Nation-building in pre-federal and federal Ethiopia (1855-2019): Analysis of the language policy role, pattern, and consequence

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Abstract

The study analyzed the role, pattern, and consequence of the language policy in Ethiopia's nation-building process during the Imperial era (1855-1874), the Derg era (1974-1991), and the EPRDF era (1991-2029). The study followed a comparative-analytical research design with qualitative method of data collection and analysis using primary data sources such as constitution and official policy documents and secondary data sources such as books, journal articles, and monographs. The findings revealed that despite changes in the language policy towards multiculturalism from one era to the next, particularly during the EPRFD era, the three consecutive eras emphasized either on nation-state building model notably the Imperial era and partly the Derg era emphasizing on oneness promoting unity in uniformity, or multinational-state building model notably the EPRDF era emphasizing on diversity and/or otherness promoting diversity without adopting adequate inclusive multicultural policies at national level for promoting multicultural citizenship and without fostering nested identities. As a result, a polity-building model that promotes multicultural citizenship while granting adequate autonomy for to self-rule for promoting diversity and fostering nested identities didn't happen. The state's failure to build inclusive polity has caused eroded state legitimacy, ethno-national mobilization, competing state and ethnic nationalism, and deeply entrenched social divide explained in the form of mistrust, hostility and political polarization along ethno-national identity marker since the mid-1960s. In conclusion, the study has put forward an inclusive-polity building model that horizontally grants adequate autonomy to self-rule for asserting diversity and vertically promotes adequate multicultural policies for realizing multicultural citizenship and attaining social cohesion as well as fostering nested identities to promote unity in diversity in balance as neither nation-state building model that emphasizes uniformity nor multinational-state building model that stresses on heterogeneity addresses the underlying political ills of Ethiopia.

Keywords: *federalism, language policy, autonomy, multinational cohesion, nested identities.*

1. Introduction

Nation-building in the context of inclusive polity-building is defined as the process of building a community of sentiment, having social cohesion to attain a *political body* formed by free will through constitutional democracy. Such a nation-building process promotes shared national values adopting inclusive multicultural policies such as language, culture, and national symbols, including national flag, anthem, and lacing narratives embracing diversity in a society, including ethnic, religious, or regional

differences, fostering cooperation through multicultural policies; and nurturing nested identities blending unity and diversity equations in balance without one equation of undermining over the other (See Assefa, 2023).

Language policy is part of public policy that plays crucial role in shaping the type of nation-building model. Therefore, while monolingual language policy shapes a nation-state building model that promotes unity in uniformity, multilingual language policy fashions inclusive-polity building model that promotes unity in diversity (McGarry & O'Leary, 2003). Nation-state building model pursues a certain narrowly defined public identity under the guise of "civic" promoting national identity, which is however the values of a core nation — a significant majority group in the state, or in its absence, titular nation in control of the state power (Assefa, 2023). Inclusive-polity building model, on the other hand, promotes unity in diversity in balance granting adequate autonomy for asserting diversity and adopting inclusive ensuring multiculturalism for promoting inclusive citizenship (Kymlicka, 1995)[1]

The language policy consists of official language policy that relates to the working language of the government for public service delivery; the language policy in education that relates to medium of instruction and language subject(s) to be taught in a formal education system; language policy in media that relates to

medium of broadcast; and language policy as an part of human rights (Cooper, 1989; Tollefson & Pérez-Milans, 2018).

Ethiopia is not only a multicultural state but also multinational as it constitutes dozens of mobilized groups horizontally demanding adequate autonomy to assert diversity and vertically adopting inclusive multicultural policies to promote inclusive multicultural citizenship strongly opposing the nation-state building process that took place since it modern state formation in the second half of the 19th century promoting a certain narrowly defined "civic" national identity, including language, culture, and religion (Markakis, 1974).

Modern nation-state building process in Ethiopia began in the second half of the 19th century with the rise of Emperor Tewodros II (1855) subduing the powerful regional lords such as *Ras* Ali II of *Yejju* (1853) and *Dejazmach* Wube of Semien and Tigray (1855) that weakened central authority during the Era of Princes (1769-1855) (Bahru, 2002). However, the state-led nationalism aiming to attain cultural uniformity, including language, custom religion has caused mobilized groups. In other words, the state's effort to produce cultural uniformity induced sub-state/ethnic nationalism with horizontal and vertical demands; horizontally demanding autonomy for asserting diversity and vertically demanding multicultural policies for inclusive citizenship. The nation-state building model, which might have worked in those countries having a core nation, it has failed in Ethiopia for it lacks a core nation that absorbs national minorities. Ethiopia only constitutes relative majority ethno-national groups such as Oromo 34.5% (25.4 million) and Amhara 26.9%

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[1]Autonomy refers to exclusive rights of a certain groups to assert diversity which includes fiscal autonomy, political autonomy, administrative autonomy, or cultural autonomy. On the other hand, inclusive multicultural citizenship entails the state's ability to adopt multicultural policies, including affirmative action, special representation for national minorities to ensure fair representation.

