**Nation-building in pre-federal and federal Ethiopia (1855-2019): Analysis of the language policy roles, patterns, and consequences**

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***Abstract:*** *This study examines the roles, patterns, and consequences of the language policy in pre-federal and federal Ethiopia employing a comparative and analytical research design, using primary and secondary data sources, including official documents, journal articles, books, and monographs. The study assesses the roles, patterns, and consequences of the language policy in imperial monarchy, and Derg era, and the roles of federalism in nation-building model in EPRDF era; and the type of nation-building compatible with Ethiopia to ensure social cohesion. The findings showed that Ethiopia’s language policy remained monolingual to achieve ‘nation-state’ out of ethno-cultural diversity imposing a certain state-favored public identity which has caused tragic consequences inducing diverse ethno-cultural groups into ethno-national forces standing against the state establishment as its antithesis demanding autonomy and inclusive multicultural policies to promote unity in diversity or inclusive polity-building as an alternative. The coalition of ethno-national forces otherwise known as Ethiopian Peoples’ Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) came to power in May 1991. EPRDF federalized the state with the intent to address the various ethno-cultural groups demand for asserting diversity and ensuring inclusive multinational citizenship. However, the findings revealed that EPRDF’s nation-building model was not also inclusive polity-building model. Despite efforts to provide autonomy and multicultural policies, issues of asserting diversity and ensuring inclusive citizenship remained problematic, and which has made Ethiopian federalism to face challenges of social cohesion, state legitimacy, and regime stability. Therefore, this study recommends Ethiopia to adopt inclusive polity-building model granting adequate autonomy and multicultural policies for its ethno-national groups.*

***Keywords:***nation-state building model, inclusive polity-building model, language policy, federalism

# Introduction

Language policy is part of public policy which plays crucial role in shaping nation-building. While monolingual language policy shapes nation-state building, multilingual language policy fashions inclusive polity-building (McGarry & O‘Leary, 2003). The nation-state building intends to attain cultural uniformity imposing a certain narrowly defined public identity in the name of *civic identity* on others, which is however often the values of the core nation in the state, or in its absence the values of titular nation in control of the state power. Conversely, inclusive polity-building model promotes ‘unity in diversity’ granting autonomy to self-rule and promoting inclusive multicultural policies at shared-rule for asserting diversity and promoting inclusive citizenship (Assefa, 2023; Kymlicka, 1995).[[2]](#footnote-2)

Language policy comprises the followings: the official language policy that relates to the working language of government for public service delivery, including enacting, enforcing, and interpreting of laws; the language policy in education relates to medium of instruction and language subject(s) to be taught in a formal education system; the language policy in media that relates to medium of transmission for mass communication; and the language policy as human rights that relates to promoting social dignity recognizing diverse languages spoken in the country (Cooper, 1989; Tollefson & Pérez-Milans, 2018). Ethiopia is not only a multilingual/multicultural state but also a multinational[[3]](#footnote-3) state which constitutes dozens of mobilized groups demanding autonomy and multicultural policies for asserting diversity and inclusive multinational citizenship resisting nation-state building model that imposes narrowly defined public identity, including language, culture, and religion (Markakis, 1974).

Modern nation-state building process in Ethiopia evolved in the second half of the 19th century with the rise of Emperor Tewodros II employing power centralization policy (Bahru, 2002). Nation-state building model imposes a certain public identity on others with the intent to attain uniformity repressing diversity, often promoting the values of core nation, or in its absence the values of titular nation at the helm of state power (Assefa, 2023). The state-led monolithic nationalism attempting to realize nation-state has gradually induced contending nationalism otherwise mobilized ethno-national groups for asserting diversity and inclusive multinational citizenship. The monolithic nation-state building model, which might work for multicultural states with core nation, has failed in Ethiopia mainly because it had no core nation in the state. Ethiopia constitutes relative ethno-cultural groups such as Oromo 34.5% (25.4 million) and Amhara 26.9% (19.8 million). However, neither of them form core nation unilaterally.[[4]](#footnote-4) Opposing the imperial monarchy and the subsequent military socialist regime commonly known as *Derg*, the mobilized ethno-national coalition forces known as Ethiopian Peoples’ Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) came to power in the early 1990s. And, all attempts of ‘nation-state’ building in Ethiopia has failed resulting in tragic consequences, including eroded state legitimacy, power struggle along ethnic identity marker rather than ideology involving regime instability, including the demise of the imperial monarchy in 1974, the overthrow of *Derg* in 1991, and even the substitution of the EPRDF by the current PP government in 2019.[[5]](#footnote-5)

