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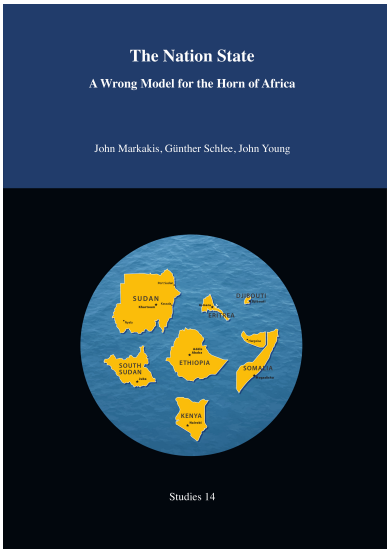

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Chapter 3
Bolshevism and National Federalism in Ethiopia

John Young

3.1 Introduction

Civil war broke out in Ethiopia on November 4, 2020 when the national army at the behest of Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed attacked the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) administered state of Tigray. There were many differences between Abiy and the TPLF, but foremost was the Front's support of national federalism and the prime minister's backing of a return to the centralized administration of past Ethiopian governments. The issue of national federalism has been controversial since it was first introduced by the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) in 1991, but the war encourages the debate to be revisited. This chapter considers national federalism as an alternative arrangement to the Western nation-state and examines its theoretical origins in the writings of the Bolsheviks and the early experience of the Soviet Union, compares Soviet experience with that of Ethiopia under the EPRDF, and attempts to draw some insights.

Alone in Africa, Ethiopia was not a colony, but an independent state that took the form of an empire and competed with the European powers in the scramble for territorial gain in the continent. While other African empires collapsed before or with the advent of European colonialism, successive Ethiopian imperial governments defeated—as in the case of Italy in 1896—or came to arrangements with the colonial powers—as in the case of Britain and France—and thus maintained its empire well into the modern era. Moreover, its collapse late in the twentieth century was not due to foreign intervention, but because of internal contradictions. Ethiopian experience thus set it apart from the rest of Africa; its wars of liberation were not against a foreign power but against the imperial regime of Haile-Selassie and the Derg. With the possible exceptions of South Africa and South Sudan, all the major African armed struggles were anti-colonial, but the EPRDF fought the state socialism of the Derg to realize its own version of socialism and ways to address the national question. Again, in contrast to the rest of Africa, the EPRDF explicitly rejected the European modelled nation-state. Instead, the system of national federalism formulated by the EPRDF has its inspiration in Bolshevik ideas and the experience of the Soviet Union, spurned Western practice. And the ideas it drew upon were the product of a long debate among the Western political left in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in response to the brutality of forced assimilation, marginalization, and crushing of rival nationalities during the national democratic revolutions of the British, French, German, Italian, and American states.

In opposition to the European model of political development, the international political left was of one mind in viewing the nation-state and nationalism as obstacles to achieving a society of free people (Bookchin 1994). For the left, nationalism united people in a hierarchical arrangement that obscured the ultimately class-based contradictions that served to

oppress the workers and other marginalized groups to advance the interests of capitalists who needed captive national markets. Anarchism represented the most extreme manifestation of this leftist conviction and held all states to be barriers to human freedom. Marx and Engels sometimes endorsed nationalist struggles, such as that for Polish self-determination because it had the objective of undermining the reactionary Russian Tsarist regime. However, they held the nation-state to be a transitional phenomenon to be overcome in realizing a nation-less and class-less communism.

In response to the threat posed by the rise of reactionary nationalism and Islamism, the Bolsheviks oversaw the construction of a federation that deliberately undermined the dominant Russian nation and endeavored to politically, culturally, and economically advance the marginalized communities, not as an end in itself, but as a means to give birth to a socialist state. That the commitment to this ideal declined, the Soviet Union under Stalin and his successors perverted the goal of socialism, and it collapsed in 1991 does not negate consideration of that experience since it continues to cast light on the national issue in contemporary Ethiopia and elsewhere.

The collapse of the Soviet Union cannot be attributed solely to the rising nationalism of its component parts and instead to growing anger at the unaccountable elites ruling the federation and a misconstrued reform process under Soviet President and General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), Mikhail Gorbachev. But it is noteworthy that the Soviet Union broke up along national lines and should Ethiopia not overcome its long-running crisis, given added weight by the outbreak of war in November 2020, the country could follow the trajectory of the Soviet Union and disintegrate.

Although the writings of the leading Bolsheviks on the national issue and the early experience of the Soviet Union had widespread support in the Ethiopian Student Movement (ESM) from which all components of the EPRDF and much of the opposition had their origins, its practical application to federalism was widely greeted with skepticism and opposition. On the one hand, it was opposed by Amhara and other Ethiopian nationalists who held it would bring about the disintegration of Ethiopia. On the other hand, it was opposed by secessionists, the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), and those who assumed that it was subterfuge to keep the minority Tigrayans in power, that no serious power would be devolved, and that none of the country's nations would be permitted to secede. Although the EPRDF maintained that its approach was a realistic response to the country's endemic national conflicts and that the Western modelled nation-state was unsuitable for Ethiopia and Africa, it was at best ignored on the continent and at worst viewed as a recipe for disunity and weakening the central state.

Most scholars have opposed the EPRDF's approach to the national issue and thus began a dialogue of the deaf. Academic critiques have typically been informed by Western social science, a belief in the superiority of the Western nation-state, support for models of federalism designed to suppress the kind of national consciousness that the EPRDF's policies gave rise to, and a religious like faith in Western liberal democracy. Hence the popularity of Abiy's rejection of EPRDF 'authoritarianism' and support for a Western version of democracy. Abiy's vision for Ethiopia harkens back to a golden age of pan-Ethiopian unity and the absence of ethnic conflict under unitary governments. Unfortunately, there was no such golden age and instead there is a long history of Ethiopian emperors and the Derg trying to overcome national revolts at great human cost.

Understanding this better than Abiy and the Amhara centrists who form his ideological core, the EPRDF tried to construct a system that passed considerable powers to national communities, not as its critics would have it to bring about the demise of the Ethiopian state or to ensure the self-aggrandizement of Tigrayans, but instead to overcome national oppression and ensure the state's survival. That the TPLF and EPRDF model of decentralized national based administrations was not always successful and in need of reform cannot be contested, but it represented an important attempt to contain national strife that has long threatened to dismember Ethiopia, while the centrism pressed by Abiy is a tried and failed approach.

In an environment of Western triumphalism in the post-Cold War era, critics often considered it enough to link the EPRDF's model of federalism to Bolshevism to discredit it. Meanwhile, EPRDF supporters were reluctant to acknowledge their theoretical dept to Bolshevik ideas and Soviet experience and instead were reduced to contending that only a radical devolution of power to national communities could save the country from disintegration. There was much truth in this, but it provided little basis for understanding the EPRDF's model of federalism and could not be defended on either theoretical or comparative grounds. The EPRDF had the power, but the academics and other critics have overwhelmingly dominated the debate, and with each crisis faced by the regime there were new attacks national federalism. The November 2020 war provides a context to reconsider whether centralized unitary government or a version of national federalism best meets the needs of Ethiopia, assuming that the country survives its present crisis.

After reviewing the writings and approaches of the leading Bolsheviks on nations and nationalism and the experience surrounding the establishment of the Soviet Union, this study will outline the development and implementation of the TPLF and EPRDF system of national based federalism. The experience of the TPLF (and subsequently EPRDF) system will then be compared with that of the early Bolsheviks. The chapter concludes that Ethiopia's ongoing crisis is not due to the EPRDF's national federalism, and a reformed version of it still provides the best hope that the country can survive. But national federalism could have been strengthened if the TPLF and EPRDF had not rejected class as both a unifying factor in the country and a means to mobilize Ethiopia's marginalized people.

3.2 Bolshevism and the Nation-State

On the eve of revolution, the Russian empire state covered one-sixth of the planet and was made up of an enormous variety of peoples, cultures, and religions overseen by a tsar who doubled as both head of state and of the Orthodox Church. The tsar gained the loyalty of the various national components of the empire by co-opting part of the indigenous elites, assimilating them through administrative adaptation, and establishing Russian settler colonies in the peripheries. The collapse of the Russian empire was ultimately due to its over-reach in the First World War and the growth of nationalist movements in the non-Russian parts of the empire, both of which provided a critical opportunity for revolutionaries. National consciousness was largely a Western import and initially restricted to intellectuals, but the heavy-handed response of the regime, Russification campaigns, and the construction of a national hierarchy produced growing resentment. Meanwhile, the Central Asian revolt of 1916 served as an expression of these developments and Muslim fears of assimilation by a Christian regime.

After initially playing down the significance of national sensitivities, the Bolsheviks supported national demands. Josef Stalin, himself a Georgian, who became the Bolshevik commissar of nationalities wrote what became his most influential theoretical contribution, "Marxism and the National Question" in (1913) on the problem. Stalin defined the nation as "a historically constituted, stable community of people, formed on the basis of a common language, territory, economic life, and psychological make-up manifested in a common culture" (Stalin 1913, 10). Stalin followed Marx in holding that nations developed in the context of the decline of feudalism and the rise of capitalism. But herein lay a tension because the Bolsheviks held that the nation and nationalism would ultimately disappear with the realization of socialism, but in the short-term it treated nations as primordial identities. For Stalin and the Bolsheviks, nationalism was "a bourgeois masking ideology," and they made a distinction between opposing national oppression and supporting nationalism.

In Western Europe, the rise of capitalism produced independent nation-states under national bourgeoisies while in Eastern Europe, including Russia, it gave rise to multinational empire states under feudal, capitalist, and mixed political elites representing the dominant national bloc. In Russia, this role was carried out by Greater Russians (Russians, Belorussians, and Eastern Ukrainians) who dominated a well-organized aristocratic military bureaucracy. The Bolsheviks held that tsarist Russia was a "prison house of nationalities" perpetuated by a "Greater Russian chauvinism" that imposed its language, culture, and religion on the empire's subjugated population, and this produced nationalist responses. To gain the support of ethnic minorities, the Bolsheviks attacked Greater Russian chauvinism, proclaimed the sovereignty and equality of the empire's nations, and mobilized the marginalized minorities around a commitment to national self-determination. The right of self-determination meant that only the nation had the right to determine its destiny, outsiders did not have the right to forcibly interfere in the life of the nation, and a nation could arrange its life in the way its members wished (Stalin 1913, 23). This demand shocked European rulers, most of whom hosted discontented national minorities, but it was also attacked by many in the revolutionary left of the era, including Rosa Luxemburg. Even though she herself was Polish and Jewish, she opposed granting her own communities rights, including Polish independence, which Lenin strongly advocated, because—she contended—it undermined the international class struggle (H. Scott 2008). Bolshevik thinking, however, was not based on any liberal idealism and instead was meant to undermine bourgeois nationalism, win the support of the people, and facilitate their advancement.