(19.8 million). However, none of which is a core nation representing over 50% of the total population.[2]

Opposing the imperial rule of power centralization and cultural assimilation policy, including the later *Derg* regime, which failed to address the long standing quest for asserting diversity and inclusive multinational citizenship, the coalition of ethno-national forces – Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) assumed the state power in May 1991. As EPRDF also failed to realize demands of ethno-national groups for promoting unity in diversity in balance, it was replaced by the incumbent Prosperity Party (PP) in 2019 following the public protest in 2018 notably in Oromia and Amhara regions[3].

2. Materials and Methods

The study applied a comparative analytical research design with qualitative method of data collection and analysis using official documents, books, and journal articles and monographs in analyzing the language policy role, pattern, and consequence in the nation-building process of pre-federal and federal Ethiopia covering the Imperial era (1855-1974), *Derg* era (1974-1991),

and EPRFD era (1991-2019). The study addressed the following basic research questions: What were the role, pattern, and consequence of the language policy in the nation-building process in three successive eras? How significantly different was one era from the next in terms of the language policy role, pattern, consequence, and nation-building model? Finally, what type of language policy and nation-building is suitable for Ethiopia constituting ethno-national groups horizontally demanding autonomy for asserting self-identity and vertical multicultural policies for ensuring inclusive multicultural citizenship?

3. Conceptual Framework

3.1. Distinction of Nation-building and State-building

The notion of nation-building and state-building are quite related and yet are distinct.[4] They both involve in creating a

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[2] A core nation refer to an ethno- national group that constitutes over 50% of the total population unilaterally, and which helps facilitate nation-state building process by effectively subsuming/ absorbing national minorities. However, Ethiopia remains the land of national minorities for it is devoid of a core nation constituting over 50% of the total population.

[3] Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) was a coalition of multiethnic political parties (r. 1991-2019). EPRDF was replaced by the incumbent ruling party – the Prosperity Party (PP) in 2019. PP is a "unified" version of EPRDF which came into power replacing the coalition version of EPRDF, and excluding Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF).

[4] Nation-building model despite constituting many variants fall into two broad categories: (a), nation-state building model (ብሔረ-መንግሥት ግንታ), which promotes unity in uniformity through assimilation or liberal integration approach, and (b), inclusive-polity building model (ሕብረብሔረ-መንግስት ግንታ), (also referred to as state-nation building model) promotes unity in diversity horizontally granting autonomy for asserting diversity and vertically adopting multicultural policies for ensuring multicultural citizenship. Inclusive-polity building model moderates and balances between unity and diversity through fostering nested identities. A nation-building model that promotes diversity without due regard for unity is referred to as multinational-state building model (ብዝሃብሔረ-መንግስት ግንታ) which emphasizes on promoting diversity/otherness in a way that undermines unity. Inclusive-polity building model maintains social cohesion through democratic institutions and policies granting autonomy, ensuring multicultural policies, and fostering nested identities without one set of identity undermining over the other, and this may resolve tensions between competing state/civic nationalism and ethnic nationalism. On the other hand, the concept of state-building (ሐገረ-መንግሥት ግንባታ) has to do with building public institutions,

cohesive and functional societies. Nation-building in its inclusive sense focuses on promoting shared national identity among different groups building a community of sentiment in diversity by promoting shared national symbols such as flag and anthem, shared narratives; constitutional patriotism or national pride such as evoking historical legacies in defending one's mother/father land and maintaining the state sovereignty; reconciling ethnic, religious, or regional divisions by fortifying social cohesion, and fostering nested identities (Assefa, 2023). On the other hand, state-building focuses on strengthening political institutions and governance structures to create a stable, functional political system that provides security, enforces laws and policies, and delivers public services to its society (Assefa, 2023). Key elements of state-building include developing legal and political institutions; building a capacity on monopoly use of force such as police, military; administrative capacity for public services; and promoting rule of law and democratic governance; and infrastructure, including road and transportation facilities, communication, electricity, water supply, education, and healthcare, and so on (Assefa, 2023).

In fact, the relationship between nation-building and state-building often overlaps and influences each other, or even in some cases interchangeably used as they are inseparable components like a hardware (state-building) and software (nation-building) aspects of a computer, in which while state-building plays a *cornerstone* role, nation-building plays a *stimulus* role (Assefa, 2023).

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including civil service/bureaucracy, health care system, justice system, security, infrastructure such as roads, electricity, water supply, housing, etc.
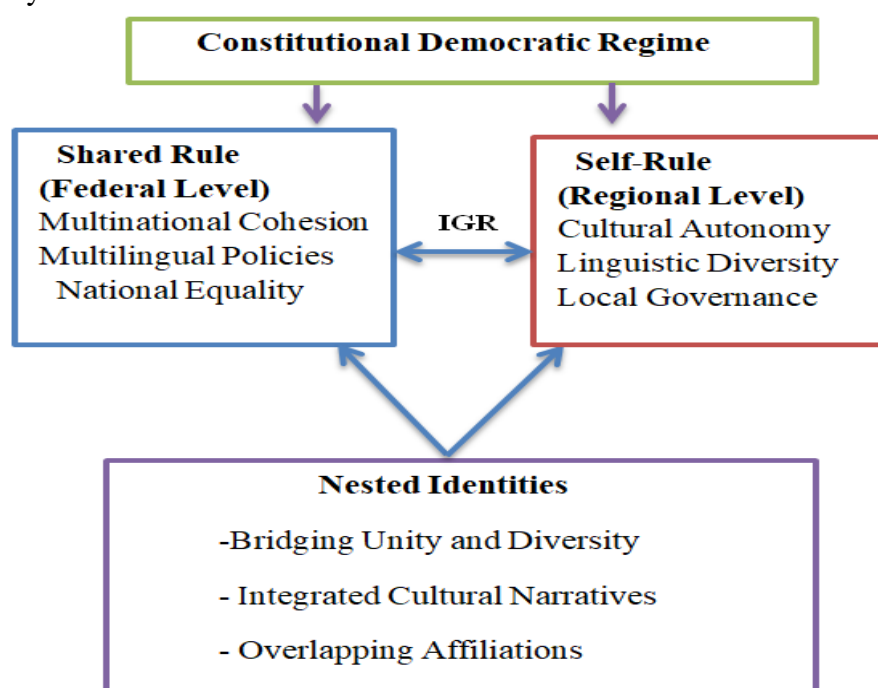
3.2. Inclusive-polity building model and its core pillars