## Materials and methods

Employing a comparative empirical and analytical research design and utilizing primary and secondary sources of data, including official documents, books, and journal article, this study analyzes the language policy roles, patterns, and consequences in nation-building process of Ethiopia in pre federal and federal eras spanning the modern imperial monarchy era (1855-1974), *Derg* era(1974-1991), and EPRFD era (1991-2019). The scope of the language policy covers the official language and language in education policies. The study addresses the following research questions: what were the roles, patterns, and consequences of the language policy in Ethiopia’s nation-building process in three consecutive eras? Has federalism made any significant change in Ethiopia’s nation-building model? What type of nation-building model fits for multinational Ethiopia for ensuring social cohesion and regime stability?

# Theoretical framework

Although the origin of nationalism traces to back to the late 18th century with the American Revolution (1775) and the French Revolution (1789) shading light on the concept of popular sovereignty opposing imperialism and absolute monarchy respectively, nationalism as forces of nation-state building began to evolve in Europe in the mid-19th century, particularly with the German and Italian unification which was achieved in 1871 (Hyslop, 1960). After the defeat of socialism and collapse of the Soviet Empire and thereby the breach of the Berlin Wall in 1989, while Czechoslovakia was split into Czechs and Slovaks as they conceived themselves as different nations, the east and west Germans were (re)united for they believe to be belonging to the same nation (Moore, 1998).

On the other hand, nationalism as a doctrine of nation-building in African was introduced even later in the mid-20th century after World War II in the struggle for independence from colonialism (Hannum, 1996). Unlike the European states constituting core nations in most cases, African states lacked such core nation in the state to promote nation-state building due to the fact that African states were drawn by the colonial maters without due regard for ethno-cultural similarity. As a result, the only common factor in the context of African states has been relying on evoking collective sacrifices made against colonialism during the struggle for independence rather than promoting collective identity due to the fact that these states were arbitrarily carved. In other words, African states would be better off if they could promote inclusive polity-building model that promotes unity in diversity rather than importing the practice of nation-state building in the Western liberal countries with core nation (Ajala, 1983; Gbenenye, 2016; Khapoya, 2015). However, African states followed the footsteps of the Western liberal countries wrongly transplanting the nation-state model imposing a certain state-favored identity as civic identity and/or nation- state promoting the values of the titular group in control of the state power. This has induced sectarian groups (competing ethno-national forces) demanding self-determination for asserting diversity, inclusive multinational citizenship or otherwise resorting to independence, which has continued to undermine social cohesion, regime stability, and territorial integrity, including in in the case of Ethiopia (Assefa, 2010).

From the mid-18th century, where modern nation-state building began with the recognition of sovereignty in the Westphalia Treaty in 1648, until the mid-20th century, the term ‘nation’ would exclusively refer to independent sovereign states. In other words, mobilized groups within the state were not regarded as nations. However, following the decolonization process and human rights revolution, particularly after WW II, supported by the international laws that encouraged self-determination rights for people, mobilized groups have now started to be regarded as ethno-national groups demanding autonomy, inclusive multinational citizenship, or otherwise political independence (Buchanan, 1991; Tierney, 2005). Therefore, nowadays, multinational such as Ethiopia, Belgium, Canada, India, Spain, the UK etc., possess multiple nations within the state. In most cases, such multinational groups evolve as a result of nation-state building model carried out in multicultural states repressing diversity. For example, Quebec of Canada, Catalonia and Basque of Spain, Scotland of Britain, Flemish of Belgium, and Kurds in the Middle East, including Turkey, Iraq, Iran, and Syria, and ethno-national groups in Ethiopia are all one way or another related to the monolithic nation-building model carried out in these multicultural states (Assefa, 2023; Bengio, 2007; Brubaker, 1996). On the contrary, multicultural states that promote inclusive polity-building model may continue as multicultural states without necessarily transforming into multinational states.

