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Berhanu Abegaz

A Tributary Model of State Formation

Ethiopia, 1600-2015

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For Tesfaye, Teferi, Workuha, and Tsehay
&
In memory of Aklilu and Alemnesh

Foreword

A Tributary Model of State Formation: *Ethiopia, 1600-2015* by Berhanu Abegaz addresses an issue that is at once topical and pivotal to Ethiopia. It also offers a broad analytical survey of the question in the Afroasiatic world. The author's purpose is to find out why these countries, Ethiopia in particular, are still struggling to build well-functioning, capable, and accountable modern nation-states. Some measure of success has been obtained in countries like India, but for the most part, the task is far, far from being achieved. Why are these countries latecomers to the game? Have there been impediments? If so what, and how grave, are they?

This book opens with a chapter examining the key elements of a modern nation-state: (i) a capable and effective governing entity with an adequate fiscal base, (ii) the prevalence of the rule of law, and (iii) accountability of officers of the state to the governed. This is followed by a broad historical analysis of how each of these elements has evolved. Various theories of the natural process of **state formation** (and deliberate efforts of **state-building**) are examined. In Europe, successful state formation was the outcome of efforts to create buoyant revenue bases to fund a defense against external attacks. And making it sustainable required an environment which encouraged economic growth. Afroasiatic polities built states whose revenue bases consisted of tributes and where no environment existed for sustained productivity growth in agricultural and non-agricultural activities. This, says the author, goes a long way to explain "why tributary empires tend to be exclusionary and are impelled to be expansionist to capture tributary peripheries after pauperizing core provinces." Despite significant shifts in the political economy of Afroasiatic countries in the subsequent colonial and postcolonial era, the tendency to be exclusive persisted with the emergence of new power elites, preventing in the process the formation today's modern nation-states.

A more in-depth discussion of state formation in the Afroasiatic world is offered in the chapter that follows where the author surveys the Ottoman, the Safavid, and the Mughal empires. Of the three, the Ottomans had the most extensive bureaucratic apparatus with military districts run by officers who acted as tax collectors. Revenues were largely obtained from taxes on agriculturalists, pastoralists, and long-distance traders. Yet, there was no secure revenue base underpinned by economic growth.

The Safavids and the Moguls broadly followed the Ottoman template. While Islam provided a universalist ideology which most subject peoples in the three empires shared (the Hindus under the Moguls being an exception), the system was essentially tributary in character with an alien power elite holding sway over disparate peoples and cultures. A brief discussion of precolonial African states (Gondar in Ethiopia, Dahomey, Asante, Mali, and Kongo in West and Central Africa) concludes the survey.

Gondar is addressed in much greater detail in its own terms. A successor state of the Kingdoms of ancient Axum, Zagwe, and the Solomonid States, Gondar (1555–1770), it perfected the tributary-military model of state formation but ultimately succumbed to internal strife. Why, asks the author, was this robust state unable to transform itself into a tax-based, territorial, national state? In search of an answer, he posits the following hypothesis: "[T]tributarism is self-limiting since it relies on an indirect rule and puts a high premium on extractive contests over smallholder surpluses. By undermining the emergence of an autonomous farmer class and a business class, endemic predation stunts the fiscal basis of the state and undermines the legitimacy of the state in the eyes of its hapless subjects."

An excellent account of Gondar's complex land tenure system is provided, demonstrating persuasively how the interplay of economic and political constraints militated against economic growth and thereby forestalled the emergence of a secure revenue base so crucial for a modern nation-state. It is perhaps useful to add here that the Ethiopian tributary state had succeeded in establishing the rudiments of the rule of law, one of the defining attributes of a modern nation-state. According to the *Kibre Negest,* an iconic text which served as the basis for key aspects of Ethiopia's jurisprudence down the centuries, the law comes down from God. The King is his supreme magistrate on Earth, given the sacred mandate of administering God's law faithfully and impartially. In the universe of the *Kibre Negest*, priests kept an eye on the King and interceded whenever he deviated from the law. Accountability, another attribute of a modern nation-state, was also a feature of the *Kibre Negest*. The King was accountable not only to God but also to those he governed. Despite this enabling heritage, the Ethiopian State was for the most part hamstrung by the double whammy of tributary tax collection and autocracy.

Gondar ultimately gave way to an incident that had the potential of being Ethiopia's Magna Carta, but sadly ended up triggering an era of competing principalities (*zemene* ***mesafint***) during which the emperors were rendered impotent. The incident was provoked by the last effective emperor, Tekle Giorgis (1770–1777), who came upon the idea of imposing a new kind of tax. A mass gathering was called by the inhabitants of the immediate vicinity at which the new tax was rejected, and a laconic message sent to the emperor: govern us in the manner of your fathers and we, like our fathers, shall support the Crown. We render our bare feet to thorns and our chests to the lances of adversaries. But we render no taxes. To which the emperor replied ruinously: if I go by what you say, wherein lies my royal authority? He was immediately suspended from power and was restricted to the palace. The rebellious gathering appointed a prince to act in its name. No one thought of designating some authority to oversee the prince: a critical act that might have altered Ethiopia's

history. In time, the prince evolved into an autocrat, setting an example for other princes and plunging Ethiopia into fractious principalities.

In 1847, a visionary military leader named Kassa, consumed by the idea of restoring the country's historic unity, power, and renown, embarked upon a military campaign to unseat every prince, one at a time, beginning with the Prince of Gondar, the primus inter pares. He succeeded and was crowned emperor. With remarkable determination, he set out to create a modern nation-state where a strong central government had the power to tax, establish a standing army, curb the power of the Church and the local princes, and introduce land reform to relieve the peasantry of its many miseries.[1] He encountered fierce resistance and was finally brought down by a British military expedition for his refusal to release British citizens he had put behind bars. The Emperor committed suicide rather than bow in submission to the enemy.

The seat of empire later moved southwards to Shewa where Menelik II was crowned Emperor in 1882. Abegaz picks up the story from there and introduces the reader to a new vista of Ethiopia's political evolution: the modern Shewan State covering the nine decades to the end of 1974. The global environment had changed dramatically: it was the age of industry and the colonial scramble for Africa. Menelik's response was to launch a military campaign to reclaim the lost provinces of bygone times. This turned out to be a major challenge, for massive demographic shifts had occurred following an extended civil war in the sixteenth century. But Menelik persisted and succeeded in reclaiming regions lost during the civil war, adding fresh territory to pre-empt Italian, French, and British colonial incursions. A military encounter was bound to occur with one of these at one point or another. In 1896, the Italian Army crossed Ethiopia's northern border and occupied considerable territory. Emperor Menelik's army went to war. To the astonishment of the colonial powers and the wider world, he emerged victor.

A vigorous modernization program ensued. By the middle of the twentieth century, the Shewan state (first under Menelik and later under Haile Selassie) succeeded in transforming the historic tributary state into a territorial state double its previous size. And, in Abegaz's words, "it [had] laid down a reasonably secure fiscal base which was strung together from different sources, and developed links with the global economy." This was no mean accomplishment, but the project of building a modern political order with a strong, accountable, and growth-promoting state remained incomplete.