Unlike nation-state building model, which promotes unity in uniformity, inclusive-polity building model promotes unity in diversity granting autonomy to self-rule and adopting multicultural policies at the union/national/shared-rule level. Inclusive-polity building model contains five major ingredients: (a). Constitutional democratic regime; (b). Shared–rule unit; (c). Self-rule entities; (d). Intergovernmental relations (IGR); (e). Nested identities in which individuals and groups blend their self-rule shared-rule identities (Stepan, 1999).

A constitutional democratic regime entails that shared-rule and self-rule units must be guided by an established constitutional democracy. Similarly, the shared rule unit has to adopt multicultural policies that promote multicultural citizenship and social cohesion addressing the vertical quest for promoting inclusive citizenship. On the other hand, self-rule entities while promoting diversity (asserting diversity) have to promote nested identities as well as encourage its people to possess dual loyalties blending local and national identities without emphasizing on diversity or otherness. Autonomy to self-rule that addresses the quest for asserting diversity and promoting group-differentiated rights should not undermine loyalty to the overarching national identity. And, there must be intergovernmental relations (IGR) facilitating smooth relations vertically between the union government and regional states and horizontally among member states of the federation. At last, promoting nested identities by blending local and national sets of identities is needed in a way one set of identity without

undermining the other to keep a cohesive society within diversity. In other words, individuals and groups should be able to identify not only with their own local identity such as regional, ethnic, cultural identity but also equally with the larger national political unit. For instance, in the context of Ethiopia, people should be able to identify themselves without prioritizing their ethnic or civic identities and this is what refers to fostering nested identities (Assefa, 2023; Stepan, 1999). Fostering nested identities helps citizens to identify themselves simultaneously with their local community and the broader union. Such

policies to be used at shared rule include national symbols and uniting narratives that incorporate diverse identities as part of multicultural nation and at the same time, at the self-rule level, there should be policies that not only assert diversity but also encourage blending self-identity with the larger to keep the balance of unity and diversity. However, if the union (shared-rule unit) government is oppressive failing to adopt multicultural policies for promoting multinational cohesion at shared-rule and denying to grant autonomy to self-rule units ends up without success.

Source: adapted based on theoretical framework, 2024

Figure 1: Inclusive-polity building model.

3.3. Distinction between nation-state and multinational state/nation of nations

The origin of modern state evolution traces back to the 17th century with the Treaty of Westphalia (1648) recognizing sovereignty of the state within its own territorial jurisdiction, or otherwise prohibiting a state interference from the internal matters

of another state. From the time of the Westphalia Treaty to the mid-20th century, the term modern state was equated with a nation-state regardless of cultural diversity within itself. In other words, sovereign states have been named as nation-states irrespective of cultural diversity within the state. On the other hand, until the first half of the 20th century mobilized groups within

the state didn't qualify to be named as nations. However, in the aftermath of the WW I, the right to self-determination encouraged by superpowers of the time, the United States and the Soviet Union, has given rise to the development of ethno-national groups within a given sovereign state or resulted in multinational states (nations of nations) as such recognition for self-determination of people generated several nations within a given state. Therefore, nowadays, the term "nation" could mean not only a sovereign state as before but also mobilized ethno-national group demanding autonomy to self-rule or otherwise independence. The conventional description of all sovereign states as nations is reflected in such terms as the "United Nations" irrespective of the state's ethnic diversity. A state is always named as a nation in a country sense irrespective of its diversity within based on assumption that it is formed by free popular will.

On the other hand, nationalism otherwise the doctrine of nation-state building traces back to the late 18th century with the American Declaration of Independence (1776) against British Imperialism and the French Revolution (1789) against absolute Monarchy, which shed light on evolution of popular sovereignty, which remains the nucleus of democracy. Nationalism began to serve as means of nation-state building in the mid-19th century with Italian and German unification in 1871 (Hyslop, 1960). After the defeat of socialism and the subsequent ruin of the Soviet Union and the breach of the Berlin Wall in 1989, nationalism has gained momentum and which caused east and west Germans to be (re)united in 1990 as they believed to belong to the same nation while it caused Czechoslovakia to split into Czechs and Slovaks in 1993 as they believed to belong to different nations (Moore, 1998).