For instance, Switzerland is a multicultural state constituting diverse ethno-linguistic groups, which is not however a multinational state as in the case of Canada, Belgium, India, etc., because the ethno-linguistic groups in Switzerland have been duly treated granting autonomy and inclusiveness for managing diversity and preventing national oppression. As a result, Swiss nationalism remains peculiar from other European states which other neither nation-states as in the case of France, the Netherlands, Denmark, Sweden, nor multinational states as in the case of Spain, Belgium, or the UK. Switzerland, on the other hand, remains a cohesive, inclusive polity, or preferably a ‘nation by will’ (Tanner, 2006). Here, a ‘nation by will’ implies that multicultural/multinational states are considered as nations by political will despite its diversity in terms of language, culture, and religion since the state asserts diversity with autonomy to self-rule, consolidates social bonds, promotes nested identity, and boosts belongingness to the polity. Currently, Switzerland has adopted four national languages, including German 62 %, French 22%, Italian 8%, and Romansh 06 % (Berthele, 2021).

The monolithic nation-state building model,[[6]](#footnote-6) particularly the integration variant promotes unity in uniformity adopting libertarian multicultural policies that recognizes and tolerates diversity without institutional support empowering diversity though. Liberal integration model the most favored model by the international organizations such as the UN, IMF and World Bank than any other model regardless of diversity in the state. Western democracies with core nation which employed integration model, including the US, Germany, Australia, France, the Netherlands, and Austria have actually succeeded (Kymlicka, 1995; Stepan, 1999; McGarry & O’leary, 2003). However, several studies assert that integration/nation-state model doesn’t succeed in multicultural and/or multinational states without core nation since simple liberal answers such as recognition of diversity, non-discrimination, and undifferentiated citizenship, civic equality don’t suffice to address the national minorities core issues without institutional support for promoting diversity (Kymlicka, 1995; Stepan, 1999; McGarry & O’leary, 2003). In contrast, inclusive polity-building model promotes unity in diversity granting autonomy and multicultural policies using power devolution including adopting federalism and adopting multicultural policies for asserting diversity and ensuring inclusive multicultural citizenship. However, this model is also criticized for the risks it involves such as the potential to heighten political polarization along identity markers (Horowitz, 1985; Roeder 2009; Choudhry & Hume, 2010; Erk & Anderson, 2010). Critics therefore suggest employing national and/or territorial federalism that promotes nation-state model rather than multinational and/or multicultural federalism that promotes inclusive polity-building model.

However, whether national/territorial federalism that promotes unity in uniformity/nation-state would address the core issues of multinational states namely asserting diversity and promoting inclusive citizenship remains highly contested. How does the liberal integration nation-state building model through mere soft liberal multicultural policies and power devolution as institutional design address the core demands of ethno-national groups for asserting diversity and inclusive citizenship, or ensure inclusive polity-building? For instance, those countries which adopted national/territorial/integrative federalism for promoting unity in uniformity cannot address the real concerns of ethno-national groups since such a federal arrangement don’t possess such qualities as managing diversity granting autonomy for asserting diversity and multicultural polices for promoting inclusive citizenship but rather which is meant for facilitating nation-state building dispensing power to territorially arranged multicultural groups dominated by a particular ethno-national group in each territory as in the case of the USA federation, where the values of the English speaking White Anglo-Saxon Protestants (WPAS) is used as core *civic identity* over the other national minorities in all the constituting units (Kymlicka, 2001; Stepan, 1999; McGarry & O’leary, 2005; Norman, 2006). In this case, what is regarded as ‘civic identity’ simply coincides with the values of the core nation, or in its absence titular nation in control of the state power as the state cannot be free from such values as language unlike religion in which case secularism might be an option.