These notions were enshrined by the Bolshevik government's *Declaration of the Rights of the Peoples of Russia* on November 15, 1917, immediately after the October Revolution. The declaration included the equality and sovereignty of the peoples of Russia, self-determination, including secession and formation of separate states, abolition of all national and religious privileges and restrictions, and free development of national minorities and ethnographical groups inhabiting the territory of Russia. This commitment was deemed decisive in the civil war which pitted the Bolsheviks against a Russian chauvinist White army committed to a "one and undivided Russia" (Simon 1991) and supported by Western armies. But Lenin always made a distinction between the right to self-determination, which was part of a broader struggle for democracy on the one hand, and secession on the other. The commitment to self-determination would allow nationalities to realize that they did not need secession to retain national rights and privileges, or as Stalin would later say, "disunion for the purpose of union" (Kasprzak 2012, 152). In other words, if nations were sovereign and

equal conditions prevailed, the national will would determine whether autonomy or federation would prove satisfactory and secession would be rejected.

Lenin emphasized the importance of acknowledging the nationalism of the oppressed peoples and establishing a socialist federation of nations in the former Russian empire to ensure they were not captured by a reactionary bourgeois nationalism. He considered the national struggles of economically undeveloped colonized countries for liberation as being inherently progressive because they undermined the power of capital and distinguished them from the reactionary nationalism of the bourgeoisie. Accordingly, "Lenin's acceptance of the reality of nations and national rights was one of the most uncompromising positions he ever took, his theory of good ('oppressed nations') nationalism formed the conceptual foundation of the Soviet Union and his NEP-time policy of compensatory nation building was a spectacularly successful attempt at a state-sponsored conflation of language, culture, territory and quota-fed bureaucracy" (Slezkine 1994, 414). But doubts remained and in 1933, Hans Kohn (Kohn 1933, 21) wrote, "by the very process of dragging the peoples of the Soviet Union out of the period of religious medievalism through its work of enlightenment, and leading them to a new trust in themselves and to modern technical product, it awakens in them also the will to self-expression and to cohesion of the nation, and there grows up in them […] through nationalism, the opposing force with which Communism has to contend not only in the Russian people but in the other peoples inhabiting the Soviet Union."

Also problematic was the position of the "backward" peoples of the Soviet Union who did not constitute nations and thus did not have the right to self-determination. The focus here was less on their rights and more on state paternalism to politically, culturally, and economically raise them. In this light, raising backward groups culturally was held to be as significant as the provision of territory for their advancement. Nationalism was not meant to preserve small national units, but rather modernize them, even if this meant that they would have to be assimilated. Indeed, nationalism as a tool of modernization would become a defining characteristic of the Soviet Union. While Lenin (1913) opposed forceful assimilation, he considered resisting assimilation as akin to swimming against the currents of history. In many cases, demands for language or separate national schools were futile and the dangers of doing so were many. Foremost, it amounted to the promotion of archaic, feudal, and backward elements, thus stalling modernization. It offered an illusion of the permanence of national identities to small groups with little vitality and facilitated the bourgeoisie's exploitation of the proletariat, thus distracting the working classes from the objective of socialism.

In the early period of the Soviet Union the Bolsheviks sought to end domination by Greater Russians, a position taken even though most Bolshevik leaders were themselves Russians. In their efforts to combat Greater Russian chauvinism, the Bolsheviks actively discouraged assimilation of national minorities and went to considerable lengths to promote the development and consciousness of the non-Russian peoples. This sometimes even included the expulsion of Russian settlers from non-Russian territories. At least until Lenin's death, Greater Russian chauvinism was assumed to pose a bigger danger than local nationalisms. The result: "The Soviet central state did not identify as Russian, and Russians were driven to bear the burden of the empire by suppressing their national interests and to identify with a non-national empire" (Vihavainen 2000, 79). But chauvinism was not limited to Russians and a new policy towards national equality had to be pursued to remove all traces of distrust and alienation inherited from the epoch of capitalism. A comprehensive resolution

to the nationality problem within the former empire, Lenin believed, would ensure loyalty to the emerging Soviet state.

The 1920s and 1930s in the Soviet Union were devoted to the assignment of national territories to national groups and nationalities, and this was followed by nation-building, which attempted to construct a full range of national institutions within each unit. Lenin favored establishing autonomous units, however small, with homogeneous populations that could attract fellow nationals from all over the country and even beyond to eliminate national oppression. While Rosa Luxemburg advocated territorial autonomy, Lenin held that did not go far enough to resolve the nationality question or quench the thirst of nations for the right to complete liberation and only amounted to a reformist change. As well as granting each officially recognized nation its own territory, they were given a measure of autonomy under indigenous elites, encouraged to develop their own culture and language (and where the language was not in written form to construct it), and have a direct role in the central government, essentially an affirmative indigenization action program known as *korenizatsiia*.

The Soviet system embraced traditional custom, law, and local leadership of Asian minority peoples, including nomadism and the integration of the Islamic Sharia into the Soviet legal code. The territories of the nations were extended from the republic level to townships and villages, so that each republic was a mosaic of differentiated national subunits, often with different languages. For groups who did not have a national republic, an all-union administration was created.[1]

Language was the core of the policy, and minority nationals received preference in access to higher education and job openings in industry and public administration while the use of languages other than Russian was promoted in administration and higher education. The focus on language led to the conversion of sixty-six languages from the Cyrillic script used in Russian to the Latin script before its reversal in the 1930s (Martin 2001, 185–203). At the time of the revolution, literacy rates in Central Asia ranged between 2 and 7 percent; by the end of the 1920s the Soviet Union had largely eradicated illiteracy and was in the process of industrializing the national republics and *oblast*s with indigenous workers (Smith 1999). Nor were the Bolsheviks only concerned with advancing nations, and efforts to expand the social, political, and economic opportunities for women constituted "the earliest and perhaps most far-reaching attempt ever undertaken to transform the status and role of women" (Lapidus 1978, 3).

Many of the groups granted national status did not fully meet the criteria laid down by Stalin's "Marxism and the National Question" because of their lack of national consciousness and the problems posed by the enormous diversity of the old Russian empire. Unintentionally, the USSR became an "incubator of new nations" rather than a "melting pot," and thus it was the first state in history to be formed of national political units. In complete contrast to the old European multi-ethnic states, the Soviet Union responded to the rising tide of nationalism by promoting the national consciousness of its minorities, which in the view of one observer represented "the most extravagant celebration of ethnic diversity that any state had ever financed" (Slezkine 1994, 414).

[1] By linking the definition of nation to possession of land, Stalin precluded groups like Jews and Germans in the Russian empire from having the right to self-determination because they did not have their own territory. Later, a region was established for the Jews, but they were typically urbanized and highly educated and did not adapt to farming, and the project failed.

Dividing the Soviet Union along national lines was also held to be the most effective means of governance, and local rulers—even though vetted by the CPSU—had to be indigenous people to assure the non-Russian peoples that they had been granted genuine national self-determination. Both Stalin and Lenin had written critically about the disintegration of the Social Democratic Party of the Austro-Hungarian Empire along national lines shortly before the First World War, and to ensure that experience was not repeated in the Soviet Union all existing national socialist parties were forcefully dissolved, replaced by local affiliates of the CPSU, and all national armed forces were either incorporated into the Red Army or eliminated (Simon 1991).

The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) was officially established in 1922 as a federation of nationalities, which eventually encompassed fifteen major national territories, each organized as a Union-level republic (Soviet Socialist Republic or SSR), and each republic had constitutionally guaranteed equal rights and standing in the formal structure of state power. Smaller minorities were made into autonomous republics (ASSRs) and still smaller minorities were given *oblast*s in a comprehensive multi-tiered federal arrangement.

To ensure the interests of the national groups were defended at the center, a Soviet of Nationalities was established as one of the two chambers of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR. As opposed to the Soviet of the Union, the Soviet of Nationalities was composed of the nationalities of the Soviet Union, which in turn followed administrative divisions rather than being a representation of national groups. The arrangement seriously diminished representation of larger groups, such as Russians, in favor of the smaller national groups of the Soviet Union. Many of the functions of the presidium of the Soviet of Nationalities were dissolved at the end of 1937, but it survived as the sole central political institution formally devoted to the nationalities question (Martin 2001).

The opposition of the Bolsheviks to any differentiation between nations that could give rise to insurgent nationalism was expressed in the widely repeated slogan: "national in form, but socialist in content." The building blocks of the Bolsheviks were class and internationalism and while nationalism was to be courted in the short-term, it was to be abandoned in the mid-term in favor of a unified worker's socialist state, and in the long-term the ideal was one language and one culture under international communism (Vihavainen 2000). The Bolsheviks contended that nations could only develop socialism when they reached equal status with the majority Russians.

Even though foreign policy was the prerogative of the all-union government, the Ukraine pursued foreign relations with Ukrainian minorities in Poland and Czechoslovakia and eight million Ukrainian nationals in the Russian and other Soviet republics. Central Asian republics exerted control for a time over immigration and delegates of the Turkic republics participated in an international conference in 1926 on a plan for the development of Turkic written languages (Martin 2001, 193).

The authority of the central government, however, was never in doubt, because it maintained sole responsibility for economic and military matters and was under the direction of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, itself a centralized body made up of the various federation components. The frequent result in the view of Lenin and Trotsky was excessive centralization, and they repeatedly complained that the central bureaucracy was a major obstacle to realizing the commitment to nation-building. Indeed, a major theme in Lenin's *State and Revolution* (Lenin 1917b) was his concern to destroy all the remnants of the old regime, including its stultifying bureaucracy, which he saw being replicated under the Bolsheviks.