Abegaz asks why and provides a two-part answer. Internally, Shewa (like Gondar) was beleaguered by the self-limiting nature of tribute-seeking which discouraged agricultural modernization and economic integration, especially in the historic northern and central provinces. External factors also came into play. The fall of Axum came fast on the heels of the rise of hostile Arab communities on the littoral of the Red Sea during the seventh century, followed by the emergence and dominance of the Ottomans in the ensuing centuries. Ethiopian emperors had to devote a good bulk of their resources to fending off these adversaries. And the forced isolation

[1] The Meiji Restoration of Japan, with leaders harboring a similar vision, was launched in 1868.

of more than a thousand years further blocked the country from the centers of commerce and learning to which it had access previously and had greatly benefited from.

As with Gondar, Abegaz proceeds to provide an extensive analysis of the complex system of land tenure and tribute collection in Shewa, demonstrating at each stage how the system effectively shut out any prospect of sustained growth and the emergence of a productive farmer and merchant class. He supplements this with an excellent account of the taxes, tributes, and revenue from the slave trade of the short-lived Kingdom of Jimma Aba Jiffar.

The latest variant is the Revolutionary State represented by the two revolutionary regimes from 1974 to the present. Shewa had managed to develop three of the building blocks of a modern state: a common language, a legitimizing ideology, and monopoly over the instruments of violence. And Shewa's genius of fusing the legacies of Axum and Gondar with the new demography of the diverse cultures of the southern provinces had been key to its success as a trailblazer of a modern state. When all is said and done, however, Shewa fell short of evolving into a full-fledged modern nation-state capable of providing popular participation in public affairs, basic services to all, decentralization, adequate accountability, separation of Church and State, and fundamental freedoms. And in 1974, a small politically conscious segment of the population precipitated a revolution.

Over a relatively short period, Marxist students succeeded to undermine the old regime. In the end, however, it was the military that usurped power. The soldiers had no vision or coherent strategy for change. And before long, they embarked upon mass arrests, summary executions, and a Stalinist type police state. As soldiers long trained to uphold national unity and inviolable borders, they wore the mantle of nationalism—not realizing that their version was purely of the cartographic variety. Increasingly, they found it difficult to manage the nation's affairs, long term or short term. And they failed spectacularly when their extensive military superstructure imploded in the face of sustained secessionist resistance. The young radical victors were initially perceived as liberators from the military. Rather than building on this enabling sentiment and fashioning less repressive and more inclusive policies, they opted for an even more radical version of Marxism (that of Enver Hoxha of Albania) made worse by a pernicious breed of ethnocentric nationalism.

Abegaz applies to these two regimes the same analytical tools he had earlier used with such good effect and concludes that the classical extractive tributary system of raising revenue persists. Under these regimes (especially under the latter) land has been turned into state property. And the new governing elites extract what amounts to rent from exploiting that asset (supplemented by huge resource transfers from donor countries to support development) and deploy them for advancing the interests of their political class. Much more is said in the chapter in this regard that gives depth and meaning to these observations. In the concluding chapter, the author spells out the implications of his analysis for reforming the Revolutionary State.

A key question that has dominated the debate on Ethiopian nation-state formation is which of the two factors, the external or internal, was the more determinant? This book contains a fairly exhaustive exploration of the balance between the two,

with the author favoring the internal as the more decisive factor. I lean towards the view that external factors have been the more formidable inhibitors of the nation-building process. Imagine the countless missed opportunities for the cross-fertilization of ideas in science, technology, the arts, governance, and the like that might have paved the way for the emergence of a modern nation. Ironically, when the isolation ended during the reign of Emperor Haile Selassie I, the flood of new ideas (which started with Italy's occupation in the mid-1930s and culminated in the mindless adoption of an exclusivist foreign ideology in 1974) disrupted the process of nation-building that the Emperor had finally set in motion.

Reading Abegaz's book reminds one of *Why Nations Fail,* a similar but more ambitious book published in 2012, by Acemoglu and Robinson. Those who have read it will recall how tangentially, and perhaps inevitably, Ethiopia's case was treated. We all owe a debt of gratitude to Abegaz for rectifying the situation and for enhancing our understanding of a subject of such consuming and abiding interest to Ethiopians. It goes without saying that there is also much that will be of interest to scholars and specialists of Ethiopia.

Philadelphia, PA, USA Tekalign Gedamu
November 2017

Ato Tekalign Gedamu is a retired economist who held a number of cabinet positions under two Ethiopian governments, was Vice President for Finance at the African Development Bank where he served for some 16 years, and was Chairman & CEO of the Bank of Abyssinia

Preface

> *With respect to cognitive categories, the KN (Kibre Negest] assumes the equivalence of land ≈ people ≈ nation ≈ polity. Thus, it speaks of the rejoicing which took place in behere Ityopia, a phrase that connotes land, country, and people alike.*
>
> *Donald Levine (2009: 314)*

> *[T]he Ethiopian emperors and the rest of the landed nobility lived poorly. Their best dish and best drink required little or no skill. Their houses were not only poorly constructed but also hardly furnished. They not only dressed poorly but did not even enjoy the comforts of sandals, to say nothing of shoes or boots.*
>
> *Merid Wolde Aregay (1984: 127)*

Economic transformation and socio-political modernization, we now know, are strongly associated with two sets of widenings. The first, political widening, entails a transition from narrowly primordial collective decision-making institutions to pan-ethnic, pan-faith, and territorially shared notions of authority and governance. The other is economic widening (and later deepening) which entails a non-discriminatory pan-territorial and trans-sectoral mobility of people, capital, goods and services, and ideas. A modern social order then is one where the fundamental rights of citizenship are honored, property rights are well defined and enforced, and a viable state imposes the rule of law and provides basic public services.

A modern political order, a subset of a modern social order, rests on a tripod of distinctive institutions. One is a *state* with competent officials who are not prone to egregious nepotism, cronyism, or **clientelism**. A second pillar is *the rule of law* that fosters limited government by imposing binding restraints on the rulers. The third is the *accountability* of elites to nonelites, assuming a paternalistic form out of a sense of *noblesse oblige* or preferably a democratic form.

Definitions are in order. The term *state* generally refers to the set of administrative and coercive institutions which enjoys **sovereignty** (domestic and international). The term regime refers either to a ruling clique in control of the state or the rules and norms for the exercise of power. A government, on the other hand, denotes

the leadership that is in control of state institutions. As they say, if the state is a computer, the regime is the software, and the government is the programmer or the operator.

By *state formation,* I mean the drawn out, nonlinear, and endogenous evolution of the institutionalization of the power of a supra-society political entity which eventually enjoys a monopoly of large-scale violence. *State-building* is a deliberate action by elites to develop the machinery of the state to enhance technocratic and coercive capacity, and to gain the legitimacy to rule.

Nation-building, on the other hand, is the deliberate fostering of a strong sense of a common political identification with the state by a culturally, and ethnically, or racially diverse populace to undergird the resiliency of state institutions. State resilience is understood here as the capability of the state to absorb internal as well as external shocks while preserving stability, adapting to unavoidable radical changes, and even transforming itself into a nation-state by consolidating the requisite resource base to underwrite political centralization (OECD, 2008; Fukuyama, 2014).