 Fig. 1: Inclusive polity-building model involving devolution and multiculturalism

 At the federal/shared-rule/union level

* Inclusiveness to assert national equality

Multicultural and/or multinational state

 At regional/local self-rule level

* Autonomy to assert diversity

 *Source:* Adopted based on the theoretical framework discussed above.

#  4. Empirical analysis/Results and discussion

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

 Although the reign of Tewordos II signified the start of modern nation-state building, the origin of the ‘historic’ Ethiopian polity went back to the Aksumite Kingdom in the 1st century AD, which was shaped based on the values of the Northern highland plateau otherwise Abyssinian culture and Orthodox Christianity following King Ezana’s official conversion to Christianity in the early 4th century AD, specifically in 330 AD (Sergew, 1972).The reign of Emperor Tewodros II (r. 1855-1868) marked the process of modern nation-state building of Ethiopia realizing power centralization/state sovereignty, subduing strong regional lords undermining central authority such as *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 that weakened central authority and paved the way for modern nation-state building overcoming the ‘Era of the Princes’ also known as *Zemana Mesafint* (in Amharic) which lasted from (c. 1769-1855).

With regard to the language policy, Emperor Tewodros II declared Amharic as literary language of the court replacing the hitherto literary language known as Geéz.[[7]](#footnote-7) Therefore, hereinafter Amharic gained the status of being spoken and written/literary language of the court (Bender, 1983). As a result, the monolingual language policy continued to shape nation-state building imposing a certain narrowly defined public identity on others. The nation-state building in Ethiopia other than language also involved the values of the Northern Plateau (aka Abyssinian custom) with a hierarchical political culture and Orthodox Christianity. However, the monolithic nation-state building in multicultural Ethiopia eventually induced competing nationalism causing ethno-national mobilization as its antithesis demanding autonomy and multicultural policies for asserting diversity and inclusive citizenship in the late 1960s originally initiated by the Ethiopian Student Movement (ESM) (Bahru 2002).

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

However, when it comes to the language policy pattern, it remained the same promoting and perpetuating the one language policy started by his predecessor. In terms religious tolerance, Emperor Yohannes IV was even more conservative than his predecessor as was evident in the Council of Boru Media (1878), where Muslim aristocrats of the Wollo province were forced to follow Christianity, or otherwise leave their position in the government (Rubenson, 1987). Interestingly, the reign of Emperor Yohannes IV has proved that granting autonomy without adopting multicultural policies is not a guarantee for promoting inclusive polity-building.

As earlier implied in the theoretical framework section, devolution of power including federalism doesn’t make a difference in nation-building model unless which involved autonomy to assert diversity and multicultural policies to promote inclusive citizenship as witnessed in national/territorial federations such as the USA, Australia, Austria, Brazil, Argentina, etc., which have adopted federalism as means of power distribution and thereby nation-building rather than managing/accommodating diversity promoting inclusive polity-building. The territorial/integrative federations basically promote a certain core nation or in its absence titular nation in the state using territorial federal arrangement for defusing concentrated diversity in a way to subtly attain nation-state building (Kymlicka 2001; Stepan et al., 2011).

 Emperor Menelik II (r. 1889-1913) was another key political figure in the making of modern Empire-state of Ethiopia.[[8]](#footnote-8) The victory of Adwa in 1896 against the colonial power of Italy was remarkable achievement under his reign, which played crucial role in winning the international recognition, expanding its territory, and opening up of a formal diplomatic relations with the European powers, including Italy itself, Britain, France, and Russia (Bahru, 2002). Unlike his predecessor, Emperor Menelik II reinforced power centralization *centrally* appointing regional rulers, particularly in those newly integrated territories with force (Marcus, 1994).

With regard to the language policy during this time, Ethiopia continued to promote Amharic as a symbol of unity despite the incorporation of huge ethno-linguistic groups into Ethiopian empire following the robust territorial expansion project, which *tripled* the demographic and territorial size of the empire-state (Markakis, 1974). The monolingual language policy continued to dictate Ethiopia’s nation-state building based on the already established nation-state identity, including language, culture, and religion regardless of the huge diversity recently included. The local elites continued to adopt the values of the *ruling class,* including language, culture, and religion; and they were reciprocated with recognition, local authority, and even were able to establish intermarriages with the royal families (Cohen, 2000).