The emphasis on a nationalized and centralized economy also limited the authority of union governments. But given the pervasive poverty, especially in the central Asian republics, unified economic planning was deemed critical to rapidly increasing desperately low living standards.

By the mid-1930s this policy was in retreat, and while the large national regions were kept intact most village and district level units were abolished. During Stalin's Great Terror of 1936–38 "narrow nationalism" became the focus of repression. Nonetheless, Articles 15 and 16 of the 1936 Constitution guaranteed the rights of the Union Republics and for each Republic to have its own constitution, while Article 17 gave each Union Republic the right to secede from the USSR.

Stalin's commitment to "socialism in one country" further undermined the nationality policy and began a process that weakened the internationalist focus of the Bolsheviks. On the eve of the Second World War, Stalin began a campaign of Russification, which increased with the war, and Russian became the language of inter-national communication throughout the Soviet Union. In the 1980s, the choice of language in the schools was given to parents and most of those outside the Russian federation selected Russian because it was deemed to offer more job opportunities for their children. Nonetheless, the commitment to national rights remained a core principle of the Soviet Union, and until its demise it continued to serve as a key point of distinction with Western governance practices.

Despite the retreat from the transformative positions of the first two decades of the Soviet Union, the theoretical writings of Stalin, Lenin, and other Bolsheviks on the rights of nations and national minorities and the means to give expression to those rights are important because they challenged Western orthodoxy, particularly the notion that the nation-state is the end-point of political evolution. One of the greatest achievements of the Soviet Union was the rapid advance and industrialization of the various Asian nations and this development led to claims that the USSR had realized its mid-term objective of a unified worker's socialist state. But its longer-term objective of one people and one culture under international communism became increasingly unrealistic. By the time of Khrushchev and Brezhnev it had become clear there would be no transcending of nationalism. "Nations were there to stay; nationalism would have to be managed rather than transcended" (Lovell 2009, 113).

3.3 Ethiopia: Ideologies Under Assault

The parallels between the pre-revolutionary and revolutionary Russian empire and Ethiopia are remarkable. The Ethiopian emperor, who like his Russian counterpart was head of state and of the Orthodox Church, attempted to assimilate the different ethnic elites into the cultures and languages of the Amhara ruling class. It employed *neftegna*s (gun carrying settlers) from various ethnic groups to forcefully occupy territory for the empire. While Ethiopia did not have pogroms like Tsarist Russia, it did have indentured peasants, forced national evacuations, lowland African people who were viewed as slaves, and a distinct racial hierarchy. The Ethiopian student revolutionaries began their campaign against that empire and its prison of nationalities, which proved remarkably easy to collapse. Afterwards the real struggle began against the *Derg*. Future EPRDF leaders were strongly influenced by Bolshevik experience and contended that the establishment of a federation along Russian lines was the best means to preserve the integrity of Ethiopia and advance its objectives, and Soviet experience continues to provide insights into the EPRDF's national policies.

While there had been revolts in the periphery against Emperor Haile-Selassie, their leaders did not have the capacity to overthrow the imperial authority. It was not until the emergence of the Ethiopian Student Movement in the late 1960s that an opposition took form that could ideologically challenge the regime and prepare the ground for it to be overthrown. Before, the primary influences were Western modernization and the development of Japan as a traditional polity. In a context of rising global radicalism, however, the ESM quickly assumed a Marxist orientation even while the students initially rejected national divisions in the country and extolled Ethiopian nationalism, which was held to transcend other identities and loyalties (Young 1997b). The early ESM focused on three trends: pan-Ethiopianism, democratization, and the national question.

The national question came to the fore over the problem of whether to support the Eritrean demand for the right to self-determination. Most student activists contended that since Ethiopia was feudal, Eritrea could not be considered a colony and therefore supported a unitary Ethiopia. Only a minority held the country to be in a transitional phase in which nations and nationalist movements could emerge and be supported. Particularly influential was student leader Walleligne Makonnen's contention that Ethiopia was not yet a nation, but an Amhara-ruled collection of nationalities and paraphrasing Fanon concluded that "to be an Ethiopian you will have to wear an Amhara mask" (Balsvik 1985, 277–278), a position also held by the nationalist Oromo students. Debate continued, and the students progressively shifted at least in principle from a position of outright condemnation of secession to recognizing the right of Eritreans and all of Ethiopia's people to self-determination. They also endorsed a conception of Ethiopia as a "prison of nationalities," a phrase drawn from Russian revolutionary experience.

Debate over the national question continued to bedevil the students and while accepting in principle the full right of self-determination, in practice many students followed what became Stalin's later position of condemning any calls for national self-determination as "narrow nationalist" and "separatist." Meanwhile, the country's leading revolutionary party, the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party (EPRP) mobilized on a pan-Ethiopian basis and called for a proletarian revolution. Nonetheless, its leaders were sufficiently aware of nationalist sensitivities to establish the Oromo People's Democratic Organization (OPDO) to mobilize Oromo. In contrast, groups largely from the non-Amhara core of the country, including the future leaders of the TPLF, highlighted the nationalities issue and held "Amhara chauvinism" to be the enemy in a context where a Shoan Amhara elite imposed its language, culture, and Coptic faith on the peoples who made up Ethiopia. Ultimately the difference between the EPRP and the TPLF was not a strategic question since the TPLF affirmed that the class contradiction superseded all other contradictions. Rather it was a question of whether the national issue was primary for purposes of mobilization, as affirmed by the TPLF, or class, as held by the EPRP. The TPLF contended that its own formation as a Tigrayan national party, together with other national parties, such as the Afar Liberation Front, Western Somali Liberation Front, Sidama Liberation Front, and the OLF, provided conclusive evidence in support of its position. Not only was the issue unresolved, but it led to conflict between the parties.

In opposition to what became the EPRDF position, the future OLF did not single out Shoans for the imposition of their culture but all northern Ethiopians who were frequently

conflated with *neftegnas*.[2] The OLF concern was with the traditional Abyssinian state dominated by the Amhara, but in which the Tigrayans were junior partners, and both practiced a form of settler colonialism in the territories. The TPLF view was that the regime was feudal and Amhara-dominated, not like South Africa as contended by the OLF. Oromos, they held, interacted and lived throughout the country. While they had the right to self-determination, because their problem was not a result of colonialism, they did not have the automatic right to secession.[3]

Sensitive to the nationalism of their Tigrayan followers and appreciating the limited capitalist development in the country, which meant that the working class was a negligible force while the peasants and ethnic minorities loomed large, the TPLF focused on the peasantry. The Front emphasized national struggle and held that the national contradictions had to be resolved before multinational class struggles could be settled. The early TPLF entertained the idea of Tigray's secession before proclaiming the right of Tigrayans as a nation to self-determination but insisted this would only take the form of secession if the revolutionary forces failed to overthrow the Derg and realize a democratic Ethiopia, a formula consistent with the position of the Bolsheviks. According to one TPLF veteran, Stalin's (1913) article became a "bible," while another said it was read "scores of times." The TPLF leadership widely read the Marxist classics that were translated into Tigrinya to the extent that another veteran said, "Our life was one of fighting and studying Marxism," and Meles Zenawi was smitten with the experience of Enver Hoxa's Albania after a 1984 visit. However, the front never proclaimed itself Marxist or even socialist and at best would only acknowledge that some of its leaders were Communists or Marxists.

The Derg also ascribed to Marxist principles, aligned with the Eastern Bloc, declared equality among the country's ethnic groups, and promised self-administration. In 1983, it established the Institute for the Study of Ethiopian Nationalities (ISEN), which had two mandates—assessing the distribution, social, and economic conditions of ethnic groups in the country and recommending a new state structure that would provide regional autonomy for the various ethnic groups. Ultimately, the regime was not prepared to accept nationality as a political phenomenon that had to be addressed by a radical re-ordering of the basis of power in the state. Instead, the Derg introduced the constitution of the People's Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (PDRE) in 1987, which established an asymmetrical regime of regional autonomy.

Under this configuration, some of the provinces affected by the national/regional insurgency were organized into five autonomous regions—Eritrea, Tigray, Dire Dawa, Ogaden and Assab—while Eritrea was provided with more autonomy. In addition, the Derg translated the constitution into some peripheral languages and employed non-Amharic languages in its literacy programs, but there was no linguistic autonomy and Amharic remained the working language of the government at all levels. Moreover, "these measures were not intended to provide administrative and political autonomy as the military regime and its vanguard party, the Workers Party of Ethiopia (WPE) continued to centralize power."[4]

The failure to fully acknowledge national rights encouraged the national based revolts that would ultimately be the undoing of the regime. The threat that politicized national

[2] Email from former and late President of Ethiopia and former OPDO leader, Dr. Negaso Gidada, March 1, 2017.
[3] Author interview with Gebru Asrat, former Chairman of Tigray, Addis Ababa, May 13, 2017.
[4] 'Ethiopia's Ethnic Federalism: History and Ideology', retrieved from https://openaccess.leidenuniv.nl/bitstream/handle/1887/13839/chapter%20three.pdf, accessed March 20, 2020.

groups pose to social stability arises directly from their exclusion from states specifically organized to monopolize power for particular favored groups and preserve a status quo in which they are the prime beneficiaries (Markakis 1994), something both the Bolsheviks and the TPLF opposed. It is thus national monopolized states, and not marginalized groups, that are the cause of struggles over state power in Ethiopia and the Horn.

After establishing itself in Tigray, the capture of central state power increasingly became the focus of the TPLF and that necessitated either accepting non-Tigrayans within its ranks, which would involve reinventing itself as a pan-Ethiopian movement, or—and this more closely matched its philosophy—forming a multi-national front. The TPLF thus established the EPRDF as a front with a unified program, leadership, and army. Where movements did not exist, it established them (see Young 1997b, 62, 166). The OLF was never considered for membership because it favored the "establishment of a people's republic of Oromia" although it subsequently divided over the issue (Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) 1976, 15–16). For its part, a consistent fear of the OLF was that "the TPLF aspires to forge hierarchical relations with the Oromos."[5] The Amhara-dominated Ethiopian Peoples' Democratic Movement (EPDM) was replaced by the Amhara National Democratic Movement (ANDM) to emphasize its national character and distinguish it from Professor Asrat's All Amhara Organization. The ANDM came together with the TPLF to form the EPRDF, which were joined in 1990 by the TPLF-constructed Oromo Peoples' Democratic Organization (OPDO) and later by the Southern Ethiopia Peoples' Democratic Front (SEPDF). It was that alliance as the EPRDF took power in May 1991. A host of other armed national groups were invited to a peace conference in July and subsequently joined the EPRDF in the transitional government.