Multinational states (nations of nations) differ from nation-states in terms of needs of asserting diversity and promoting inclusive citizenship (Buchanan, 1991; Tierney, 2005). While promoting singular citizenship may suffice for nation-states, it requires granting autonomy and promoting multicultural citizenship for a nation of nations. For example, Quebec of Canada, Catalonia and Basque of Spain, Northern Ireland and Scotland of the UK[5], Flemish of Belgium, and Kurds in the Middle East, including Turkey, Iraq, Iran, and Syria, and dozens of ethno-national groups in Ethiopia have needs of autonomy to self-rule for asserting diversity and promoting inclusive multicultural citizenship (Assefa, 2023; Bengio, 2007; Brubaker, 1996). Switzerland is, for instance, multicultural state with 4 national languages[6], including German, French, Italian, and Romansh

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[5]Although the UK is commonly regarded as a unitary political system for it lacks a written constitution, however, practically it remains a *de facto* federal system by metrics of power devolution.

[6] The term national language and official language have distinct meanings though often overlaps. While a national language is associated with those languages playing vital role in cultural and social identity formation of a nation representing larger ethno-linguistic heritage of a country, official language relates to providing formal official service for governance and official communication. In many cases, official languages may not be explicitly endorsed as national language, particularly in the case of linguistic diversity since it becomes delicate issue raising issues of inclusion or exclusion. As a result, it is tacitly understood that official language is (by default) national language. For instance, South Africa has 11 official languages, including English but none of them is explicitly endorsed as a national language. However, it doesn't mean that South Africa has no any national language. In fact, isiZulu, isiXhosa, and Afrikaans are *understandably* South Africa's national languages for their socio-cultural significance. Similarly, Amharic was/is Ethiopia's official and national language explicitly or tacitly.

(Berthele, 2021). Multinational states such as Ethiopia, Belgium, Canada, etc., possess multiple nations within themselves and such groups evolve as a result of nation-state building model (in most cases) repressing cultural diversity. For example, Quebec of Canada, Catalonia and Basque of Spain, Flemish of Belgium, and Kurds in the Middle East and ethno-national groups in Ethiopia are the product of nation-state building model carried out by the respective states (See Assefa, 2023; Bengio, 2007; Brubaker, 1996).

As earlier implied, nation-state building model pursue either an assimilation model promoting unity in uniformity based on state-favored "civic" national identity or an integration model that adopts liberal multicultural policies recognizing and tolerating diversity without institutional support for promoting group-differentiated rights. Liberal integration variant of nation-building recognizes and tolerates diversity without institutional support for promoting diversity. Liberal integration has always been promoted by International Organizations such as the UN, IMF and World Bank regardless of the state diversity within. Western states with core nations, including the United States, Germany, France, the Netherlands, and Austria have actually succeeded with liberal integration model (Kymlicka, 1995; Stepan, 1999; McGarry & O'leary, 2003).

However, several studies assert that this model doesn't succeed in multicultural states devoid of a core nation since simple liberal answers such as non-discrimination, recognition, and undifferentiated singular citizenship, civic national equality without institutional support for diversity don't suffice to address the question of ethno-national groups demanding for asserting

cultural diversity and ensuring inclusive multicultural citizenship (Kymlicka, 1995; Stepan, 1999; McGarry & O'leary, 2003).

4. Results and Discussions

4.1. Imperial era's language policy and nation-building model (1855-1974)

Although the reign of Tewordos II signified the beginning of modern state-building process in Ethiopia, the origin of the historic Ethiopian polity traces back to the Aksumite Kingdom in the 1st century AD, which was framed and shaped based on the mores of the Northern highland plateau commonly known as Abyssinian and the values of Orthodox Christianity following King Ezana's conversion to Christianity in the early 4th century (in 330 AD) (Sergew, 1972).The reign of Emperor Tewodros II (r. 1855-1868) was a turning point in the process of Ethiopia's modern state system realizing centralization and state sovereignty, subduing strong regional lords that undermined central authority, including *Ras* Ali II in 1853, *Dejazmach* Wube in 1855, and King Haile Melekot in 1855. In doing so, Emperor Tewordos II was able to abolish fragmented regional rules in Ethiopia and paved the way for modern nation-state building overcoming the 'Era of Princes' also known as *Zemana Mesafint* which lasted for nearly a century (c. 1769-1855).

Regarding the language policy, Emperor Tewodros II declared Amharic as literary language of the royal court replacing the previously literary language known as Geéz.[7] Amharic then gained the status of

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[7] Geéz, which is now mainly confined to the liturgical service in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, was once the literary (written) and spoken language of the royal Court (the Palace) during the Aksumite Kingdom (c. 1st century AD-10th century AD). Amharic replaced Geéz as spoken language

being literary/written language of the court (Bender, 1983). The monolingual language policy started with Tewodros II continued to shape Ethiopia's nation-state building model based on a certain narrowly defined public identity. The nation-state building model in Ethiopia also involved the mores of the Northern Plateau (aka Abyssinian custom) with a hierarchical political norm and Orthodox Christianity (Merera, 2003).

