What factors determine and shape peasant's/farmer's access to farm inputs like fertilizer, pesticide, herbicide, machines?
- 10) How much of your agricultural production do you sell to market and consume as a household? Did you notice any change in the proportion of agricultural products sold to market and consumed by your household over 27 years EPRDF stayed in power?
- 11) Did you observe any change in terms of income inequality/landholding among peasants/farmers after EPRDF? What were the requirements for becoming a model farmer? What was the major form agrarian labour relations: wage labour/sharecropping? Were there peasants who became landless, thus forced to become wage labourers/migrate to urban areas? Did sharecropping arrangements increase or decrease? What are the majority of sharecropping arrangements? What are the reasons for changes/lack of changes?
- 12) How do you describe communal structure in your *Kebele*? Hierarchical or diffused? How about social cohesion and group solidarity, that means strength of coercive and compliance mechanisms?
- 13) What obstacles/opportunities to your economic improvement exist under EPRDF? Do you support selling/buying land?
- 14) Was there any relation between wealth/income/landholding of peasant and their political stance towards EPRDF; support/resistance/negligence?
- 15) How do you see role of women in agriculture and local government (the change/lack of change) under EPRDF?
- 16) Who should I contact to learn more about peasant-state relations under EPRDF? [for Interviews only]

Appendix 2

List of Interviews and FGDs

Interviews

Number	Date of Interview	Place	Age	Gender	Position
Interview 1	January 11, 2023	Sadan Dawo,	73	Male	Peasant
Interview 2	January 12, 2023	Busa	43	Male	Land expert at one of Kebeles in Dawo
Interview 3	January 16, 2023	Dawo	35	Male	Kebele Manager in Dawo
Interview 4	December 14, 2023	Qaso Wasarbi	32	Male	Dairy Farmer
Interview 5	January 16, 2023	Sadan Dawo	36	Male	Peasant
Interview 6	January 16, 2023	Sadan Dawo	42	Male	Peasant
Interview 7	January 19, 2023	Sadan Dawo	53	Male	Peasant
Interview 8	January 19, 2023	Sadan Dawo	60	Male	Model Farmer
Interview 9	January 23, 2023	Nano Gabriel	73	Male	Elder/Peasant
Interview 10	January 23, 2023	Nano Gabriel	28	Male	Peasant
Interview 11	January 24, 2023	Busa Town	58	Female	Peasant
Interview 12	January 23, 2023	Nano Gabriel	34	Female	Peasant
Interview 13	January 26, 2023	Busa Town	30	Male	Sinqe Bank Officer
Interview 14	January 26, 2023	Busa Town	52	Male	WALQO/Sinqe Bank Officer
Interview 15	December 19, 2023	Qaso Wasarbi	67	Male	Former Communal Forest Committee Secretariat
Interview 16	December 21, 2023	Qaso Wasarbi	44	Male	Peasant

	2023				
Interview 17	January 27, 2023	Dawo Woreda	54	Male	Kebele Chairman in Dawo
Interview 18	January 27, 2023	Busa Town	48	Male	Woreda Agriculture Expert/Formal DA
Interview 19	February, 2023	15,Qaso Wasarbi	41	Male	Gare Misoma Leader and Member of Kebele Social Court
Interview 20	January 27, 2023	Busa Town	37	Male	Woreda Agriculture Expert/Formal DA
Interview 21	January 30, 2023	Busa Town	39	Male	Woreda Planning Officer/Formal DA
Interview 22	February 5, 2023	Qaso Wasarbi	36	Male	Dairy Farmer
Interview 23	February 17, 2023	Qaso Wasarbi	66	Male	Elder/Peasant
Interview 24	April 3, 2023	Addis Ababa		Male	An Expert at Land Governance Activity, Ethiopia
Interview 25	May 16, 2023	Sululta		Male	Land Services and Conflicts Expert at Sululta Town
Interview 26	May 16, 2023	Sululta		Male	Revenue Authority, Sululta Town
Interview 27	May 20, 2023	Sululta		Male	Oromia Land Administration Expert
Interview 28	May 15, 2023	Addis Ababa		Male	Land Law Expert at Rural Land Administration and Use Lead Executive

FGDs

Number	Date	Place	Number of Participants	Remark
FGD 1	January 14, 2023	Sadan Dawo	6	Youth
FGD 2	December 28, 2023	Sululta	5	Elders/Aba Gadas
FGD 3	December 28	Sululta	7	Women
FGD 4	January 21, 2023	Nano Gabriel	7	Youth
FGD 5	January 21, 2023	Nano Gabriel	6	Women
FGD 6	January 14, 2023	Sadan Dawo	5	Women
FGD 7	January 30, 2023	Busa Town	5	Woreda Officials
FGD 8	January 22, 2023	Nano Gabriel	8	Mixed (Women, Youth, Elders, etc)
FGD 9	January 15, 2023	Sadan Dawo	5	Elders
FGD 10	February 2, 2023	Busa Town	5	Civil Servants
FGD 11	December 2023	25,Sululta	6	Mixed (Women, Youth, Elders, etc)