Some leaders, including Meles, had visited Europe prior to the EPRDF assuming power, most had travelled in the region, and all had spent time in Sudan. Nonetheless, they were surprised by the political realities they faced on the eve of their assumption of state power. The realities were two-fold, and both proved major obstacles to EPRDF hopes of implementing socialism, which their leaders understood to mean a transformative make-over of Ethiopia. First, they were coming to power at a time when the "socialist world," even if condemned by the TPLF/EPRDF leadership for its betrayal of socialism and the working class, was collapsing before a triumphalist and aggressive capitalist West. Capitalism only had a weak hold economically in peripheral areas of the global economy like Africa in 1991. But as an ideological formation it was rapidly assuming a hegemonic position that could not be ignored by a poverty-stricken Ethiopia that desperately needed finances, not only for development, but to fend off the prospect of another famine on the scale of 1984. Moreover, by the early 1980s neoliberalism had been widely embraced by the metropoles of capitalism, and with the collapse of the Soviet Bloc they were anxious to speed up the role back of the welfare gains of the post-World War II working class.

Second, Derg rule had completely tarnished the notion of socialism in the mind of the citizens of the country. 1991 marked the formal collapse of the Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc, but its crisis was evident to even the most casual observer by the late 1980s, and there was a growing need for the EPRDF to confront the emerging situation. In addition, as one TPLF veteran said, "The Derg was so hated that upon coming to power we [the EPRDF] couldn't say a word about socialism. Our people hated Marxism." Another veteran said,

[5] Email to the author from Leencho Lata, former leader of the OLF, March 12, 2017.

"The Ethiopian people think that socialism and the Derg are the same and both are hated." No doubt this was true, but hatred of the Derg's so-called socialist project was widely known long before the EPRDF came to power.[6]

It was in that context that the Front held an emergency congress in the field in 1990 in which it decided to be "more political and less ideological to survive." This was graphically expressed in a transitional program that Meles hastily formulated and which contradicted much of what the TPLF and EPRDF had long advocated. The EPRDF endorsed a market economy, effectively the previously hated Washington Consensus, and felt compelled to further endorse—but not effectively implement—multipartyism and political pluralism to alleviate Western fears of its perceived Marxism-Leninism. The EPRDF also quickly stopped referring to its role as that of a vanguard party overseeing Ethiopia's transition from pre-capitalism to socialism, and the TPLF's Marxist-Leninist League of Tigray (MLLT) and its ANDM, OPDO, and EPRDF counterparts were quietly dropped. Among the EPRDF leadership, the rapid displacement of a set of ideological formations that had informed and inspired a generation of cadres was carried out with remarkably little dissent, so convincing were the obstacles that had to be confronted. But acceptance by the Front's base of these ideological gymnastics was not so easy to put into practice.

While any notion of a transformative project was rejected, the EPRDF was not prepared to accept the loss of Ethiopian autonomy demanded by the Western power brokers, the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund. The issue came to a head within a few months of the EPRDF assuming state power in 1991 when the IMF demanded not only adherence to a market economy, but for the government to privatize land, financial institutions, and all state corporations. Refusal to bow down to these demands led to the IMF suspending a USD 127 million loan, an action strongly condemned by Joseph Stiglitz (2002) in his book, *Globalization and its Discontents*. Even Meles, who was among the EPRDF leaders most willing to compromise with international capital, insisted that the government would not permit a market in peasant land, loss of control over the financial and other key elements in the economy, or reverse national based federalism that the Front was in the process of implementing. Although accepting that endorsement of capitalism meant some loss of sovereignty, control over fiscal and monetary policy remained key objectives of the Front and this more than any remaining socialist sentiments explain its willingness to stand up to the IMF.

While the notion of a vanguard party had lost its meaning since the EPRDF had given up its socialist aspirations and no longer claimed to lead any classes, the practice of the party maintaining a leading role in governance continued to ensure its program could be realized, convince its cadres that a progressive project (even if not a socialist project) was still being pursued, and maintain power in a context where a measure of pluralism was demanded by the West. This approach was called revolutionary democracy, a confusing term popularized by Meles in a context where socialism was formally rejected. In practice, it was largely directed at rent-seekers who in class terms were defined as the corrupt wing of the national bourgeoisie.[7] Although no longer the vanguard of the peasantry, the EPRDF maintained an attachment to it. And while the individual rights that characterize capitalism were af-

[6] During my visit to TPLF occupied Tigray in 1988, party cadres were reluctant to talk about ideological issues, especially the attraction of some of its leaders to Albania.

[7] Alex de Waal takes up this issue in his 2015a published book, *The Real Politics of the Horn of Africa*, Polity Press, 2015.

firmed, group or national rights under the guiding principle of national self-determination, and through the pursuit of a nation-based federalism, became a core commitment of the regime, which held that there was no contradiction between the two principles.

3.4 Establishing a Nation-Based Federalism

The EPRDF convened a national conference in July 1991, which was attended by twenty-seven organizations, nineteen of them representing national groups and only three were of a pan-Ethiopian persuasion. The EPRP and the All-Ethiopian Socialist Movement (MEISON) were not permitted to attend the conference, ostensibly because they failed to renounce violence, but it had more to do with their opposition to the national-based program of the EPRDF and a history of bad relations between them.

During this period, two main opposing groups took shape, together with a third minor group.[8] The EPRDF, its allies, and the OLF gave priority to the right to national self-determination, which was held to be a necessary precondition for democracy. Like Abiy in present times, the second group resisted what they considered the ethnicization of Ethiopia because it did not reflect the country's history, would undermine unity, and sow the seeds of discord. Essentially this group viewed Ethiopia as a nation-state and saw the EPRDF and OLF project as a threat. A final and smaller group made up of national minorities welcomed these expressions of national assertiveness and self-rule but feared that some of the more developed nations might decide the fate of the weaker minorities.

The conference adopted the EPRDF's Transitional Charter, which laid down the legal framework for reconstituting the state and devolving power along ethno-regional lines. Some critics claimed these arrangements were designed to ensure the hegemony of the minority Tigrayans (Balcha Berhanu (2007); International Crisis Group (2009)), others that it gave the central government too much power, and still others that it would bring about the disintegration of the country. Essentially the argument pitted the fears and claims of ethnic nationalists (primarily Oromo) against those of upholders of a centralized Ethiopia (primarily Amhara). In a response that could have been written by Stalin, the EPRDF said that the war had been a product of an ethnically dominated state that threatened state disintegration and Front policies were designed to both preserve the unity of the state and harness ethnic energies to promote development.

The EPRDF's denigration of historical conceptions of Ethiopia was in sharp contrast to previous regimes (Clapham 2002) and was not even accepted by many Tigrayans. But like the Bolsheviks, the TPLF wanted to move beyond frequently mythical portrayals of the past and remove the central place of the Amhara in that past. Nonetheless, Ethiopians continue to be challenged by the questions as to whether Menelik II was an oppressor or a nation builder, with Abiy in the latter camp. The EPRDF wanted to reconstruct an Ethiopian identity that acknowledged its imperial past but was not in tension with existing and emerging ethnic identities.

In January 1992, the Transitional Government passed the "Proclamation to Provide for the Establishment of National/Regional Self-Government," which divided the country into ethnic blocs. The Boundaries Commission was founded that made language the critical

[8] Email from Medhane Tadesse, independent researcher, February 12, 2017.

variable in defining ethnic markers[9] and fourteen regions were established, with divisions in the regions left to local governments, again following the pattern of the Soviet Union.

But anger over what it perceived as the EPRDF's failure to follow the spirit of the Transitional Charter led to clashes between OLF and government forces. While the EPRDF demanded that the Oromo Liberation Army be demobilized, the OLF insisted that its forces be integrated into the national army. Competition between the OLF and the OPDO, together with the flawed 1992 regional elections, led to increasing tensions and the departure of the OLF from the transitional government. From the perspective of the EPRDF, the OLF was trying to achieve through negotiations what it could not accomplish on the battlefield while the OLF wanted to press to its fullest the logic of the EPRDF commitment to national self-determination. There were also problems with the National Liberation Front in the Somali region and the Sidama Liberation Front but given the overwhelming military and political power of the EPRDF they were brought in line.

The departure of the OLF ended a major obstacle to EPRDF plans, but it also lost the support of an organization that broadly shared its vision of a federation and opposed a centralized Ethiopian state. Although the OLF was militarily defeated, it remained a political threat. Without an alliance with the OLF, centralizing tendencies increasingly came to the fore. This problem is even more evident in the wake of the assent of Abiy and pursuit of a renewed centralization when the two strongest forces in Ethiopia in favor of decentralization—the TPLF and OLF—have been divided by a legacy of bitterness. If the TPLF is defeated in the November 2020 war it would also dash Oromo hopes of a decentralized federalism, and thus Abiy may be inadvertently laying the groundwork for their reconciliation.

While having important minorities, Tigray, Amhara, Oromo, Somali, and Afar regions had ethnic cores. But the other regions were formed by bringing different ethnic groups under one unit. The only apparent basis for this distinction appears to be the size of the ethnic community. Even here, tiny Harar was given special status and not included in Oromia, despite its Oromo majority, to protect its cultural survival. Meanwhile, the two and half million strong Sidama were only granted a zone within the Southern Nations, Nationalities and People (SNNP) Regional State. The EPRDF was slow to organize affiliated parties in the Somali and Afar regions because it concluded that clan, and not ethnicity, defined identity in pastoralist societies, and thus it endeavored to work with traditional leaders.

The resulting configuration was far from clear and the regions were highly diverse with respect to size, population, and resources. The lack of ethnic homogeneity in even the five aforementioned states necessitated special zones and *woreda*s (districts) to accommodate minorities. The Southern Ethiopia Peoples' Region was the most ethnically diverse, which necessitated the establishment of fourteen zones and five special woredas. This restructuring did not always take place peacefully as some areas lost administrative status and groups fought to have regional and woreda centers and the accompanying budgets. The regional structures were already operational before they were given a constitutional basis by the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia constitution, which was passed in August 1995.[10]

[9] In making language as the critical indicator of ethnicity, the EPRDF again closely followed Bolshevik practice. Although experience in northeast Africa provides numerous examples of national groups that see themselves as part of a broader national community even when they do not share the same language, other groups do share a language, but do not consider themselves part of a shared community. (See Schlee 2001; 2008.)