On the other hand, Emperor Yohannes IV (r.1872-1889) the late successor of Tewodros II, although ideally remained absolute Monarch, unlike his predecessor began to devolve autonomy to the various regional rulers. For instance, the *Litché* Agreement (1878) was concluded between Emperor Yohannes IV and King Menelik of Shoa. In this agreement while Menelik recognized the suzerainty of Emperor Yohannes, the latter was also reciprocated with formal recognition as provincial king of Shoa. Similarly, *Ras* Adal of Gojjam was elevated to King Tekle Haymanot in 1881 for his submission to the Emperor; *Ras* Michael (formerly Mohamed Ali) was granted administrative autonomy to rule over the province Wollo for his conversion to Orthodox Christianity (Crummey, 2000; Marcus, 1994).

The reign of Emperor Yohannes IV was therefore characterized by a *quasi-federal system* in the sense that regional autonomy

was officially granted as long as the regional rules were willing to pay tributes to the Emperor. However, with regard to the pattern of the language policy under Emperor Yohannes IV, the mono-lingual language policy remained the same despite provision of administrative autonomy to the regional vassals. In fact, in terms religious tolerance, Emperor Yohannes IV was even more conservative than his predecessor as was crystal clear in the Council of Boru Media (1878), where Muslim aristocrats of the Wollo region were forced to follow Christianity, or leave their position in government (Rubenson, 1987). The reign of Emperor Yohannes IV was a proof that granting autonomy alone without adopting multicultural policies remains inadequate to promote inclusive-polity building as polity-building requires autonomy and multicultural policies for promoting inclusive citizenship. In this case, devolution of power, including federalism doesn't make any difference in nation-building process unless autonomy is accompanied by multicultural polices.

Emperor Menelik II (r. 1889-1913) was another key political figure in modern state formation of Ethiopia.[8] The victory of Adwa (in 1896) against the colonial power of Italy was remarkable achievement under his reign, which played decisive role in securing international recognition by super powers, including Great Britain, France, Russia, and Italy itself, which also enabled to him expand the state territory, and open

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of the Court following the decline of the Aksumite kingdom and the rise of the Zagwe Dynasty (c. 10th century AD-13th century AD), although Geéz retained its literary language status until the reign of Tewordos II (r.1855-1868), the rise of Emperor Tewodros II, further promoted Amharic as the literary language of the Court overtaking the role of Geéz. Besides serving as the literary language of the Court in pre-federal and federal Ethiopia alike, Amharic remains the single most important language playing the role of a lingua franca language ensuring a wider communication in diverse ethno-linguistic communities of Ethiopia.

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[8]Emperor Menelik II was King of Shoa (r.1866-1889) and Emperor of Ethiopia (r.1889-1913) started unifying the land and people of the South, Southwest and East into Ethiopia's empire, which took two decades (1878-1898) to complete the empire-state building project. This period of incorporation is referred to (by some) as *'Hagar Maqnat'* roughly translated as "cultivation/ Christianization/ civilization of the people" (Bahru, 2002).

up a formal diplomatic relations with the aforementioned Europeans powers (Bahru, 2002). Unlike his predecessor, Emperor Menelik II reinforced power centralization by centrally appointing regional rulers, particularly in those newly incorporated territories with resistance (Marcus, 1994).

With regard to the language policy during this time, Amharic continued as a symbol of unity despite incorporation of huge ethno-linguistic diversity after the robust territorial expansion project, which raised the demographic and territorial size of the empire by three-fold (Markakis, 1974). Irrespective of ethno-linguistic diversity, The implicit monolingual language policy continued to dictate Ethiopia's nation-state building process based on the already established nation-state building model, including language, culture, and religion. This time around, the local elites continued to adopt the values of the *ruling class,* including language, culture, and religion; and were reciprocated with recognition, local authority, and even were able to establish intermarriages with the royal families (Cohen, 2000).

It was also during the reign of Emperor Menelik II that modern education system started. The first modern school, Menelik II School, was opened up in 1908, and French was compulsory language used as medium of instruction and taught as a subject until it was replaced by English in 1947 after nearly four decades of use (Bloor & Tamrat, 1996). The curriculum during this time also included other languages, including English, Italian, and Arabic on selective basis (Bloor & Tamrat, 1996). The modern education system during this time entirely focused on producing skilled officials who would play roles in diplomatic functions acquiring

international languages, including French, Italian, Arabic, and English (Seyoum, 1996).

Emperor Haile Selassie I (r. 1930-1974) was another crucial political figure in attaining the peak of power centralization and cultural assimilation policy in his effort to realize a nation-state building project, particularly after his return home from exile (as Ethiopia was occupied by Italy for a brief period from 1936-1941). The revised imperial constitution known as the 1955 constitution in article 125 stated that, "Amharic is the official language of the Ethiopian Empire", which highlighted the continuance of the monolingual policy. The monolingual policy during this time was even more reinforced by the education policy. Amharic was promoted as a sole local language serving as a medium of instruction in primary schools (from grade 1-6) and taught as a subject both in primary and secondary schools across the country without any space for other local languages (Bloor & Tamrat, 1996). However, it must not be forgotten that a *foreign language* (English) has always been a *de facto* co-official language in Ethiopia appearing side by side with Amharic, including in currency and other national symbols since 1947 as the country switched from Francophone orientation to Anglophone (Teshome, 1997).