The processes of class formation, nation formation, and state formation have historically been profoundly shaped by war (interstate and intrastate), migration, and long-distance trade. This means, state formation is a product of the terms under which the producer and the appropriator classes control the means of production as well as the distribution of the economic surplus already produced.

How only a handful of societies (roughly 1.5 billion people out the 7.5 billion worldwide) managed to transition from closed-order societies (doubly exclusionary economic and political institutions) to open-order societies (doubly inclusionary economic and political institutions) continues to be a hotly debated issue (NWW 2012; Acemoglu and Robinson 2012). These contingent outcomes (or radical turns) obviously involve luck, farsighted leadership, and critical moments of opportunity. One possible avenue of extrication begins with economic growth which is presumed to pave the way for inclusive institutions. A second path reverses the sequence. A third path imagines the co-evolution of inclusive political and economic institutions.

The literature on the microhistory of economic and political institutions (the trees) in Africa is sparse but rapidly growing. Drawing credible meanings from it for the macrohistory (the forest) has, however, lagged far behind. The latter has, in fact, given way to ideological (Marxist, liberal, or communitarian) or self-servingly political (ethnolinguistic or parochially religious) interpretations of the past and the future alike. The need for theoretical clarity about cause and effect, empirical substantiation of competing claims, and careful identification of the options for crafting resilient institutions remains as great as ever.

The search for the ultimate causes of underdevelopment of Ethiopia, despite its impressive historical pedigree, often ends with the recognition of the centrality of its inability to forge an effective modern state to mount a robust industrialization drive. I, therefore, take up here this vexed question of why the Christian civilizational state found it so elusive to complete the project of transforming itself into a unified nation-state through robust processes of modernization and assimilation of kindred polities within its cultural reach. I offer a line of thinking that, while Ethiopian

exceptionalism may be justified by some features of its statecraft, the basic processes of state formation and nation formation are widely shared by many precolonial African and Asian societies.

In other words, the most important aspect of the question of prolonged underdevelopment ultimately turns on the effectiveness of the Ethiopian state in managing three things: land, people, and trade. Furthermore, since state-building and nation-building often come bundled, a vital issue that must be addressed pertains to the conditions of existence for managing progressive cultural homogenization.

Many parts of Africa—Islamic, Christian, or Indigenous—had developed states and empires at least as far back as the Middle Ages. In the cases of Egypt and Ethiopia, the antiquity of the state and even the nation is remarkably long (Levine 2009). To show that Africa did not lack in the antiquity of state formation, one need only mention the various Caliphates in North Africa and Sahelian Africa, the various Ethiopian states, and other African states such as Ghana, Mali, Songhay, Asante, Kongo, Oyo, and Dahomey. Nearly all precolonial African states, however, tragically succumbed to varying combinations of crises which were at least as internal as they were products of global pressure.

Ken Post (1972) provides one interesting line of thinking to explain the demise or the enfeeblement of the precolonial African state. He rightly notes (Post 1972: 237):

> Who is extracting labor power in the form of agricultural products from whom, and how? This analysis will involve such matters as the influence of land tenure, the extent and nature of absorption into the world market system, relations with the State apparatus and those who control it, and class differentiations and relations with the rural populations.

In this sense, there appears to be a persistent failure of collective action in much of precolonial Africa. Each political unit was coherent on its own but unable to coordinate to be able to mount sustained defense against external threats through continual institutional innovations. This inability to form resilient states exposed a large part of the continent to internecine warfare, chattel slavery, brutal settlement colonies, and eventually the Scramble for Africa.

An enigmatic Ethiopia was somehow spared many but not all of these depredations. It produced able leaders, most of whom were long in memory and short on vision. Despite a 400-year experimentation with various models of modern state formation, a noncolonial Ethiopia, not unlike many of its African peers, failed to produce a robust state that is at once capable and accountable.

Ethiopia's journey in post-medieval statecraft has had remarkable ups and downs. It started around 1600 and underwent a post-*Jihad* consolidation by Serse Dengel in 1563, fragmentation beginning with Tekle Haymanot II in 1770, and ended with the restorationist drive by Tewodros II beginning in 1855. It received a boost, in the form of territorial expansion and modernization under Menelik II and successors (1890–1974), after which it underwent radical institutional changes in the ensuing 40 years to 2015.

During the revolutionary period of hyper-statism, the ideology of the primacy of class over **ethnicity** transmogrified into the primacy of ethnicity over class. A new

cosmopolitan diaspora also emerged from the social dislocation, and in the age of the information-communication revolution, which predictably garnered a substantial impact on domestic politics in the realms of both ideas and money.

Since then, the ruling coalition of ethnic fronts has been facing internal dissension and nation-wide uprisings against its misrule. Fomenting inter-communal conflict, over-reliance on large-scale state violence, institutionalized grand corruption, ethnic discrimination, and a systematic de-building of national institutions seem to usher in yet another strident popular struggle to establish inclusionary state institutions (The Economist 2017).

Several ideas have certainly been advanced to shed some light on the question of why Ethiopia has not yet completed its longstanding state-building project (see, e.g., Tibebu 1995; Tegenu 2007). Compelling explanations have so far eluded us. Crummey (1990), for example, provides a useful review of the recent historiography of Ethiopia—the literature which is rich in description but poor in theoretical construct, and one that has yet to bring the state in from the cold. More recently, the political discourse on the contested Ethiopian state has fallen victim to distortionary revisionism in the service of those who have captured it or are vying to take their turns.

Tantalizing hints can also be gleaned from the uneven and surprisingly sparse political economy literature with various takes on the interplay between internal forces and external forces. Factors invoked include centuries-old isolation born of encirclement by a hostile Ottoman Empire and later European colonialists (mainly Italy and Great Britain), political fragmentation produced by non-navigable rivers and erosion-prone watersheds bordered by unforgiving hot and dry steppes, and a predominantly landed peasantry defensively resisting unbridled rent-seeking by state elites who self-interestedly and ineptly squandered scarce resources on internecine warfare and extravagant communal feasts to the detriment of wealth accumulation.

One particular line of argument, which provoked me enough to offer what I hope is a more credible alternative explanation, is the passing remarks made in Acemoglu and Robinson (2012) to Ethiopia's social formation. In their big-picture and provocative book, they forcibly fit Ethiopia into an unhelpful straightjacket of absolutist **feudalism**. Though not for lack of trying, very few Ethiopian emperors managed to impose an absolutist rule on a predominantly landed peasanty. Zero-sum **tributarism** holds a better explanatory power.

Melding relevant insights from economic history, institutional economics, development economics, and development politics, I offer here one novel and counterintuitive line of thinking about the internal forces which profoundly shaped Ethiopian state formation. I make a case for the pivotal role, in state-building, of control over **tribute** in the land-trade-power nexus of the non-feudal world of the Afro-Asian region.

To put it rather provocatively, the lackluster record in nation-state formation in Ethiopia is a product of the fact that the Ethiopian *landed* peasantry was not, and could not have been, exploited as much as its European counterparts and for the meager surplus to be productively invested. Even after the Ethiopian state managed

to monopolize large-scale violence, and prematurely over-centralized after the 1974 Revolution, a deceptively vanquished society continually rebels against state overreach.