[10] Proclamation No. 1/1995.

Unlike those in the West, the Ethiopian constitution is not just an agreement between citizens but also constitutes an agreement between national groups (Young 1998). The EPRDF explicitly rejected the nation-state model that underpins Western states and was transplanted to Africa. The constitution's definition of the nation closely followed Stalin: "a nation, nationality or people is a group of people who have or share a large measure of common culture or similar customs, mutual intelligibility of language, belief in a common or related identities, a common psychological make-up, and who inhabit an identifiable, predominantly contiguous territory."[11] The definition proved sufficiently vague (the distinction between nation, nationality, and people was never made) that determining boundaries was largely made politically.

In keeping with devolving power to national groups, the powers of the federal government were identified and limited: "All powers not given expressly to the Federal government alone, or concurrently to the Federal Government and the States, are reserved to the States."[12] But this is immediately clarified by Article 51/2 that gives the federal government the right to "formulate and implement the country's policies, strategies and plans in respect to overall economic, social and development matters" and Article 52 empowers the states to "formulate and execute economic, social development policies, strategies and plans for the state." By this provision economic planning and development were centralized in similar fashion to that of the former Soviet Union.

The same tension exists between centralization and decentralization. For example, Article 39 specifies that "Every Nation, Nationality and People in Ethiopia has the right to speak, to write and to develop its own language; to express, to develop and to promote its culture; and to preserve its history." It is not clear whether land belong to the nations, nationalities, regional states, or the federal government although practice has been that natural resources belong to the federal government. That would also seem to be implied by Article 40 which states that, "The right to ownership of rural and urban land, as well as natural resources, are exclusively vested in the State and the peoples of Ethiopia."[13]

While the rights of peasants and pastoralists is affirmed, a problem arises due to the statement, "Without prejudice to the right of Ethiopian Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples to the ownership of land, government shall ensure the right to private investors to the use of land on the basis of payment arrangements establishment be law." How the federal government can give land grants to private investors, an area of considerable controversy in the lowlands, without prejudice to the rights of individual Nations, Nationalities and Peoples is not explained.

A further basis for centralization and critical to the pursuit of state-led development is Article 89, which makes clear that development is primarily the prerogative of the federal government and that "government has the duty to hold, on behalf of the People, land and other natural resources and to deploy them for their common benefit and development."

The constitution provided for a bicameral legislature at the center made up of a House of Peoples Representatives and a House of the Federation, which bears comparison to the Soviet of Nationalities. While the former body is elected by direct universal suffrage for five years and has exclusive power of making laws, the House of Federation represents national

[11] Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, Article 39(5). http://www.wipo.int/edocs/lexdocs/laws/en/et/et007en.pdf, accessed February 4, 2020.
[12] Ibid, Article 52.
[13] See also chapter 5 in this volume.

groups, and its representatives are selected by the regional or state councils with every recognized nationality having at least one representative and an additional one for every million people. The House of Federation has the responsibility of resolving differences between the country's national groups and acting as a court of last resort through its Committee for States' Affairs. It also decides on the division of joint federal and regional tax sources, subsidies of the federal government to the regions, and it nominates a largely symbolic president for the country who must then be approved by a two-thirds vote of both houses.

As in the Soviet Union, language is considered the determining characteristic of nations in Ethiopia and Article 5 of the 1995 constitution grants the equality of all the country's languages and gives the regions the right to determine their own working languages. But just as Russian became the language of inter-ethnic communication across the Soviet Union after 1936, Amharic was designated the "working language" of the federal government. Apart from the Amhara, the other major language groups, such as Oromo, Tigray, Somali, and Afar, began teaching in their indigenous languages for the early years of school and Amharic served as a secondary area of study, before turning to English for the latter years. Just as many Central Asian groups dropped the Cyrillic script used in Russian in favor of the Latin script, the OPDO abandoned the Abyssinian Geez script for the Latin alphabet and this was followed by many ethnic language groups in the Southern Region. And just as the shift from Russian proved to be an obstacle for employment prospects for many Central Asians, so many Oromo have discovered they are handicapped in seeking jobs outside their region and in the Amharic-speaking central government. Hence rose the demand that Afaan Oromo be given the status of a national working language.

After initially encouraging the development of indigenous languages, the problems of isolation and lack of resources led the EPRDF to stress unity and efficiency and discourage administrative proliferation. With every incentive for local politically ambitious groups to call for their own region, zone, or woreda, the ruling party shifted gears on a process that followed from their own political program. The Soviet Union took the same course, in part for these same administrative reasons and because Stalin returned to promoting a Russification that he and the Bolsheviks had previously attacked. After the break-up of the Soviet Union, President of the Russian Federation, Vladimir Putin, has also encouraged Russian nationalism and emphasized its links to the Orthodox Church.

However, the war with Eritrea produced a wave of pan-Ethiopian nationalism that initially trumped the national consciousness the regime had fostered and gave the lie to President Isaias Afwerki and others who had assumed that Ethiopia under the EPRDF had been reduced to a collection of warring national groups. This bears comparison with Soviet experience where the Second World War (the "Great Patriotic War") produced a powerful wave of nationalism led by Russians, which encouraged Stalin to launch his Russification campaign against narrow nationalism. In the wake of the Eritrean war (1998–2000), the EPRDF also condemned narrow nationalism, but it is noteworthy that the pan-Ethiopian nationalist wave was often led by peripheral and marginalized communities like the Nuer of Gambella who used the war to assert their Ethiopian identity. The Tigrayan-led EPRDF could not permit the espousal of Ethiopian nationalism to be confused with Amhara chauvinism and as a result attempted to popularize notions like democratic nationalism to distinguish it from the chauvinist nationalism of the Amhara and the narrow nationalism of separatists.

As was the case in the Soviet Union, national states in Ethiopia are based on a conception of primordialism although, unlike the Soviet Union after 1991, the EPRDF end game

was no longer to construct a nationless and classless future. Following Soviet practice, the officially designated regions do not always coincide with the established regional boundaries, the system undervalues shared histories, changing characteristics, population movements, and by attempting to contain these groups it sometimes undermines national integration. As was the case in the Soviet Union, many people in Ethiopia have mixed national origins. And just as Greater Russians in the non-Russian heartland bore much of the cost for the Soviet governance configuration, so the status of the Amhara in Ethiopia was reduced because of the imposition of a nation-based federalism.

Like the Soviet Union, Ethiopia's regional states have executive, legislative, and judicial powers and are headed by powerful presidents. Below the presidents are zonal administrations that are appointed by the regions and tasked with overseeing woreda administrations. Woredas have elected council, elected executive and judicial bodies, and the power to prepare, determine, and implement activities within its own areas concerning social services and economic development.[14] There are also provisions for special woredas to provide self-government for minority ethnic groups not numbering enough to establish zones or regions, and they report directly to the regional governments. At the bottom of the governance hierarchy is the *kebele* which has responsibility for law and order and providing basic services.

Critics of the EPRDF system of federalism have noted that the privileging of "indigenous" national groups has often come at the cost of limiting the rights of minority groups within the regions. In response, some of the regions have granted these minorities special woredas, but they do not have guaranteed representation in the regional government or its institutions and unless they form geographical blocs, they may be politically marginalized. Regional states have not always protected the rights of national minorities, but out of respect for the constitution, or in the case of Oromia concern about arousing national sensitivities, the center has refused to take up the issue in a context where Oromo nationalists direct their anger against what is held to be a TPLF-dominated EPRDF and national government. There have also been problems over boundaries and the establishment of local administrations throughout the country, and some of them have led to violence. As with the Soviet Union, such disputes were dealt with in an EPRDF-dominated state, but in the case of the Oromo region the disputes spread to the streets and posed a major political challenge for the government.

The Constitution of Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples (SNNP) has elected zonal councils, which in some cases represent specific ethnic communities, while the regional state executive is shared among the political elite in much the same manner as at the federal level. As a result, the Southern region has been called a "federation within a federation" (Assefa Fiseha 2015), and with the exception of demands of Sidama for their own region until recently the region was widely considered the best administered in the country. The same cannot be said of Oromia, which has from its inception been administratively weak and has major border conflicts with its neighbors.

In other regions, like Benishangul-Gumuz and Gambella, which could be compared to some of the backward Soviet Asian republics, a different practice emerged. Before the imposition of the EPRDF system of federalism, national conflict was common, particularly in Gambella between the Anywaa and the Nuer, but there was no developed nationalism and no support for secession. There, the EPRDF took a paternalistic approach to governance.

[14] Proclamation 7/92, Article 40.

Initially, this took the form of the Regional Affairs Department and later the Ministry of Federal Affairs, which operates out of the Prime Minister's office. Previously known to "hire and fire" poorly performing governors and other regional officials, since 2001 its overt role has declined and it is now limited to "enhancing the capacity of the less developed states" (Assefa Fiseha 2015, 17). Despite the weaknesses of some of the regional governments, the EPRDF followed the Soviet Union in devoting considerable human and financial resources to developing peripheral cultures and languages, expressed by the country's foremost secular holiday, which celebrates cultural diversity.

3.5 Comparisons and Analyses

The EPRDF came to power at the end of the Cold War and the start of a new era of Western triumphalism and renewed efforts to remake the world in its image. The West insisted that capitalism and its system of economic organization, governance, values, and ideology be wholeheartedly embraced and the socialism that inspired the EPRDF relegated to history's dustbin. The EPRDF was caught between its own ideology and the unanticipated realities of the post-Cold War era. The EPRDF model of governance was based on the writings of the Bolsheviks and experience of the Soviet Union, but during the armed struggle it condemned the same Soviet Union as "social-imperialist." Indeed, shortly before taking power and on the eve of the collapse of the socialist bloc, the appointed leader of the TPLF and EPRDF, Meles Zenawi said, "the Soviet Union and other Eastern-bloc countries have never been truly socialist. The nearest any country comes to being socialist as far as we are concerned is Albania."[15] Despite such views, the EPRDF might still have expected to align with the socialist bloc or at the least have it provide a counterpart to the West and the ideological space to pursue its program.