Unfortunately, all attempts of nation-state building ended with tragic consequences inducing mobilized ethno-national groups, demanding autonomy to self-rule for asserting diversity as well as inclusive multicultural policies for prompting and ensuring multicultural citizenship. The dire consequence of the monolithic nation-state building in the Imperial Ethiopia include the rise of competing nationalism, eroded state legitimacy, political polarization

along ethno-linguistic markers, social divide, mistrust, and hostility, and regime instability (Assefa 2010; Merera 2003).

Although crafting shared *lingua franca* language for diverse countries such as Ethiopia is indispensable so as to ensure a wider communication, however, other local languages also should have been opportunity as a means of accommodating diversity. As a result of the state failure to accommodate diversity, the country faced dire consequence incubating mobilized groups in the late 1960s. For instance, in the 1970s various liberation forces were formed like Eritrean People Liberation Front (EPLF) (1972), Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) (1973), Tigray People Liberation Front (TPLF) (1975), Western Somalia Liberation Front (WSLF) (1975), and Sidama Liberation Movement (SLM) (1978), and later on Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) (1984) (Bahru 2002; Henze, 2000).

4.2. *Derg's* language policy and nation-building model (1974-1991)

Following Ethiopia's Social Revolution (1974), Military Junta otherwise known as *Derg* took power on 2 September 1974. *Derg* switched the state ideology from feudal theocracy to garrison socialism. As compared to Imperial era, *Derg* showed a positive gesture towards multiculturalism recognizing diverse ethno-national groups with constitutional affirmation, which somehow switched the country's nation-building model from *assimilation* variant to *liberal integration* variant of nation-building as the state began to recognize the presence of diverse ethno-national groups. Unlike Imperial era, *Derg* launched what was known as the "National Democratic Revolution Program of the Socialist Ethiopia" in 1976 in the effort to promote

the history, culture, and language of the NNPs (Bender, 1985). Regarding this, Lionel Bender made the following remark:

> The military government which replaced the Haile Silassie's regime in Ethiopia in 1974 has followed much the same language policy as its predecessor: promoting Amharic as national language. However, it is moderated by a self-conscious attitude of attention to national minorities and is (masked) in so-called Marxist-Leninist propaganda. Progress is slow because of the continued state of civil war in Ethiopia (itself a sign of centrifugal forces at work) and the lack of skilled planners and technicians (Bender, 1985: 173).

In comparison to the imperial era, nation-building process during *Derg* switched from assimilation to a sort of liberal integration. The (re)opening of "Ethiopian Languages and Cultures Academy" in 1976 was also another step that indicated *Derg* had a tendency towards multilingual language policy and planning.[9] The Academy was assigned to create alphabets for those nationalities' languages without writing systems, and prepare dictionaries and grammar books. Its implementation was however undermined by socialism which regards nationalism as mere false consciousness that would fade away as class distinction is abolished. Socialism envisioned that post-national cosmopolitan world order would be restored (Nodia,

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[9] Language planning constitutes corpus planning, status planning, or acquisition planning. Corpus planning relates to standardizing and/or advancing the linguistic structure of a language, including the creation of dictionaries, grammar books, forming new writing system, and initiating reform. Status planning relates to the allocation of new function to a language such as using the language as medium of instruction or an official language. Acquisition planning relates to efforts to spread a language providing access to learn the language (Cooper, 1989).

2017). During this time even federalism was used as a means to soften nationalism in efforts to create a cosmopolitan post-national order as in the case of the failed federations of Eastern Europe, including Yugoslavia in 1992, Soviet Union in 1989, and Czechoslovakia in 1993, and which were sham federations with ethnic form but socialist in content, which were not meant to fulfill demands of ethnic groups but rather for to attain the vision of socialism as a political order (McGarry & O'leary, 2003).

Moreover, *Derg* established the "Institute for the Study of Ethiopian Nationalities" with the 1983 legislation. This Institute was assigned various tasks, including conducting research on the nationalities (referring to the various mobilized ethno-national groups and other ethno-cultural groups), identifying their geographical locations, and documenting their cultures and languages.[10] The 1987 Constitution (which is notionally the first Ethiopian Republic) stressing its commitment to ensure equality, development, and respect for the languages of the nationalities, however, paradoxically article 116 of the same constitution declared that, "Amharic is the working language of the state" without leaving space for other languages in the country as co-official language. As the state remained heavily centralized, it was incapable of devolving autonomy to the various ethno-national groups. Thus, the constitutional promise to promote diversity, including language remained a symbolic gesture without translating into actual practice (Bender, 1985: 274).

Additional *Derg* effort which is worth of mentioning here is the "National Literacy Campaign" started in 1975 and continued throughout 1980s, intending to raise the literacy rate of its people with an informal education using multiple local languages as medium of instruction, including Amharic, Afaan Oromo, Somali, Tigire, Tigrinya, Wolaita, Sidama, Haddiya, Kambata, Afar, Saho, Gedeo, Kafinono, Silti, and Kunama (Hailu 1993, as quoted in Zelealem, 2012: 24).

Unfortunately, *Derg's* language policy in an informal education system failed to translate into a formal education system. Amharic remained the sole local language as medium of instruction and language subject to be taught at a formal education (Bloor & Tamrat, 1996). Competing nationalism (i.e., state nationalism and its opposing ethno-nationalism continued to undermine unity and territorial integrity of the state, however (Bender, 1985). The nation-building process that shifted from the hitherto assimilation policy to liberal integration variant failed to stop the mobilized ethno-nationalist forces from demanding autonomy to self-rule for asserting/promoting diversity and inclusive multicultural policies. After the protracted *civil war* between the centrist-state and the insurgent ethno-national forces, *Derg* was eventually defeated and the state power was controlled by the ethno-nationalist forces in May 1991.