The absence (perhaps for agro-ecological reasons) of an independently wealthy producer-cum-appropriator feudal class in Ethiopian history has meant that monarchical elites were impelled to employ rational strategies for extracting wealth from a predominantly landed peasantry. High vulnerability to foreign domination and the siege mentality it produced were in the final analysis domestically rooted weaknesses. Going against the grain, I will argue that external constraints, though important and a constant challenge for state formation elsewhere in the world, are proximate rather than ultimate causes of the Ethiopian failure to enforce *raison d'état.*

This notable feature of the history of the Ethiopian state, in fact, endures. Political relations in the Ethiopian highlands were shaped primarily by non-feudal tributary relations anchored in the division of income between landed smallholders and an effectively prebendary class of soldier-administrators.[1] A peasant economy of settled cultivators and mobile **transhumant**s in a diverse biogeography supported poorly-integrated polities headed by ruling elites who were inevitably preoccupied with redistributive rather than productive contests. Ethiopia appeared to have transitioned from a tributary state (based on landedness, common religion and language, and a Crown as a symbol of unity) to a territorially defined state by World War I. In other words, it was a latecomer in the transition from an arm's-length tributary state (*ye'gebbar sir'at*) to a tax-reliant state (*ye'gibir sir'at*) bereft of a well-defined territory.[2]

Unlike most precolonial African states, the Ethiopian state was legitimate and certainly capable enough to defeat myriad existential threats to domestic order and its international borders. It even flirted with a semblance of a constitutional order with written constitutions in 1563, 1931, 1955, 1987, and 1994. It turned out, though, that tributarism is a low-income politico-economic trap.

Resiliency in orderliness but weakness in public-service delivery was ultimately a product of an inadequate fiscal base. Enfeebled endogenously by ossified technologies and squandered by patrimonial politics, the pedigreed tributary state lacked the capacity to generate the requisite resources and leadership to make an irreversible transition to a modern nation-state.[3]

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[1] I chose to focus on the period 1600–2015 partly to facilitate international comparison and partly to take a manageable bite of a rich political and economic history. The post-Axumite Ethiopian state is at least a millennium old, counting from Zagwe to Shewa. In its current territorial reach, it is a little over a century old. For politicians and polemical historians who wish to draft history in the service of partisan politics, the choice of longevity apparently matters greatly. It should not.

[2] There is no standard for transliterating Amharic into English. So, spellings may vary for names of people, concepts, or places between my rendering and those of the cited references.

[3] Ethiopia is somewhat of a political enigma. Census figures show that its 100 million people are two-thirds Christian and one-third Sunni Muslim. Though there are 80 linguistic groups, Ethiopia is one of the least ethnically diverse countries in Africa. Some 68% of the population is accounted for by equally sized ethnic Amara and ethnic Oromo. The next two largest groups (the Tigreans and

The motivation for this line of thinking is provided by my desire to provide an analytical framework for making sense of the evolution of the various Ethiopian states and the strategies employed by various state elites to build and sustain them. That is, the ultimate project is to solidify not just any national-state but a nation-state. We must then identity the determinants of the speed as well as the trajectory of state formation by identifying continuities and breaks, including drawing on the experiences of comparable traditional societies.

A thorough synthesis of the literature was undertaken to identify the mechanism that generates a modern political order: state formation, nation formation, **peasantization**, proletarianization, and territoriality. The conceptual entry points for our analytical foray include tributarism, rent-seeking, geopolitics, ethnicity, class, developmentalism, political traps, and poverty traps. Though historical data series are very limited, we will deploy the available evidence to buttress the central argument.

This book is an exercise in grand theorizing about the economic and political history of a pedigreed but ill-understood African state, seeks:

(a) To critically synthesize insights from the ongoing debates on competing models of state formation—European, Afroasiatic, colonial, and postcolonial
(b) To clear up the notable misconceptions about the achievements and limitations of Ethiopian state formation
(c) To reframe the conventional mental model of the precolonial African state formation and tease out the implications for transforming the extractive postcolonial state onto a trajectory of inclusiveness, accountability, and developmentalism
(d) To compensate for the sparseness of reliable time-series data with well-chosen conceptual frameworks and granular case studies of institutions and countries

Strictly speaking, this is neither a historical work nor a political analysis. It is rather an exercise in a historically informed politico-economic analysis that takes Ethiopian state formation as an organic one that evolved from embeddedness in society to one of autonomy or even a pathological domination of society (Skocpol 1985). It throws a much-needed light on why Ethiopia, with a pedigreed state and an early home of the three Abrahamic religions to build on, is still contending with atavistic political ethnicity and a subsistence-oriented economy. What appears to be a technocratically strong state is structurally weak, having been captured by political actors who respect neither the rule of law nor a meaningful sense of accountability to the larger society (Abegaz 2015).

This book consists of six chapters organized into three parts. Part I provides the theoretical framework in two chapters. Chapter 1 discusses the foundations of modern political order, the drivers of the transition to it, and the relationships between political order and economic prosperity. Chapter 2 takes a comparative look at what

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the Somali) add another 6% each. This means that 80% of the population is accounted for by four ethnolinguistic groups. The historical political faultline, as we will see, was instead between a multiethnic Christian-Highlander state and a multiethnic Muslim-Lowlander state.

I call the Afroasiatic tributary model of state formation which is contrasted with the European, Eurasian, African, and Chinese models.

Part II presents case studies of the three variants of the Ethiopian state as it evolved since 1600 leveraging three mobilizational ideologies in Christianity, Islam, and Marxism-Leninism. Chapter 3 explores, in some detail, the Gondarine state which built on Axumite political traditions and provided a template for the Shewan state that supplanted it. The latter, presented in Chapter 4, turned out to be one of the most successful in modern Ethiopian history. Chapter 5 explores the nature of the Revolutionary State which succeeded Shewa this time with a socialistic pretention of an abiding commitment to universalistic class conflict and an abiding commitment to internationalism. In the end, it fell back on the short-termist unleashing of passion by an atavistic tribalism.

Part III, which comprises Chap. 6, summarizes the main arguments. It offers some ideas for escaping the political and economic trap to which the postcolonial African state seems to have been most prone (World Bank 2017). It also offers some guiding principles for a post-EPRDF political order.

A lot of confusion is generated by the loose language in large parts of the literature on the subject. Our attempt to provide a corrective has rendered parts of our analytical narrative unavoidably didactic. The excurses in the boxes, the glossary, and the chronology of Ethiopian emperors are intended to provide a common frame of reference that will help to sharpen the focus squarely on the debate on the internal and external drivers of power in Ethiopia. Terms included in Glossary are **bolded** the first time they are used in the text.

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Acknowledgments

Ethiopia is a country of great beginnings and great unfinishings. Too few have so far been foolhardy enough to try to answer the complex question of why pioneers in state formation such as Ethiopia often suffered a reversal of fortune. The genesis of this monograph is a paper I published in 2005 in the *Journal of Agrarian Change.* There, I made a novel linkage among Ethiopia's land institutions, the country's mode of patrimonialism, and the concomitant economic underdevelopment.