A useful starting point is the debate of the left at the end of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that foresaw the dangers inherent in unbridled nationalist movements. The Bolsheviks' fear that they would assume a reactionary and violent form if they did not encourage and lead rising nationalisms was borne from the First World War in which 17 million people were killed. This was followed by fascistic nationalistic movements that provided the background to the Second World War and the death of 50 million more people. And in the present era, neofascist movements are expanding in Eastern Europe, finding constituencies in Germany, Italy, France, and the Netherlands, and xenophobic nationalism was at the core of Donald Trump's electoral victory in November 2016. Closer to Ethiopia, waves of ethno-nationalist violence have swelled in Somalia and Sudan, and independent South Sudan experienced a full-fledged civil war in 2013.

Until the recent appearance of balanced studies of the Soviet Union and its experience with nation-building (e.g. Blaut 1987; Vihavainen 2000; Martin 2001; Slezkine 1994)[16], the widespread view was that its collapse on December 26, 1991, was due to its failed state-managed economy and a misplaced federal model. These conclusions were also used to discredit the EPRDF project. However, the collapse of the Soviet federation can be attributed

[15] *The Independent*, London, November 28, 1989.

[16] Western "Sovietology" held that national rights were systematically denied in the country in favor of a totalitarian Communist Party of the Soviet Union, but when the Soviet Union splintered along national lines the position of the Western experts abruptly changed. Even the role of Stalin is being challenged in important studies such as, Getty and Manning (1993) and Furr (2011).

to many factors, in particular dissatisfaction with the central government and not intractable national differences. In response to widespread dissatisfaction, Mikhail Gorbachev introduced *glasnost* (opening), *perestroika* (restructuring), *demokratizatsiya* (democratization), and *uskoreniye* (acceleration of economic development) at the 27th Congress of the CPSU in February 1986. He subsequently called for a confederal Soviet Union in which the republics would regain much of the autonomy and sovereignty they had prior to Stalin's changes. Apart from the Baltic republics, Georgia, and Armenia, there was little support in the Soviet Union for outright secession. This was made clear in a March 1991 referendum in which 76 percent of the people with an 80 percent turnout voted to preserve the Union and eight of the nine republics subsequently signed the new union treaty (Brown 1996).

To reverse the reforms and reassert the central government's control over the republics, eight high-ranking Soviet officials orchestrated a coup and demanded that Gorbachev reject the treaty and declare a state of emergency. He refused, was held prisoner, and only freed by the intervention of the Russian leader, Boris Yeltsin, who declared the coup unconstitutional and led a public protest in the streets of Moscow. Once the coup was defeated, however, Yeltsin (who wanted to quickly carry out market reforms) and the other republic leaders set about dissolving the Soviet Union without consulting the voters or even the Supreme Soviets of their respective republics. The beneficiaries of the breakup of the Soviet Union were not the people, many of whom continue to be upset at the development, but the newly emergent political elites who moved quickly to assume the role of petty national based autocrats and take possession of state industries, resources, and properties.

While the USSR economy was stagnant in 1991, it was still experiencing a 2 percent growth rate and the economic crisis only developed after the breakup as a result of the shock doctrine of privatization and free markets pressed by Western economists in thrall to market fundamentalism. The result in Russia was not only hyperinflation and a 50 percent GDP loss but also the rapid decline of all social indices: sudden spikes rates of poverty, crime, corruption, unemployment, homelessness, disease, mortality, and income inequality, along with decreases in calorie intake, life expectancy, adult literacy, and income. Russia, Kazakhstan, Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia witnessed a 42 percent increase in male death rates between 1991 and 1994.[17] It was not socialism that brought about the rapid decline in living standards for the people of the former Soviet Union, but the pursuit of neoliberalism and the so-called Washington Consensus, under the direction of the IMF and World Bank. Moreover, until the coming to power of Vladimir Putin, Russia had become a virtual colony of the West and the US.

In the wake of Abiy's war against the TPLF Ethiopia faces a not dissimilar crisis, and like the Soviet Union the crisis had its roots in bad political decision-making and not because of its system of national federalism. Before Abiy dissolved the EPRDF, it experienced three major crises—in 2001 in the wake of the Ethio-Eritrean war, after the 2005 national elections, and in 2016 after a dispute over the expansion of Addis Ababa. This chapter cannot analyze these crises, but it is important to make their political character clear and emphasize that they could not be resolved by undermining the two major accomplishments of the EPRDF—national federalism and state-led development.

The crisis facing the EPRDF in the first instance derived from attempting to pursue a program of political and economic reform and rapid development in a highly unfavorable

[17] BBC (2009) "Privatisation raised death rate," January 15 (http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/health/7828901.stm, accessed March 20, 2020), see also Vladislav M. Zubok (2009, ix).

international context even though its conclusive military victory over the Derg gave the ruling party a measure of authority, administrative competence, and autonomy that set it apart from other ruling parties in Africa. But those advantages could not insulate the EPRDF from power struggles and conflicting visions that beset the party during and in the wake of what should have been its triumphal victory over Eritrea in the 1998–2000 war. While glossed over to present a united front, the TPLF was bitterly divided over the conduct of the war. Prime Minister Meles Zenawi led a minority faction that advocated a more conciliatory approach. The struggle came to the fore after the war and spread to other components of the EPRDF. The outcome was the emergence of a much empowered Meles, a massive purge of the party that eliminated many veteran leaders, and the end of the long-standing system of collegial leadership. One of the positive features of TPLF decision-making had been its rejection of the personality cults that have always featured in Ethiopian politics and the embrace of shared decision-making. This position meant that individuals like Tewolde W. Mariam with his sober thinking and organizational skills could complement Meles's quick intelligence or check his sometimes authoritarian impulses.

As well as eliminating many party stalwarts who he considered obstacles to his increasingly authoritarian rule, Meles also used the opportunity to remove (in the case of former Defense Minister Siye Abreha) and jail corrupt members of the EPRDF, or "rent-seekers" in the parlance of the Front. Siye was a particular concern because he had gained the support of a group, including some who challenged Meles's wartime opposition to the capture of Assab, the Eritrean Red Sea port. Meles turned to Marx's "Bonapartist thesis," which examined the circumstances in which counter-revolutionary military officers coopt the radicalism of the popular classes to mask their narrow base and attack their enemies. Meles's contended that some among the TPLF and later EPRDF were using their privileged positions in the state for individual gain. It was a curious argument to make for the leader of a party that had disavowed any attachment to Marxism and while some rent-seekers were removed in the resulting purge so were party devotees who embraced Marx more than Meles did. Crucially, Tewelde, who had opposed Meles's military policies, was removed as was Tsadkan, the chief of staff, who played a lead role in defeating Eritrea.

Also, of concern was that instead of conducting a *gim gema* or evaluation of the EPRDF's performance in which he would likely have faced strong criticism, Meles insisted that the party assess his Bonapartist thesis. This demand set the stage for the leadership division and the subsequent expulsions. Meles then continued his battle into the EPRDF and after refusing to call a meeting of the party's General Assembly, its highest organ, the purges spread. Achieving an almost complete victory, Meles and his colleagues claimed that the changes and expulsions brought clarity and ideological coherence to the party. But subsequent events prove that was not the case.

The EPRDF may have ascribed to capitalism, but nation-based federalism was not altered, the economy continued to be state led, the EPRDF affirmed its commitment to "revolutionary democracy," decision-making continued to be based on democratic centralism, the party officially rejected liberal democracy, and in practice it claimed what amounted to a proprietorial right over the country's peasantry. Medhane Tadesse and I concluded two years after these changes: "there are limits to how far the EPRDF can move away from its Marxist-Leninist origins. On one hand, it has accepted the presence of a national bourgeoisie, on the other it has made clear its continuing support for the development of an autonomous national economy in which the state retains a major role. Moreover, in such key areas as national

self-determination, land tenure, federalism, the vanguard status of the TPLF and EPRDF, support for the peasants, and lukewarm attitude to pluralism and civil society, the ruling party has not shifted position" (Medhane Tadesse and Young 2003).

Rather than a genuine renewal and audit of the party's performance, the main feature of the exercise was the demotion of Kuma Damaksa of the OPDO, the imprisonment of Abate Kisho of SEPDF, the resignation of the former Ethiopean president Negasso Gidada, and with the assistance of the ANDM, the empowering of Meles. These expulsions made it possible for Meles, who had become the darling of some sections of the West, to expand the country's military cooperation with the US and brought it increasingly into the US and Western security network. Given its overwhelmingly dominant political and military position in the country, opposition outside the party did not pose a serious threat, and few of the party dissidents wanted open conflict. The party thus united around Meles and this ensured that its problems could be attributed to the displaced dissidents, the changes he introduced would set Ethiopia on the right course, and no real evaluation would take place.

The unification around Meles also ensured that genuine problems of political direction, relations with the increasingly disaffected and growing urban population, and international relations were left to Meles and his advisors. These tensions came to the fore during the 2005 national elections in which 192 protestors were killed and 50,000 youth were arrested by the Ethiopian security forces. Meles's response was that this was not a political problem, but due to youth unemployment and economic disaffection. Against this background, he announced the goal of rapid economic development through state led development. In fact, this approach was already being implemented (Tadesse Medhane 2016), but under Meles it was largely guided by the experience of the rapidly industrializing states of Southeast Asia and not the Soviet Union.

The results of EPRDF state led development have been impressive: from 2000 to 2013 Ethiopia's annual per capita growth rate has averaged about 10 percent or almost double that of sub-Saharan Africa and life expectancy has increased from 52 years in 2000 to 63 in 2011. And while Ethiopia had one of the highest rates of poverty in the world in 2000 with 56 percent of its people living below USD 1.25 a day, by 2011 that figure had dropped to 31 percent (Hill and Eyasu Tsehaye 2014). Other social indices are equally impressive. The World Bank found that "Agricultural growth drove reductions in poverty, bolstered by pro-poor spending on basic services" and that 60 percent of the national budget was allocated to sectors of the economy that favor poor people (Hill and Tsehaye 2014, 17). Consistent with the EPRDF's claim to represent the interests of the peasantry, poverty reduction was almost exclusively in the countryside. These achievements, however, have been denied or ignored by critics of the regime. Since coming to power, the EPRDF contended that Ethiopia would disintegrate if poverty was not overcome. Front leaders also believe it would have to govern for decades to ensure the implementation of the necessary economic policies to secure a genuine transformation for the country, a policy that is inconsistent with notions of pluralism, competitive elections, and the regular transfer of power. Moreover, and unlike the proscriptions of economic orthodoxy, these achievements were not due to an unconstrained free market, but to high levels of government investment, projects, and planning.