It was also Emperor Menelik II who introduced modern education system in Ethiopia. Accordingly, 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 finally replaced by English in 1947 after nearly four decades of use. The curriculum during this time also included other elective languages besides French, including English, Italian, and Arabic (Bloor & Tamrat, 1996). The modern education during this time focused on producing skilled officials who could play roles in political and 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 centralization and cultural assimilation policy in his attempt to realize 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 its article 125 stated that, ‘Amharic is the official language of the Ethiopian Empire’, which highlighted the persistence of the monolingual policy thereby perpetuating the monolithic nation-state building model. The monolingual policy during this time was even more reinforced by the monolingual education policy promoting Amharic as the sole *local language* as medium of instruction in primary schools (from grade 1-6) and taught as a subject both in primary and secondary schools without space for other local languages in the country (Bloor & Tamrat, 1996). In other words, there was no other local language which was used as either as medium of instruction or taught as a subject in multilingual polity of Ethiopia. However, it must not be forgotten that a *foreign language* English has always been a *de facto* co-official language of Ethiopian polity that appears side by side with Amharic, including in currency notes and other national symbols since 1947 when Ethiopia officially changed its language policy from the hitherto Francophone orientation to Anglophone (Teshome, 1997). During this time around, Amharic was used not only as official language but also practically national language since all cultural, educational, and identity matters were required to be expressed in this language (Assefa, 2010).

 Unfortunately, all efforts and attempts of nation-state building in multicultural Ethiopia without core nation ended up with tragic consequences inducing mobilized ethno-national groups demanding autonomy and inclusive multicultural policies for asserting diversity and inclusive multicultural/multinational citizenship. In a nutshell, the nation-state building model in Ethiopia produced competing nationalism, undermining regime stability thereby by telling it incompatibly to the multicultural state of Ethiopia which has no core nation in the state to subsume national minorities into the values of core nation with democratic legitimacy to easily achieve a civic nation-state. Although crafting shared language for diverse countries such as Ethiopia is a necessity as lingua franca for a wider communication, however it was made in such a way banning all other local languages and/or repressing the diverse ethno-cultural groups which caused resentment against the state for its cultural marginalizing policy, which rather incubated dozens of mobilized groups in the late 1960s and in the 1970s taking guns against the state for liberation, including the Eritrean People’s Liberation Front (EPLF), Tigray People’s Liberation Front (TPLF), Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), Western Somali Liberation Front (WSLF), were the post prominent ones. As a result, all efforts and attempts of attaining ‘nation-state’ imposing a narrowly defined *public identity* as national or civic identity of the nation-state caused terrible consequences, including social divide along ethnic identity markers with political salience, eroded state legitimacy, and regime instability.

# ****4. The *Derg* era’s language policy and nation-building (1974-1991)****

 Following the eruption Ethiopian social revolution, the military junta often known as *Derg* took power in 1974 guided by Marxism-Leninism as state ideology. In contrast to the feudal monarchy, *Derg* showed a gesture towards multiculturalism recognizing the diverse ethno-national groups in the country with constitutional declaration, which somehow switched the country’s nation-building model from the previously assimilation model to liberal integration model as the state began to recognize the diverse ethno-national groups (though which is still a variant of monolithic nation-state building model). Unlike the imperial Ethiopia, Derg’s Ethiopialaunched 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 nationalities, or otherwise ethno-national groups (Bender, 1985). With respect to 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 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 era of the imperial monarchy, *Derg* attempted to improve the nation-state building model switching from an utterly assimilationist model to a sort of liberal integration model. The (re)opening of “Ethiopian Languages and Cultures Academy” in 1976 was also another step forward towards multilingual language policy and planning.[[9]](#footnote-9) The Academy was mandated to create alphabets for those nationalities’ languages without writing systems, and to prepare dictionaries and grammar books. Its implementation however fell short of expectations due to the impact of socialism that regards nationalism as mere false consciousness that would fade away when class differences is eliminated (Nodia, 2017). Socialism assumes that at the end of the day, post-national international world order would be restored and nationalism would wither along with class. During this time even federalism was employed as a means of institutional design to soften nationalism in efforts to create a cosmopolitan post-national global order as in the case of failed socialist federations of Eastern Europe were evidence for this was that they were sham federations having ethnic nature in form but socialist in content, which were not meant to fulfill demands of ethnic groups but rather for to attain socialism as a political order (McGarry & O’leary, 2003).