With a tinge of hubris, I subsequently came to the realization that the notion of a "tributary mode of production" may very well offer a deep-veined understanding of the evolution of Ethiopia's political economy and those of many of its African and Asian precolonial peers. Given the pivotal role of the state in overcoming anarchy and mounting an industrialization drive, a comparatively historical approach to its formation has much to offer.

I am indebted to a number of people, some subscribing to the feudal thesis or the colonial thesis of African state formation, for challenging me to make a case for tributarism. They include Alemante G. Selassie, Shumet Sishagne, Daniel Kendie, and Mulugeta Petros. The late Donald Crummey encouraged me to stretch the tributary thesis to the limit of its fruitful application for understanding the enigma that is Ethiopia's agrarian political economy.

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> *[The] territorial aspect of statehood arguably preceded the other characteristics associated with modern states, such as rational administration, fiscal ability, and national loyalty. Indeed, from purely a territorial perspective, states preceded nations and high-capacity modern administrations by several centuries. Hendrik Spruyt (2015: 2–3)*

> *State institutions emerged in history not as a voluntary contract between society members (such as producers willing to pay taxes in exchange for protection from the local bandits), but rather because some groups imposed their coercive power on others.… As a result, institutions and the outcomes of the bargains within those institutions reflect the power structure of a given society. World Bank (2017: 62)*

A modern political order stands on three interlocked legs that are hard to put in place simultaneously: a centralized state authority to contain widespread private violence, the rule of law to restrain abuse by powerholders, and an acceptable mechanism for the accountability of the rulers to the ruled. Precolonial political orders emerged in an environment where external threats loomed large, internal political fragmentation and contestation were high, and a weak incentive to build a solid fiscal base to support a viable state. The forms state formation assumed varied widely across time and among world regions. We need to identify, without falling into the trap of historicism or Eurocentrism, the conditions under which a given pathway can lead to the emergence of a viable modern political order.[1]

[1] Haldon (1993: 13) rightly notes: "Description alone explains neither how social formations work, nor how change occurs—although the effects of these processes can be observed. In short, it cannot reveal by itself the structural and causal relationships referred to already. And history is, if anything, about explaining change, not merely describing the fact that it happens."

B. Abegaz, *A Tributary Model of State Formation*,
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1.1 Social Order

Social order is a set of coherently interlocked cultural, economic, and political institutions and practices which give society the identity, stability, and the legitimacy of proclaimed rulers to exercise authority. Political order and economic order in this sense are subsets of the social order.

We need a unified theory of how social orders are born and how they are transformed. We can then delineate the economic and political factors that promote or retard prosperity and freedom. In other words, the doorstep conditions need to be identified for an irreversible switch from the natural state of limited-access social orders to the modern open-access social orders that broadly characterize industrial **capitalism** (North et al. 2012).

Economic transformation entails sustained and shared growth as well as the buildup of new capabilities that would undergird continual diversification of economic activity. It also expands economic freedom and interacts with complementary political and social freedoms. Why the institutional infrastructure (rules, norms, and enforcement organizations) that facilitated this transformation occurred in some parts of the world and only in the past three centuries in some one-fifths of the world, and why so few laggards managed to catchup, are vexed questions which have yet to receive satisfactory answers.

More specifically, we need a theory of the genesis of exclusionary economic and political institutions which generate self-reinforcing vicious circles, and how societies manage the transition to equally self-reinforcing virtuous circles which culminates in the emergence, usually through cumulative incrementalism, of inclusionary institutions (Acemoglu and Robinson 2012). The latter embrace social, political, and economic freedoms by extending citizenship to almost all non-elites, and bestowing legal personhood to perpetual and independent organizations.

Absolutism is essentially the vesting of centralized and unlimited authority in a monarch or a dictator. Where absolutism co-exists with weak state centralization, the fear of the incumbent ruling elite about creative destruction inevitably triggers a reactionary opposition (as in the cases of historic Portugal, Spain, China, Ethiopia, and the Ottomans). In such an exclusionary environment, any movement toward inclusiveness can be ephemeral and reversible. Economic growth is also fragile since this political settlement tends to discourage institutional and technological innovation.

There is little disagreement over whence and wither. The starting point is a doubly-exclusionary social order which defined the *longue duree* pre-industrial age. The endpoint is a doubly-inclusionary, bourgeois social order which is barely 200 years old. The debate instead is how some societies managed this monumental achievement. Two pathways readily come to mind.

The politics-led road begins with inclusionary political institutions which support rapid and shared economic growth. If broad-based and shared, economic growth gives rise to middling classes that will be able to fight for and defend inclusionary political institutions. In other words, political reform ultimately empowers a large section of the population and thereby limits damaging extractive contests.

The economics-led road to inclusionary institutions, on the other hand, begins with exclusionary but pro-growth economic institutions, which, by promoting regime-

enhancing rapid but unequal growth, boosts the size of the economic pie along with some self-restraint by the elite on unproductive rent-seeking. Prosperity under a benevolent dicatatorship, by discouraging innovation, is likely to run out of steam. Unequal growth can nonetheless set the stage for a crisis-induced switch to inclusionary economic and political institutions since it is now easier for the less pauperized masses to overcome persistence and inertia than would be the case without a modicum of improvement in living standards.

The interplay between these two sequences has been the subject of two competing theses in development history. We briefly outline the arguments.

Institutional economics (NWW 2009; 2013) offers a historically-contextualized analytical framework for making sense of the genesis and impact of political and economic changes as institutions evolve. This approach begins with the premise that success in political as well as economic development depends primarily on improving institutions understood as the prevailing rules of the game.

A central idea of the historical-institutional perspective is that the key to improving institutions is to control large-scale violence. Institutionalized peacebuilding is, at least historically, done by incentive-compatible arrangements among elites regarding the modes of creation and distribution of economic rent. Smart state elites strive to deploy or leverage the full range of instruments at their disposal.

The notion of economic rent has various interpretations. Broadly construed, economic rent consists of two components: classical producer and consumer surplus (price divergence from opportunity cost or benign neoclassical rent) and any additional income generated by market power involving scale economies (monopoly rent), political investment (political rent) or by innovation (innovation rent).

A key idea linking rent with violence is that the capacity for violence is the principal determinant of the outcome of inevitable contests for the distribution of economic rent. Limited-access societies such as Ethiopia impose restrictions on the organized entry of non-elites (including access to government) for fear of destabilizing the exclusionary equilibria struck by a dominant coalition of elites. These restrictions limit competition and hence productivity growth.

In other words, the counterfactual is not a competitive market economy, as postulated by the Neoclassical perspective, but disorder and violence. The emergence of viable private organizations and an increasingly differentiated government organization in a mature and non-static limited-access society creates the possibility of mutual restraint, enduring impersonalization of exchange, and eventual transition to an open-access society embracing the rule of law for elites, support for perpetually-lived organizations, and political control over violence-capable organizations.

1.1.1 The North–Wallis–Weingast (NWW) Thesis

Understanding the role of violence in the stasis of natural societies is the key to understanding institutional change toward *open-access* societies with strong states. Violence potential is conceptualized by NWW (2012) as being endogenous to state formation and social order.