However, rising living standards have not dampened discontent, which peaked again in 2016 over the expansion of Addis Ababa into Oromo lands. Land grabbing for real estate speculation and industrial use had caused conflicts in various parts of Oromia and these problems came to the fore when Oromo farmers on the outskirts of the national capital were

victimized. The problem began as a result of the arrogance and incompetence of administrators of the central government who were so anxious that land be made available for industrial development that they did not follow constitutional provisions to consult the Oromo regional government whose lands were needed or the municipal government of Addis Ababa. It also became apparent that OPDO officials were complicit in the extortion.

In a context where the government was increasingly distrusted, this administrative issue became a major political problem as Oromos claimed their fundamental rights were being denied. The government responded to their grievances by shooting hundreds of demonstrators, arresting thousands more, declaring martial law, and bringing the army on to the streets, thus exacerbating the problem. Meanwhile, Amhara in their regional state had their own grievances that included claims of Tigrayan dominance and the incorporation of the territory of Walkait into neighboring Tigray. They, too, went to the streets to protest and were shot. Probably more alarming for the EPRDF leadership was fear that the Amhara demonstrations were encouraged, or at least not discouraged, by the regional government. While the prevailing narrative maintains that Tigray benefited from domination of the national government and the EPRDF, Tigrayans complained of their expulsion from the Amhara region and the abuses and political marginalization they experienced in Oromia.

Apart from unleashing the security forces, the government responded by conducting hundreds of in-house appraisals, carrying out a massive purge, particularly of the OPDO, and holding out the possibility of further devolution of authority. As was the case after 2005, the government claimed that youth unemployment was a contributing factor to the problem and diverted more state resources to overcoming it. It promised better governance, reform of state institutions, appointment of non-party members to the cabinet, and other measures of a largely technical nature.[18] But these measures did not dampen the distrust in the government, just as raising living standards did not bring the EPRDF support.

The government's critics were not united, with some attributing the problem to national federalism and others to state led development, but collectively they emphasized EPRDF authoritarianism, TPLF domination, and the need for democratic change. Critics accused the EPRDF of being elitist and opaque, running roughshod over competing political organizations, having scant respect for elections, controlling parliament (of the 547 MPs in the current House of Representatives only 1 belonged to an opposition party and 1 to an independent party), having a fetish about control, opposing the emergence of an independent judiciary, viewing urban dwellers and middle class Ethiopians as potential enemies, and assuming a proprietorial position over the peasantry.[19] EPRDF policy successes included the raising living standards, increasing educational levels, and improving opportunities served to create a growing class of people disaffected at their political marginalization. While cultural diversity was encouraged, political pluralism was given short-shrift and independent voices in civil society, the media, and trade unions were repressed by the EPRDF. The state was crucial to the EPRDF in similar fashion to that of the Bolsheviks. The situation is analogous to that described by Gramsci (Gramsci 1992, 873) who wrote, "the state was everything, yet civil society was still primordial and gelatinous."

The authoritarianism tendencies of the EPRDF was a genuine concern, but the demand for democratic change is problematic. First, the kind of democracy proposed—liberal democracy—has been radically revised under the impetus of neoliberalism and lost much of

[18] Ethiopian Prime Mister Speech to the parliament, October 10, 2016.
[19] See e.g. Ottaway (1995), Gudina (2003) and Aalan (2006).

its liberating character. Second, it is a product of the advanced capitalist states and cannot be translated wholesale to Ethiopia as Abiy is discovering. Neoliberalism is not just a means by which the economy is organized, but also involves increasingly undemocratic forms of governance. The notion that the only means to achieve development is for peripheral states to adopt the institutions and practices of the West was the by-word of modernization theory in the 1960s. It subsequently fell out of favor because of its blatant Eurocentricism, but again came to the fore in the late 1970s and 80s under the guise of neoliberalism, which held that privatization of state assets, floating currencies, rejection of economic justice, and the like are prerequisites to achieving development.

In practice, this meant elections served as a means for the orderly circulation of elites, the role of governments was reduced as decisions were increasingly made by corporations beyond public purview, national sovereignty was undermined as governments were made beholden to the Bretton Woods institutions and international trade agreements, and everyday life was increasingly subject to the laws of the market and commodification. Former US Federal Reserve Chairman, Alan Greenspan, gave the game away when he declared that elections do not matter much because thanks to globalization the world is governed by market forces, not elected representatives. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, the West rejected long established notions of economic justice and equality while private enterprise was held to be the foundation of democracy (Abrahamsen 2000). The growing inequalities within states and between states were legitimized and held to be a necessary product of development, while socialism was viewed as antithetical to democracy and associated with a failed Soviet model.

The EPRDF was correct to view neoliberalism as inappropriate for a poverty-stricken Ethiopia. But issues of accountability, the authoritarian character of the state, and the EPRDF's hegemonic position in the government could not be brushed aside simply because the model of governance being pressed on it by the West and its elite supporters in the country were not suitable. To be clear, the EPRDF's endorsement and pursuit of national self-determination, national rights, economic justice, and equality are all critical components of democracy, especially when it is appreciated that historically democracy was understood to be a process to advance the interests of the poor, the disenfranchised, and the nationally marginalized. But genuine democracy involves the widest possible popular engagement and empowerment, respect for basic human rights, and does not involve the protection of powerful interests, all of which characterized EPRDF governance.

The EPRDF rejected liberal democracy, but failed to develop, refine, and press alternative means of accountability, such as gim gema, that had been widely employed to critically assess programs, leadership, and the personal conduct of its members (Young 1997a). Gim gema became a cornerstone of the TPLF's practice of governance and after 1991 was introduced into the various institutions of the state. TPLF leaders believed that gim gema would ensure that the movement maintained its revolutionary ideals and not succumb to the temptations of state power. But the TPLF never had the power or the level of commitment to fully introduce gim gema into the federal government and civil service, therefor it was never given a legal basis or refined in response to the new conditions of administering a state (Tadesse Medhane and Young 2003). As one senior TPLF cadre noted, party members were receptive to gim gema and personal criticism during the armed struggle because they had little to lose materially, but after victory careers and social standing could be threatened and

this potentially revolutionary tool has become formalistic and an instrument of management (Medhane and Young 2003).

Notions like gim gema were a product of the revolutionary past and, together with the Bolshevik thinkers that inspired the TPLF and EPRDF, became a source of embarrassment. The EPRDF rejected neoliberalism but at the same time endorsed its two main principles—capitalism and global economic integration. The EPRDF spurned liberal democracy, but its alternative was a thinly disguised authoritarianism. The high moral standards of the TPLF during the armed struggle were rooted in socialist values, but since the commitment to capitalism in 1991 public morality was increasingly shaped by the market, and the EPRDF looked to technocratic leadership and managerial systems to contain corruption and rent-seeking with, at best, mixed results.

While it would be a mistake to blame Meles entirely for the problems faced by the EPRDF, he did end the system of collegial leadership, which provided a measure of control over him and ensured open debate at the highest levels of the party and government. Even his admirers cannot defend the underhanded means he used to force long serving and loyal cadres to leave the TPLF and EPRDF. He replaced experienced cadres with technocrats, apparently assuming that since he had provided the development map the country could safely be put on auto-pilot. This ensured there would be no audit of the EPRDF and debate would be restricted to technical measures. Meles was widely respected but never popular in the country.

Although condemned by international human rights organizations he was admired by former British Prime Minister Tony Blair and former US President Bill Clinton. Meles's desire for international acceptance led him to cooperate with Western security forces and align Ethiopia's foreign policy with the US Global War on Terror and join George Bush's "coalition of the willing" in the war against Iraq. To his credit, Meles inaugurated *Metekakat*, or leadership replacement, which led to the retirement of many among Tigrayan political and security elite. It also meant that upon Meles's death in 2012 Hailemariam Desalegn, a Pentecostal Christian and a member of one of Ethiopia's most disadvantaged communities, the Welayta, assumed power. But perhaps the biggest failing of Meles was marginalizing potential challengers, constructing a government and ruling party dependent on him, turning his back on the pursuit of class politics, and laying the basis for the EPRDF's ideological confusion and displacement.

Abiy was able to come to power because of a tactical alliance between the Amhara and Oromo components of the four parties that made up the EPRDF to isolate the TPLF. Once in power Abiy ended the state of hostilities with Eritrea for which he gained the 2019 Nobel Peace Prize, although by the end of 2020 the borders between Eritrea and Ethiopia remained closed and there was no trade between the countries. He was successful, however, in establishing a pact with Eritrea's President Isais Afwerki, who also opposed national federalism because it threatened his unitary state, to fight the TPLF. Abiy's policy of reconciling with foreign based armed groups weakened the central state, made parts of the country ungovernable and led to what he claimed was an attempted coup in June 2019 when an Amhara extremist officer who had been dismissed in 2009 for an earlier attempted coup and then rehabilitated by Abiy, killed the Ethiopian chief of defense staff and a handful of other senior officials.[20]

[20] New York Times, June 23, 2019.

Apart from Tigray, Abiy has faced major problems in Oromia where the central government has lost control of western parts of the state and jailed many from the recently returned armed groups as well as civilian party leaders, while 81 civilians were killed in June 2020 after the popular activist musician Hachalu Hundessa was killed by the army. Many of these problems stem from the disillusionment of Oromos who have discovered to their dismay that Abiy who they had viewed as one of their own supports the centrist government that generations of Oromos have opposed. Having lost his ethnic constituency, Abiy largely depends on the Amhara elites who he elevated to senior positions in the security services, Amhara militia angered that the TPLF has taken over disputed border lands, and state governments that are largely made up of allies he has placed in power. Although Abiy has made clear that the main point of contention is to replace TPLF supported national federalism with a unitary state, there is no indication that most Ethiopians want a return to the centrist government that produced countless national rebellions under the imperial system and the Derg.