Furthermore, *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]](#footnote-10) The 1987 Constitution (which is theoretically the first ever Ethiopian Republic Constitution) stressed its commitment to ensure equality, development, and respect for the languages of the nationalities, however, paradoxically in article 116 of the same constitution Amharic was declared as “the working language of the state” any space for other local languages even at sub-national or local level. Since the state remained heavily centralized unitary socialist incapable of devolving adequate autonomy to the various ethno-national groups, the constitutional recognition of local languages was limited to symbolic gesture without translating into practice (Bender, 1985: 274).

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

However, the pitfall of Derg’s language policy was that the multilingual language policy in the informal education didn’t translate into formal education system. In other words,Amharic remained the sole local language used as medium of instruction and taught as a subject across the country (Bloor & Tamrat, 1996). Briefly, *Derg’s* language policy continued to be monolingual policy both in terms of official language and language in education. As a result, competing nationalism (i.e., civic-state nationalism and its own antithesis ethno-nationalism) continued to undermine national unity and territorial integrity of the polity (Bender, 1985). The nation-building model that somehow shifted from assimilation to liberal integration model anyway failed to deter the mobilized groups from demanding autonomy and inclusive multicultural policies. After the protracted civil war between the center and mobilized groups, *Derg* was eventuallydefeated in May 1991 by the concerted efforts of ethno-nationalist forces, notably the Ethiopian Peoples’ Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF).

# ****5. EPRDF era’s language policy and nation-building (1991-2019)****

Following *Derg’s* failure to adequately address the long-standing demands of the mobilized groups for asserting diversity and inclusive multinational citizenship as it was preoccupied with ideology of socialism which assumes nationalism would wither away sooner or later following the elimination of class struggle, EPRDF adopted federalism primarily with the intent to address the long-standing causes of ethno-nationalist forces to assert diversity and promote inclusive citizenship. However, whether Ethiopian federalism basically manages diversity and realizes inclusive multicultural citizenship granting adequate autonomy and inclusive multinational citizenship is problematic.

EPRDF that ruled Ethiopia from 1991-2019 until which was replaced by the Prosperity Party (PP) in December 2019, adopted federalism and multicultural policies as means of inclusive polity-building for promoting unity in diversity granting autonomy and multicultural policies. However, EPRDF adopted asymmetrical ethno-federalism under a pre-defined territory as stated in article 39 & 47 of the 1995 Constitution. Ethiopian federalism as explicitly stated in the preamble of the 1995 federal constitution, it is a federation of NNPs. Currently there 76 recognized NNPs with a proportional seat in House of Federation, the Upper Chamber of the Parliament. However, in terms of institutional setting, not every ethno-territorial group is entitled equal autonomy to self-rule however rather some are endowed with local autonomy to self-rule while others are endowed with regional autonomy. Therefore, institutionally, Ethiopian federation currently constitutes 12 regional states out of which 7 regional states are titular nation-states controlling the regional state power either unilaterally or predominantly. These 7 regional states are Tigray, Afar, Amhara, Oromo, Somali, Sidama, and Harari[[11]](#footnote-11) and all of which are named after the titular nation in control of the regional state power.

 On the other hand, the vast majority of NNPs (i.e., 69 out of 76) are endowed with local autonomy to self-rule being confined in cluster regional states or in some rare cases being pockets national minorities in the aforementioned ethno-national states. However, most of the ethno-territorial groups are found under the cluster regions, including the South Ethiopia region, Southwest Ethiopia region, Central Ethiopia region, Benishangul-Gumuz region, and Gambella region.