4.3. EPRDF's language policy and nation-building model (1991-2019)

EPRDF, which came to power ousting *Derg*, restructured Ethiopia into (mainly) ethnic-based federation with the intent to address the long-standing question of self-determination rights and ensuring national equality horizontally granting autonomy

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[10]A proclamation set to provide for the establishment of the institute for the study of Ethiopian nationalities, Proclamation No.236 of 1983.

for asserting self-identity and vertically promoting inclusive citizenship. EPRDF installed a federal system based on ethno-territoriality principle in way to address the aforementioned quests coupled with popular consent which was a major tool used in federalization process of Ethiopia (Assefa, 2010).

In other words, non-territorial minorities have been out of sight of the constitutional framers, and which has undoubtedly significantly jeopardized the civil and political rights of the non-titular minorities inhabiting out of their own predefined homeland territories (Assefa, 2016). As stated in the preamble of the 1995 FDRE constitution, Ethiopia's federation is supposed to be a federation of ethno-national groups or in the vernacular of the 1995 Constitution "Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples (NNPs)" having unconditional right to self-determination (See article 39 (1)). There are 76 recognized NNPs with seats in the House of Federation (HoF), which should not be confused with ethno-linguistic groups however in which case there are over 85 ethno-linguistic groups (See the 2007 census). As per the 1995 Constitution, the NNPs have proportionate seat in the HoF (see art. 61/2). Ethiopia's federalism is an *asymmetric* in the sense that there is disparity in autonomy among the NNPs. While some NNPs are endowed with regional autonomy; most of them are endowed with local autonomy. However, in light of institutional setting, Ethiopian federation is a *symmetric* as all regional units are endowed with equal rights and power (See 47/4).

Ethiopian federation currently constitutes 12 member states, including Tigray, Afar, Amhara, Oromia, Somali, Benishagul-Gumuz, Gambella, Harari, Central

Ethiopia, Southwest Ethiopia, Sidama, and South Ethiopia. In terms of addressing issues of the horizontal autonomy and the vertical inclusion, EPRDF era was better off as compared to the previous eras, particularly in addressing the horizontal questions — the quest for autonomy to assert diversity though there are disparities in autonomy among NNPs. For instance, pertaining to issues of granting autonomy to assert diversity, EPRDF was able to provide NNPs autonomy to self-rule at sub-national level. In doing so, some NNPs, including Oromia, Somali, Afar, Tigray, and Harari[11] that have been named after the respective titular NNPs managed to use their language as official language of the respective regional states. However, national minorities within the aforesaid regional states as well as vast majority of NNPs under multiethnic regional states such as Benishagul-Gumuz, and Gambella were not able to use their language as official language at self-rule level for such multiethnic arrangement poses challenges to adopt a particular language as official language of the respective regional states since such arrangement compels to adopt a *lingua franca language* to ensure a wider communication. In this case EPRDF was not able to satisfy all NNPs to use their language as official language at self-rule.

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[11] Harari State is peculiar in its language policy adopting bi-official language policy at sub-national level. Harari is the smallest regional state of Ethiopian federation. Geographically, it resembles a 'city-state' encircled by Regional State of Oromia. The capital of Harar City is shared between the Eastern Hararge Zone of Oromia and the Harari State. Demographically, its population is exceedingly outnumbered by other inhabitants notably the Oromo population. Geographic and demographic factors seem to have compelled the Harari state to peculiarly adopt co-official language recognizing Afaan Oromo besides Harari language.

This is in fact one of the major challenges of Ethiopian federal system, which pushes NNPs to demand for further and exclusive regional autonomy and self-rule rather than cluster-based multiethnic regional autonomy and local self-rule. In other words, EPRDF was not able to deliver regional autonomy and regional self-rule to every NNP as promised by the 1995 constitution (See article 39 & 47). To this end, the post-EPRDF era, or otherwise the incumbent ruling Prosperity Party (PP) has been able to split the hitherto SNNPR, which constituted over 75% of the NNPs, into four regional states, including Central Ethiopia, Sidama, Southwest Ethiopia, and South Ethiopia.

Moreover, regarding issues of promoting inclusive multicultural citizenship, EPRDF failed. The need for political reform was caused by public protest in different parts of the state notably Oromia and Amhara in quest for fair representation and inclusion and opposing maladministration and gross human rights violations by the regime and the state's failure to address such demands of quest for autonomy in different parts of the country. Regarding the language policy as part of inclusive multicultural policies, EPRDF was not able to adopt multilingual policies at the national level despite adopting federal system and multilingual policies at regional level.

NNPs under the EPRDF era continued to demand adequate autonomy to self-rule notably exclusive regional autonomy as in the case of Sidama, Gurage, Wolayita, Haddya, Kaffa, and inclusive multicultural policies for multicultural citizenship, and which continued to undermine political stability and social cohesion. EPRDF was not able to promote nested identities encouraging people to blend unity and

diversity equations in balance as it was mostly emphasizing on otherness.