Almost from the day he took power, Abiy viewed the TPLF as the main threat to his regime and long before war broke out, he had dismissed Tigrayan ministers and officials in the government, Tigrayan heads of the army and national security, and many generals. Things reached a crisis when Abiy, who has never been elected by the Ethiopian people, indefinitely postponed national and state elections scheduled for September 2020, because of Covid-19 according to his allies, or because he would lose claim his critics. Responding as strict constitutionalists or in an effort to embarrass Abiy, the TPLF went ahead with elections in Tigray, won resoundingly, and as a result neither the central government, or the state government recognized one another.

Long before Abiy took power there was a virtual consensus of the need to reform, but not end, the system of national federalism. EPRDF policies had served to increase the standards of living of many Ethiopians, but this economic advance empowered the central state and threatened to undermine the EPRDF's decentralized national based federation. Meanwhile, economic development gave rise to classes in the towns, cities, and countryside that employed the nationalism that EPRDF policies encouraged to attack the government. Youths in Oromia and the Amhara region launched attacks on the TPLF and Tigrayans, shutting off road transport to Tigray for weeks while the central government did nothing. The central government also did little to protect Tigrayans living outside their home state, mostly in the Amhara region, from being killed and forced off their land. Meanwhile, Oromos charged Tigrayans along with Amhara of expanding into their lands during the feudal era and complained of TPLF domination of the EPRDF.

Like the Soviet Union, in the wake of Meles's death Ethiopian governance was in need of reform, but the changes pressed by Abiy together with his anti-TPLF and by extension anti-Tigrayan campaign have led to war. And the longer the war continues the more that central government troops will be reassigned from locations, particularly in Oromia, to the Tigray battle fronts and thus provide opportunities for armed groups in these areas, the more that ethno-nationalist groups elsewhere in the country led by the OLF will conclude that should the TPLF be defeated their hopes for achieving a decentralized Ethiopian state will die, and that differences between these groups and the TPLF can be overcome and bring their collective weight against the Abiy government. Instead of defeating the TPLF as a means to defeat national federalism, Abiy's war could instead bring about the disintegration of Ethiopia or result in an even more decentralized federation.

3.6 Conclusion

Consideration of the EPRDF's system of national federalism and approach to the nation-state has largely taken place within the confines of Western social science, but this chapter has proceeded from the assumption that much can be gained from examining these issues in light of the studies of the Bolshevik leaders and early developments of the system in the Soviet Union. Not only were the TPLF and other political parties that emerged from the Ethiopian student movement strongly influenced by the Bolsheviks on the national question but the imperial Ethiopia they were dedicated to overthrowing bore striking comparisons to the Tsarist Russian empire overthrown by the Bolsheviks.

There are, however, limits to these comparisons, notably the early Bolsheviks were largely Russians dedicated to dismantling a Russian constructed empire, while the leaders of the TPLF were drawn from a community that had been junior partners in an Amhara dominated feudal state. While the Bolsheviks smashed the Tsarist state and replaced it with their own as a means—they hoped—to realize their objective of socialism, upon coming to power the EPRDF dropped its commitment to a transformative project, endorsed capitalism, and largely operated through the existing central state. While national federalism was an end in itself for the EPRDF, for the Bolsheviks it was a way station on the road to socialism.

Despite, not because of, its approach to the national question, the Soviet Union collapsed, and thus ensued a long period of decline and suffering for many people of the former federation. Unless Ethiopia can overcome its problems, it could face a similar fate. The suffering in the states of the former Soviet Union was due to the adoption of neoliberalism and acceptance of liberal democracy, the solutions professed by Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed for Ethiopia. But what set the Soviet Union on the course to that catastrophe was a flawed reform process and one that did not address growing economic inequalities. The reform process launched by Gorbachev was desperately needed, long delayed, and unavoidable, but its catastrophic results were due to the fact that the Soviet Union had long since betrayed its revolutionary origins (Furr 2011).

Although the EPRDF leadership contended that ideological concerns were resolved in 1991 with the acceptance of capitalism and the Front and its components did not take up ideological issues again until the advent of Abiy, there remained a tension, if not a contradiction, between its commitment to capitalism and the remnants of a leftist past in its orientation, party structure, policies, and commitment to the peasants. TPLF and EPRDF fears about the response of the West to its leftist ideological orientation in 1991 were understandable given the triumphalism of a resurgent West claiming victory over socialism and prepared to use its political, economic, and even military power against dissenting third world regimes. That global power continues to be a major constraint on the ability of peripheral states to formulate policies that meet the needs of their people, not serve the interests of the capitalist metropoles, and maintain national sovereignty.

But that was then, and the global context now is less constraining. The unipolar world that existed in 1991 has undergone radical changes and the West no longer poses the threat it once did. China is a major player on the international stage in both the economic and political spheres. Having forged close relations with Ethiopia, China ascribed it a major role in the African link to the China's One Belt One Road project. The European Union is in crisis, and in the aftermath of the election of Donald Trump the alliance between Europe and

the United States, which served as the bedrock of the post-Second World War international order, is decidedly shaky.

But what has most altered the global context is the growing international opposition to neoliberalism in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis and this has been acerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic. To be sure, neoliberalism remains entrenched and continues to be endorsed by Western social democratic parties. But socialism has always been a broad house and one that more closely conforms to the pre-Abiy EPRDF commitment to state led development, land nationalization, and a Bolshevik inspired national federalism than adherence to capitalism and global economic integration. Moreover, any version of socialism must have a base in the working class, yet that class barely existed when the EPRDF assumed power in 1991. A generation later, a working class is emerging in Ethiopia, opening up a range of political opportunities.

Related to this was the confusion that proceeded from EPRDF's attempt to be all things for all the people. Embracing capitalists and the working class often led to repression of workers and unions and undermined the Front's relationship with the working class, which should have been at the core of a party committed to fostering rapid and equitable development. Indicative of the problem is the fact that fewer than 10 percent of workers in the expanding textile industry are unionized, and there is no national minimum wage in the private sector (Rosen 2016). While the World Bank drew attention to the success of the EPRDF in dramatically reducing extreme poverty, even before the advent of Hailemariam and Abiy there were also indications of a society becoming increasingly unequal, one being the 108 percent growth in the number of millionaires in Ethiopia between 2007 and 2013, the highest growth rate of this group in Africa.[21] This figure is explained by both the phenomenal levels of growth in the country as well as privatizations. The biggest beneficiary of the privatizations—amounting to 60 percent of all government privatizations—was Mohammed Hussein al-Amoudi, an Ethiopian-Saudi dual citizen and richest man in the country, whose close relations to the government, particularly Meles Zenawi, had long been a matter of controversy and has called into question the competitiveness of these actions.[22] Al-Amoudi was one of many rich and powerful businessmen arrested by the Saudi Arabian government in mid-November 2017.

Equally misplaced was the EPRDF claim to represent the interests of both rich and poor peasants, something Giday Zera Tsion warned against in the 1980s (Young 1997b, 137–138). While rich peasants did not pose a threat during the armed struggle, development in recent years generated growing economic differentiation and produced disaffected youth who proved crucial in forcing the resignation of Hailemariam and bringing Abiy to power. But there is little indication that Abiy's program of liberal government and a free-market economy will staunch this disaffection. Indeed, while he touched all the nationalist and anti-Tigray and anti-TPLF nerves in the country with his November 2020 war, the war and his efforts to replace the developmental state with market-based capitalism will produce economic polarization, uneven development, and increased tensions. To be sure, a crisis was already emerging because the EPRDF had rejected its commitment to politics that were "ethno-national in form, class in content," in favor of a devotion to programs and policies that are ethno-national in both form and content.[23]

[21] New World of Wealth, nw-wealth.com

[22] https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/08ADDISABABA82_a.html, accessed February 3, 2020.

[23] This insight is to be credited to Assefa Fiseha an email to the author, November 19, 2017.

While political reforms were needed even before the displacement of the EPRDF, Abiy's rhetorical commitment to democratic pluralism should be treated with skepticism. In its Western version, pluralism recognizes a plurality of groups, interests, and associations in society, but crucially does not acknowledge their power imbalances and the possibility of them being subverted by foreign, particularly Western, interests as has been the case many so-called color revolutions. Genuine pluralism means the existence of a rough equilibrium of power between contending interests and social forces, something which does not exist in Western capitalist societies (Miliband 1989, 29). In any case what Abiy considers democratic government to date has involved power being centralized in the prime minister's office, over-ruling parliament, indefinitely postponing elections, and replacing most state governments with his allies. He also eliminated virtually all Tigrayans from government, the security services, and government corporations, charging them with corruption, although none have been convicted.

Critics from the right argued that the EPRDF's version of national federalism would bring about the destruction of the country upon coming to power in 1991, but instead it preserved the unity of Ethiopia when faced with disintegration after the overthrow of the Derg. Furthermore, it played a critical role in ending the heavy hand of centralization under the Haile Selassie and Derg regimes, gave new life to long suppressed national cultures, and served as a base to develop regional economies. But this achievement was threatened by a recentralization as a result of the developmental state under Meles and the near collapse of the state under the weak leadership of Hailemariam Desalegn, which led to his replacement by Dr. Abiy Ahmed in April 2018.

The national federalism of the early TPLF was part and parcel of a socialist project, but upon coming to power the EPRDF jettisoned that project even while ascribing to a version of the Bolshevik system of national federalism. The Bolsheviks and the Communist Parties of China and Vietnam differentiated the peasantry and explicitly aligned with the poor and middle peasants. In contrast, the TPLF viewed the peasantry as a homogeneous class and did not make common cause with their natural allies among the poor and middle peasants and that left them susceptible to the nationalist appeals of rich peasants and others. The TPLF focus on the peasantry was appropriate given the under-developed state of the Tigrayan and Ethiopian working class. But Ethiopia has been developing a working class and an expanding population of urban poor, and by not championing their interests they too were prone to nationalist appeals of the growing middle class. The Bolsheviks were committed to advancing the marginalized national communities but fearing that nationalism could be used to undermine the state they espoused class-based politics.

The Soviet federation ultimately failed, but Bolshevik support for the rights of oppressed nations was far in advance of the Western capitalist states which until recently worked to eliminate national minorities in their construction of a nation-state. The TPLF/EPRDF and its system of national federalism may also be assigned to history's dustbin, but a reformed version of it offers the best hope that Ethiopia will not follow the experience of the Soviet Union and disintegrate.