Unfortunately, despite adopting federalism and multilingual policies, the NNPs in Ethiopia continue to demand autonomy and inclusive multicultural policies for asserting diversity and inclusive citizenship, and which continues to undermine regime stability and multinational cohesion. This is because there is inadequacy both in terms of asserting diversity autonomy to self-rule the multicultural policy to shared rule. For instance, the 1995 Constitution still declares monolingual official language policy. The 1995 Constitution states that the working language of the federal government is Amharic, while the constituent units may adopt their own working languages (see article 5(2-3)). In other words, the language policy at federal level is guided by *a lingua franca thesis* that advocates promoting one shared language to ensure a wider communication and thereby bringing about national unity which is however against the gist of inclusive polity-building model that promotes multilingualism at the union level. As the case of Switzerland, Canada and Belgium illustrates which are all multicultural federations.

During EPRDF era, in addition to the monolingual official language policy, the language policy in education also followed suit promoting a lingua franca thesis by teaching one local language, Amharic, as a subject across the country without space for other local languages to promote multiple lingua franca languages which has been therefore against the gist of inclusive polity-building model. Therefore, it poses questions that how significantly did EPRDF’s language policy and nation-building model differ from the pre-federal era? In fact, this question would be answered by looking into the self-rule autonomy that allowed most of the ethno-national groups to use their own language as medium of instruction (for mother tongue education), or even in some cases, using as official language at regional self-rule, particularly in those ethno-national regional such as Oromia, Tigray, Afar, Somali, Sidama, and Harari though it remained monolingual guided by a lingua franca thesis at federal level. In a nutshell, when we closely look into language in education policies during EPRDF era (r. 1991-2019) in terms of inclusive polity-building that grants autonomy and multicultural polices to assert diversity and inclusive citizenship, it has had significant limitations making Ethiopian federalism unable to be qualified as inclusive polity-building model. Moreover, despite the multilingual language policy at self-rule level, only those NNPs with regional autonomy to self-rule have managed to use their own working languages in practice while the vast majority of ethno-national groups to local autonomy to self-rule have not been able to use their vernacular as official or even as co-official language despite the constitutional promise to promote one’s own language (See article 39(2)). This has made the various ethno-national groups in the country push for autonomy and inclusive multicultural policies for asserting diversity at self-rule and inclusive multinational citizenship at shared rule.

As a result, following the political reform in 2018, and formal substitution of EPRDF by PP in 2019, a new language policy draft evolved in February 2020, which has increased the federal working languages from one to five, including Amharic, Oromiffa, Tigrinya, Somali, and Afar 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[[12]](#footnote-12) which would play significant roles 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 in terms of inclusive polity-building. Moreover, in terms of language policy in education, the 2020 language policy draft 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 electively. This would have positive roles in terms of inclusive polity-building process as it increases chances for learning multiple languages and thereby raises chances for multiple lingua franca languages given the growing number of federal working languages potentially to be taught electively across the country. In fact, that is how inclusive polity-building model is realized. However, there could be change resistance about such pluralistic language policies thereby undermine the implementation of the 2020 language policy reform.

## 6. Conclusion

The monolingual language policy which started during the Imperial era shaped Ethiopia’s nation-state building project imposing a narrowly defined state identity. The language policy continued to be monolingual throughout the imperial and *Derg* era with some slight changes. The monolithic nation-building model proved its incompatibility to Ethiopia given the country’s multicultural and multinational reality without core nation. The outcome of the monolithic nation-building was that it transformed the multiethnic groups into multinational groups getting politically mobilized demanding autonomy and multicultural policies for asserting diversity/self-determination promoting inclusive citizenship/national equality or otherwise resorting to independence since the late 1960s. In other words, the nation-state building project has induced a deeply divided society along ethno-linguistic identity, where such identity marker became an epicenter for power struggle, recognition, political party organization more than any other bases such as ideology, which paly little role (if any).