The 1995 Constitution also declares that "Amharic is working language of the federal government", while the constituent units may adopt their own languages (see article 5(2-3)). As succinctly put, the language policy of Ethiopia is guided by *one lingua franca language thesis* rather than multiple *lingua franca languages* that advocate promoting one shared language to ensure a wider communication among diverse ethno-linguistic groups to bring about national unity, which is however against the gist of inclusive polity-building model that advocates multilingualism at the union/national level as the case of Switzerland, Canada, South Africa, India, and Belgium illustrates. These countries are all multicultural federations adopting multiple lingua franca language policies. As opposed to *one lingua franca* thesis, *multiple lingua franca* language thesis promotes multinational cohesion as in the case of Switzerland[12] that has four national languages, South Africa[13] eleven official languages, India[14] twenty-three official languages under the eighth schedule of the Indian constitution including English, Belgium[15] has two (French and Dutch) federal official languages, and Canada[16]

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[12]
https://www.eda.admin.ch/aboutswitzerland/en/home/gesellschaft/sprachen.html

[13] https://www.statssa.gov.za/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Approved_Language_Policy_2018.pdf

[14]
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eighth_Schedule_to_the_Constitution_of_India

[15] Van der Jeught, S. (2017). Territoriality and freedom of language: the case of Belgium. *Current Issues in Language Planning*, *18*(2), 181-198.

[16]
https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/language-policy

two (English and French) federal official languages.

 Last but not least, EPRDF also applied monolingual language policy in education teaching one local language, Amharic, as a subject across the country in primary and secondary schools to promote based on the thesis of *one lingua franca language* without offering space for more *lingua franca languages*. In other words, during EPRDF era, in addition to the monolingual official language policy, language policy in education followed suit promoting one *lingua franca language,* teaching one local language, Amharic, as a subject across the country without consideration for *multiple lingua franca languages* which has been therefore against the gist of an inclusive polity-building model. Therefore, it raises a question that how significantly did EPRDF's language policy and nation-building model differ from the pre-federal era? This question would be answered by looking into the self-rule autonomy that allowed most of the NNPs to use their own language as medium of instruction (for mother tongue education), or even in some cases, for enabling official language use at regional self-rule level such as Oromia, Tigray, Afar, Somali, and Harari though it remained monolingual at national level.

In a nutshell, when we closely look into the language policy in education during EPRDF era (r. 1991-2019) in terms of polity-building granting autonomy to self-rule and multicultural polices to promote inclusive citizenship, it has had significant limitations. The nation-building model was rather multinational-state model focusing on otherness/ diversity as it missed nested identities. Moreover, despite the presence of the multilingual language policy at self-rule level, only those NNPs with regional

autonomy have managed to use their own working languages in practice while the vast majority of NNPs have not been able to use their vernacular as official or even as co-official language at self-rule level despite constitutional promise to promote one's own language (see article 39/2). This has made the various groups in the country to push for autonomy and inclusive multicultural policy for asserting diversity and inclusive citizenship at national level.

As a result, following a formal substitution of EPRDF by PP in 2019, a new language policy evolved in February 2020, which has raised the federal working languages from the previous one language to five languages namely Amharic, Afaan Oromo, Tigrinya, Somali, and Afar selecting based on the criteria of a language of wider communication, a language with wider mother tongue speaker, and a language with trans-boundary nature shared by millions in the neighboring countries with a potential role for fostering economic, cultural, and diplomatic integration[17] which would play significant role in terms of symbolic relevance though which is still contested that whether this language policy reform is adequate in a country where more than 80 languages are spoken. Moreover, in terms of language policy in education, the 2020 language policy has come up with a tri-lingual language policy urging students to learn at least three languages, including one's own mother tongue, a foreign language (English), and one local language from among the federal working language on selective basis. This will have also a positive role in terms of building inclusive polity-building process

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[17] LPFDRE (Language Policy of Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia), Ministry of Culture and Tourism, February 2020/Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

as it raises chances for learning multiple languages and thereby increasing chances for multiple lingua franca languages given the growing number of federal working languages. In fact, that is how inclusive polity-building model is realized.

5. Conclusion

Ethiopia's monolithic nation-state building model proved its unsuitability for one single most reason: a lack of core nation that effectively absorbs minorities and smoothly settles any resistance against the *status quo*. The consequence of this model has remained tragic resulting in competing nationalism, which in a way undermined social solidarity, political stability and state legitimacy and including heightened identity based power struggle. Although the EPRDF era registered positive record in terms of multilingual language policy as it was able to let the NNPs to use their language for education and in some cases for administration; however, EPRDF was also unable to promote national level multilingual polices for fostering cohesion. EPRDF's nation-building model didn't qualify for inclusive-polity model which may rather falls into the category of multinational-state model as which was emphasizing on distinctiveness/otherness, among others, failing to pay attention to nested identities.

Ethiopia needs an inclusive-polity building adhering to constitutional democracy, adopting multicultural policies at national level for ensuring inclusive citizenship, granting autonomy for asserting diversity, fostering nested identities (blending self-identity and shared identity), and forming an effective and smooth communication both vertically and horizontally among member states of the federation. In terms of language policy also switching from one *lingua franca thesis* to *multiple lingua franca* as in the case of multicultural federations such as Switzerland, Belgium, Canada, India, and South Africa.

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