Table 1.1 Transition to open-access social order by taming violence

Violence order	Yes	No
Yes	**Y-Y** (Closed order)	**Y-N** (Open order)
No	**N-Y** (Pathological disorder)	**N-N** (Primitive)

Source: **Author; NWW (2012)**

Violence is dispersed in *closed-access*, exclusionary societies. Dominant elites, in this case, have a strong incentive to bargain with less powerful elites enjoying some extant capacity for violence to advance their interests. To lessen the risk of undermining the scope of rent creation and redistribution, bargaining among elites then becomes regularized. This would explain why the management of violence is key to understanding the formation of modern states (Bates 2009; NWW 2012).

Dominant elites are certainly motivated to fuse wealth and political power, as emphasized by Acemoglu and Robinson (2012), through violence and coercion. However, NWW (2012) note that such elites are also constrained enough to engage in political bargains by ceding rent-extracting power in direct proportion to the threat of counter-violence from competing coalitions of elites.

Only in innovative open-access societies do we see a sufficient concentration of power to allow for the emergence of a strong state. Interestingly, NWW (2012) suggest that it is the very presence of a dominant coalition of elites that provides legitimacy to government institutions to begin to enforce progressively impersonal rules and regulations. In other words, state power rests on legitimation by powerful coalitions rather than simply by the accumulation of the instruments of naked violence per se (Tilly 1990; Giustozzi 2011). Political analysis should then focus on the requirements for effective elite coalitions rather than on the workings of the resultant state or the government itself.

The nagging question remains how only a minority of societies managed to effect the transition from a closed-access society to an open-access society. NWW (2012) identify three doorstep conditions for this transition: clear and enforceable property rights, a prevalence of independent and perpetual organizations, and a politically neutral military. To identify the options involved, a typology (shown in Table 1.1) would be helpful.

Realistically speaking, there are two modes of violence-mediated pathways from a closed order or an anarchic society to an open order one. One is a movement from a social order that is maintained by violence—slavery, serfdom, or other forms coercive subjugation of nonelites by elites—to one where rights are honored, and competitive discipline is impartially enforced by a legitimate central authority. The second is a movement from a pathological society of all-against-all to one where violence is tamed enough to make society governable through private deterrence (Bates 2009) but with all the high transaction costs involved.

Table 1.2 Transition to doubly-inclusionary institutions

Political institutions *Economic institutions*	Exclusionary (closed access: selectors)	Inclusionary (primacy of electors)
Extractive (self-perpetuating)	**E-E** (rentier, feudal, tributary)	**E-I** (authoritarian populist)
Inclusionary (self-limiting)	**I-E** (market liberalist)	**I-I** (open access)

Source: **Author**

NWW (2012) are, however, noncommittal about the forces and the circumstances under which any of the paths will be traversed. They hedge that, because culture is an important filter of what is legitimate and possible, it is hard to formulate a general theory of transition between the two social orders.

1.1.2 The Acemoglu and Robinson (AR) Thesis

Acemoglu and Robinson (2010, 2012) rely on the distinction between extractive economic institutions and exclusionary political institutions, on the one hand, and inclusionary institutions of both types, on the other. They also pose a natural affinity between extractive economic and political institutions (vicious circle) and inclusive economic and political institutions (virtuous circle). Transition is the result of interactions between existing institutions and auspicious critical junctures. Reviewing how history shaped the institutional trajectories of nations, they explain prosperity as a product of the entrenchment of inclusive institutions.

AR characterize the virtuous circles (or perhaps virtuous spirals) by noting that the logic of pluralist political institutions makes usurpation of popular power more difficult. This is because inclusive political institutions support, and in turn are supported by, inclusive economic institutions. Furthermore, inclusive political institutions allow for the free flow information via a free media (see Table 1.2 for a typology), when it eventually emerges.

Four possibilities are implied by the perspective advanced by AR (Acemoglu and Robinson 2012) for breaking the vicious circle. One possibility entails small changes that can cumulatively generate radical institutional change. Examples include the Age of Discovery, the Commercial Revolution, the Enlightenment, or the Industrial Revolution. Small changes cascading into a torrent facilitate the emergence of inclusive political institutions in Europe, as a new class of merchants and businessmen got engaged politically. A broad coalition for change emerged which also included the gentry trudging a pathway that nurtured a liberal-minded tradition of parliamentary rule and local forms of power-sharing going back to the Magna Carta.

A second possibility is historical accidents such as the Black Death and a colonial empire benefiting a labor aristocracy at the Center while pauperizing labor in the Periphery. Spillovers from the French Revolution in large parts of Western Europe, via interstate conflicts the French won, led to the copying of inclusive French institutions. The first two Estates (the nobility and the clergy) eventually lost out to the Third Estate (merchants, businessmen, professionals, artisans, and later common people).

Yet another set of triggers comprises the infrequent radical breaks such as revolutions, the end of slavery, and the end of serfdom all of which created a power vacuum that was filled by autonomous towns. Revolution—the Glorious Revolution in England or the French Revolution—mattered greatly wherever absolutism had a long been the norm. As Acemoglu and Robinson (2012: 211) put it:

> The Glorious Revolution was a momentous event precisely because it was led by an emboldened broad coalition and further empowered this coalition, which managed to forge a constitutional regime with constraints on the power of both the executive and equally crucially, any one of its members.

Finally, contingences and cumulative causation tend to honor the law of unintended consequences. This includes the inauguration of the struggle for political liberties in some of the most unpredictable places. Illustrative historical examples include the birth of democratic experiments by convict labor in Jamestown (the franchise for White labor) or Australia (the secret ballot) by European workers who were conscious of their power of leverage created by labor scarcity.

At the risk of oversimplification, it may be noted that the literature offers two competing conceptualizations of the preconditions for institutional transformation. Institutional economics emphasizes cumulatively incremental causation involving individuals maximizing expected net gains from an activity in a world of uncertainty and randomness outcomes. Political economy approaches take power seriously and focus on contingency-prone critical junctures, driven by elite bargains, which may result in the status quo or radical change—hence, the importance of comparative analyses of actual and counterfactual outcomes.

A **Critical Juncture** is a window of opportunity involving contingent decision-making by elites in a world of great uncertainty and unpredictability. It is loosely described as a discrete critical period or moment (short relative to the period that follows it). Though often assumed to lead to a change in the absence of plausible and theoretically consistent counterfactuals, it does not inevitably result in an irreversible and markedly different system than the status quo ante (Cappoccia and Kelemen 2007). Critical junctures are distinguished from normal periods by the fact that they present powerful stakeholders with a much broader menu of contingent choices, one of which will path-dependently become the new normal. So, if big mistakes are to be made by reformers, they are often made during the transition period that is a critical juncture. A **Critical Period**, on the other hand, is a longer transition period involving ebbs and flows involving the atrophy of the old order and the progressive build-up of the new order which gives way to a substantially new order.

If contingencies happen to favor radical change, how does transition occur? An impeccable causal logic is the politico-economic model of institutional transformation (Cappoccia and Kelemen 2007). The antecedent is the path-dependent (or self-

reinforcing) reproduction of a closed-order society which generates a stable equilibrium. External shocks or cumulative internal contradictions, after reaching a critical point, express themselves in the form of flux. This institutional drift may then induce a critical juncture that cumulatively or suddenly generates a shock with contingent outcomes. Transformational change in favor of an open-order society is only one of many possibilities.