While the roles of the monolingual language policy was that it shaped the monolithic nation-building project in pre-1991 Ethiopia, and its consequences include eroded state legitimacy, social antagonism and mistrust as a result of the historical legacies of the monolithic nation-building project defined by marginalization of diverse ethno-cultural groups imposing a certain narrowly defined nation-state identity in terms of language, culture, or even religion. When it comes to the federal Ethiopia from 1991-2019 under the EPRDF era, there are changes and continuities in terms of language policy and thereby nation-building model. In other words, Ethiopian federalism has been still between nation-state and inclusive polity-building model. Its nation-state nature is that it has been guided by a lingua franca thesis rather than inclusive polity building model. Again, it terms of granting autonomy for asserting diversity, it has its own achievements as well as limitations given what it grants is asymmetrical autonomy to self-rule which has made some groups local autonomy to demand for more autonomy for asserting diversity. Therefore, the whole assessments of the study asserts that Ethiopia needs to adopt an alternative model of nation-building, or what is referred to as an inclusive polity-building model that promotes “unity in diversity” granting autonomy and multicultural policies for asserting group-differentiated rights and promoting inclusive (multinational) citizenship.

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2. Autonomy entails the exclusive right/power to assert diversity, and which has different aspects, including fiscal autonomy, political autonomy, administrative autonomy, and cultural autonomy. Inclusiveness entails the state’s/polity’s ability to adopt inclusive institutions and policies, including multiculturalism, affirmative action and/or special representation for national minorities in the state to ensure fair representation. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. While multinational states are also multicultural states but the reverse is not necessarily true because not every ethno-cultural group gets mobilized into ethno-national group unconditionally. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Ethiopia is referred to as ‘the land of national minorities’ for the fact that there are only relative majority ethno-national groups. Core nation refers to a dominant national group in multicultural and/or multinational states constituting substantial majority group, which helps build a nation-state by subsuming national minorities in the state. See Ethiopian Census 2007, Ethiopian population census communication. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. EPRDF stands for Ethiopian Peoples’ Revolutionary Democratic Front, which was a Coalition of multiethnic political parties ruling the country from 1991-2019. EPRDF was replaced by the incumbent ruling party, Prosperity Party (PP) in 2019. PP is a reformed version of EPRDF which came into power excluding the Tigray People’s Liberation Front (TPLF), which was one of the four major political parties of the Coalition. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Monolithic nation-state building models has several variants, including control/segregation model that promotes separating racial identities; fusion model that synthesizes a new overarching identity; elimination model that takes extreme anti-diversity measures such as ethnic cleansing and genocide to achieve a ‘pure’ nation-state building; secession model that promotes partition; assimilation model that promotes unity in uniformity imposing a certain identity on others; (liberal) integration model that adopts soft libertarian multiculturalism recognizing and tolerating diversity without institution support, however, and inclusive polity-building model that promotes unity in diversity by asserting diversity and promoting inclusive citizenship (Assefa, 2023; McGarry & O‘Leary, 2003). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. The classical Ethiopic language otherwise known as Geéz was spoken and literary/written language of the court during the Aksumite Kingdom. It was however replaced by Amharic as spoken language following the fall of the Aksumite kingdom and replaced by the Zagwe Dynasty (c. 1150-1270). Amharic was gain replaced by Geéz as literary language of the court with the rise of Emperor Tewodros II in 1855, and has continued to serve as lingua franca to the diverse ethno-linguistic groups in the empire besides serving as official language of the state in pre-federal and federal Ethiopia alike. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
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. It took him two decades (1878-1898) to compete the empire-state building project. This period of expansion is referred to (by some) as *'Hagar Maqnat'* roughly translated as “cultivation/Christianization/civilization of the land” (Bahru 2002). [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Language planning can be 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, establishment of 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). [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. A proclamation set to provide for the establishment of the institute for the study of Ethiopian nationalities, Proclamation No.236 of 1983.  [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Harari National Regional State is peculiar in its demographic and geographic settings. It is a sort of ‘city-state’ encircled by Oromia regional state and demographically exceedingly outnumbered the Oromo population. As a result, the Harar city is the not only the capital of Harari People’s State but also Eastern Hararge Zone of Oromia Regional State. Therefore, due to such geographic and demographic factors Oromiffa has been made a co-official language in Harari People’s Regional State. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. LPFDRE (Language Policy of Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia), Ministry of Culture and Tourism, February 2020/Addis Ababa, Ethiopia [↑](#footnote-ref-12)