The endpoint of an irreversible movement away from exclusionary institutions is clear enough. A successful transition from a mature limited order to an open order produces stable, equitable, and competitive political economies. Being developed economically entails having sophisticated economic organizations and the rule of law binding on elites which would lead credible enforcement of property rights and other contractual commitments. Similarly, being developed politically entails a constitutional order where all major players accept legitimate changes of power and effective legal recognition of organizational rights independent of who is in power. Backsliding is always possible, but short-lived, once the deep institutional structures are informed by the enduring core political values of mutual acceptance and self-restraint or forbearance.

1.2 Political Order

Political scientists tell us that a modern political order (*Sir'ate Mengist*) has three mutually constitutive pillars (Hobsbawm 2012; Migdal 1988; Huntington 2006; Fukuyama 2012, 2014). The first pillar, a capable and effective state, has attributes which include control over an adequate fiscal base to underwrite basic public services. Highly valued public goods include secure borders, internal law and order, respect for personal safety and property rights, and key public infrastructure that crowds-in private investment. The second pillar, the rule of law, is grounded in widely-accepted societal norms and is binding on both the ruler and the ruled. The third pillar, accountability of the ruling elite to the citizenry, operates through a steady extension of popular sovereignty to subjects-turned-free-citizens. The first of the three pillars speaks to the state's administrative and military capability while the latter two address the legitimacy of both the rulers and the public institutions they build.

The *state* embeds the norms of the dominant **political culture**, especially as they pertain to long-held notions of authority or legitimacy. Its supreme institutional machinery distinguishes it from civil society, political society, and business society. Furthermore, the state leg of the tripod existed in pre-modern times in some parts of the civilized world far ahead of the other two touchstones.

By political culture, we mean the widely-shared norms (attitudes, beliefs, and sentiments) that define legitimacy in the exercise of authority or power in a community such as a polity or a nation. These include beliefs about the autonomy of the individual (civil liberties), the universality of equality all human beings (human rights), the right to participate in collective decision-making (political rights), the equality of collectivities (ethnos, gender, religions, or classes), notions about the

ultimate source of political authority (constitution or religious cannons), the legitimate use of violence (legitimacy), and notions about the locus of political socialization (family, community, or state).

One common way to classify state organs is along functional lines. The first, the state-sanctioned military and security services, is concerned with law and order as well as with securing international borders. The second, the professional bureaucracy (the civil service, the judiciary, and the police), is responsible for implementing preferably impersonal rules and for providing key public services (such education, health, infrastructure, and regulation). The third, the legislative and the executive, is responsible for rule-making and policy execution.

In this stylized conceptualization, state power is distributed among rule-makers, rule-implementers, and specialists of violence. Political control over state institutions may be in the hands of political entrepreneurs, a **kleptocracy**, an **oligarchy**, or an organized citizenry. The ruling political group (aka the regime or the administration), occupies the top executive and the legislative positions, but not always the economy.

The oldest state in the world, that of China, is well over 1000 years old. The modern state, on the other hand, is hardly three centuries old. As Fukuyama (2012) avers, the modern state had its origins in victories over the age-old **patrimonialism** of kin-based, fragmented societies. Whether it is one of collective-governance based on kinship groups or an organized polity lacking effective sovereign authority, fractionalized pre-capitalist village society frustrated effective trans-ethnic coordination and hierarchical leadership. Political centralization is, however, necessary for stemming mutually destructive internecine violence in large-scale societies as well as for reducing the risk of falling prey to predation by outsiders.

The modern state is characterized as capable (i.e., it enjoys administrative and military control, and territorial security) and contestable (reasonably open to participation in political life of disparate ethnic, religious, class or regional interests). The establishment of a state-funded and state-administered military with a monopoly over large-scale and legitimate violence is, in fact, an important but recent development in state formation even for European societies (NWW 2012). The history of the post-French Revolution state indeed shows that military expenditure as a share of the government budget was highest during the first three waves of the Industrial Revolution, 1770–1970 (Parrott 2012).[2]

The ideal military model was one with a seamless intertwining between the multi-centered civilian side of state administration and an extremely hierarchical

[2] State building, being highly contestable, has until World War II involved incredible external violence among warring national states, city-states, and other principalities. This would explain why war abroad and civil strife at home have long been the preoccupation of state builders. Historically, wars were financed by a combination of tax revenue and public debt (against future revenue and plunder) whose mix and coerciveness depended on the nature of the economic base, be it based on capital, land, or labor (Tilly 1975, 1990; Parrott 2012; Giustozzi 2011). The project of centralizing power and ensuring monopoly over the instruments of violence was, therefore, costly and protracted. However, it permitted a degree of separation of the private sphere from the public sphere thereby paving the way for sustained civilian control of the specialists of violence.

military bureaucracy. The private European colonial monopolies, which morphed into the innovation that is the joint-stock company, presaged the expression of this ideal in the form of the modern military-industrial complex by fusing commercial authority and military authority (Economist 2011).

State-building then is ultimately about the hard power of penetration, by hegemonic state elites, of business society and civil society. It is also about building effective institutions for sustained economic growth. The latter is predicated on a system of taxation to ensure an adequate fiscal base for underwriting a secure border, maintaining domestic order, adjudicating distributional conflicts, and enforcing the rules governing the economic and political systems. Here, fairness in rulemaking and rule-enforcing crucially and counterintuitively depends on the strength of nonelites to constrain a rapacious ruling elite from capturing and privatizing public institutions for its exclusive private benefit (Migdal 1988).

The second pillar of a modern political order, the rule of law, is grounded in cherished cultural norms, enforced faithfully and predictably, that are binding on both the ruler and the ruled. It refers to a formalized, impersonal, and impartial application of the law. This is best expressed formally in a constitution which defines the structure of government and ideally enshrines popular sovereignty in a bill of rights.

The rule of law, which often evolved out of a rigged rule by law, also tames egregious abuse of power by violating citizen rights (to life, liberty, and property) and abuse of public office for private gain (corruption) assuming such forms as nepotism, favoritism, and cronyism (Fisman and Golden 2017). While state building concentrates power, the rule of law limits government power and protects minorities from the tyranny of the majority. Autonomous religious establishments facilitated the process of civil-law formation by providing legal training in cannon law while the emergence of corporate groups (business, labor, and civil society) pushed for the impartial application of a codified law. In pioneering Western Europe and its Offshoots, a byproduct of long-evolved cultural norms upheld individual liberty and civic engagement (Fukuyama 2014).

The third pillar, accountability of the political elite as well as economic elites to citizens, is all about upholding the presumed societal mandate, if only out of enlightened self-interest, to mind the common good. The minimalist form is the exercise of free and fair elections with a modicum of political competition. When accountability takes a substantively constitutional-democratic form, it would be liberal only where citizen rights are constitutionally and practically protected (Urbaniti 2006).

Where civil liberties are circumscribed in an electoral system, we have an illiberal **democracy** which is only slightly removed from benevolent dictatorship where both civil liberties and political participation are at the whim of the ruling group. In this case, the limited degree of contestability among fundamental interests in society cannot ensure a stable political equilibrium without dictatorial authority (World Bank 2017).

The cornerstone of democratic constitutionalism is popular sovereignty which entails equal political citizenship (expressed in organized opposition political parties, universal enfranchisement, and active civic engagement) and equal socio-

economic citizenship (recognition of cultural diversity, and an equitable distribution of resources and benefits). In this vein, institutionalists underscore the importance of a capable state staffed by competent professionals, a bureaucratic norm with built-in checks and balances, and legitimation through meaningful participation of citizens in public affairs.[3]

All three elements of the modern political order came together under industrial capitalism which raised living standards, spawned a homogenizing factory-driven urbanization that broke down village-based identities, and thereby paved the way for representative government. In other cases, absolutism gave way to a benevolent dictatorship which eventually brought prosperity and belated demand for a meaningful level of political voice for organizations representing the interests of ordinary citizens.

The transition from a dependent subject to a free citizen and from controlling bodies to representative bodies nonetheless took place only in a minority of countries. One explanatory variable is the power of lofty ideas—of equality, justice, and moral restraint. The other variable, built-in restraints on power-holders, pertains to the existence of economic base that is not captured by a predatory class. It turns out that there is also no free lunch in politics—taxation does and must anchor political representation. Democratic accountability can only come from powerful forces of inclusion.

Thus initiated, virtuous circles can produce a self-generating escape against persistence. This is so because pluralism makes usurpation of popular power more difficult. Furthermore, inclusive political and economic institutions go together as do multipartysm and a free media (Acemoglu and Robinson 2012).

Building a functional political order in poor countries is, therefore, a daunting task. It requires transforming viable but narrowly-based states with circumscribed core constituencies (religious, regional, or ethnic) into robustly broad-based national states. If traction is somehow attainable, it might pave the way for reliance on the rule of law, and a decisive shift away from meting out state violence or sowing corrosive discord as a method of rule.

Fusing state-building (coercive hard power) and nation-building (integrationist soft power) also require an ability on the part of the state elite to restrain corrosive predation by protecting the most productive members of society. This is vital for broadening the fiscal base of the state without endangering the position of ruling elites who naturally wish to wield veto power against credible threats to their hold on political power (Acemoglu and Robinson 2012; Bueno de Mesquita and Smith 2011).

[3] It would be useful to note here that by "institutions" we mean norms and codified rules which serve societal needs for order, efficiency, and accountability. To be effective, they need to be backed by the requisite organizations with the mandate and the capability to enforce them as impartially as possible (NWW 2012). Economic, political, and social institutions also interact in complex ways to produce changing mixes of predation and shared growth in the economic realm, and coercion and freedom in the political realm. While disentangling random changes from systemic changes is difficult, we do know that the impediments to collective action tend to perpetuate inefficient and inequitable institutions.

1.3 Theories of State Formation

A coherent theory of state formation must then address several questions. What are the key variables that determine a viable statehood and the transformation of highly fractionalized ethnos and other sectarians into coherent nation-states under a historically-determined dominant national political culture? Who is best-suited to serve as the flagbearer of the state?

The requirements for successful projects of state building, nation formation, or nation-state formation are certainly not entirely clear (Moore 1993; Huntington 2006; Hobsbawm 2012; Fukuyama 2014; Micklethwait and Wooldridge 2014). The candidates for explanatory variable include the availability of adequate economic resources, the presence of ambitious elites, imperial rule, a threshold of population density, a cohesive political culture to legitimize authority, and persistent existential threats to the state or the society.

What we can say for sure is that the success depends on the size and reliability of extractable resources, the forms and levels of centralized coercion, the types of political entrepreneurs representing the state (propertied or predatory), and the nature of the pact among the state elites and between them and the economic elites (Spruyt 2011; Weber 1978). Success in effecting nation formation, in turn, depends on additional variables such as the degree of cultural homogeneity of the population and the degree of accommodation by the dominant culture of its competitors (Fukuyama 2014; Acemoglu and Robinson 2012).

Before the entrenchment of a modern market economy, the targets of fiscal extraction (typically an independent **peasantry**, serfs, or traders) were direct; so were the agents of surplus extraction, including the titled hereditary nobility or landlords with labor rights. The permissible modes of surplus extraction (taxes, fees, tributes, mass levies, slaves, and the like) were also ill-defined and highly variable. Political centralizers had to contend with other political entrepreneurs which included oligarchs, warlords, clerics, or soldiers of fortune.

Viable states emerged only in those societies which managed to produce sufficient mobilizable economic surplus to support a non-productive class of warriors and administrators. This is so because states require a secure fiscal base to underwrite their myriad functions which explains why they spend a lot their energy ensuring the generation, appropriation, redistribution, and use of economic surplus.

Success in war and cohesiveness of political culture shape the relations between the political Center (the Sovereign) and the political Periphery (regional lords or landed elite). One can glean from the literature the insight that a universalistic ideology is essential for a credible claim by state elites of ultimate and transcendent (with respect to ethnic, regional, or religious identities) authority to cement legitimacy. As such, the state itself must develop a distinct identity whether this assumes the form of autonomy, embeddedness or even embodidness in the larger society (Evans 1995).

The evolution of the state is then profoundly shaped by geopolitical forces, historical legacies, and the socio-economic environment within which the state is situated (Fig. 1.1). More specifically, state capability to exact and utilize public

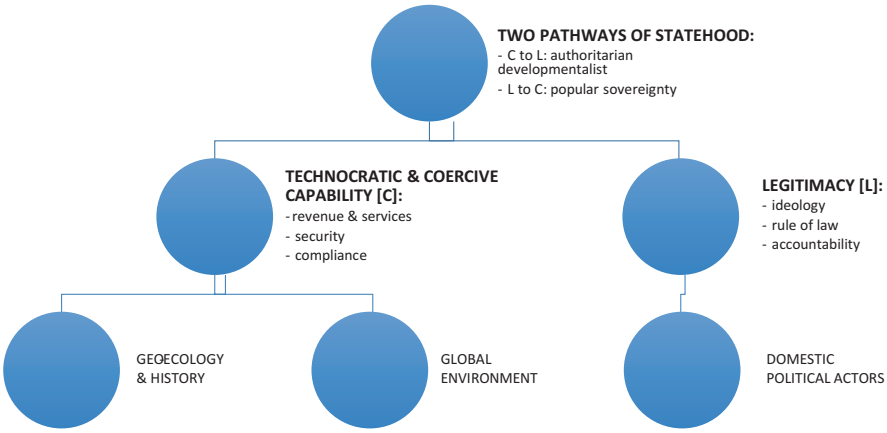

Fig. 1.1 Drivers of state formation and state robustness. C capability, L legitimacy. (*Source and notes*: Author)

resources as well as to penetrate and regulate society is shaped by the nature of the fiscal base, the alignment of political actors, and the opportunities that come with engagement with the larger geopolitical forces.

A viable state must, in the final analysis, meet certain conditions to obtain the loyalty of most of the citizenry and to defend itself against external aggression. These pre-conditions comprise four elements. First and foremost is a solid fiscal base built either through decentralized revenue mobilization by delegating authority to private actors (tax farmers, fief holders, or lenders) but without losing control. Still better, adequate public resources are mobilized through a centralized bureaucracy.

The second element is the progressive attainment of a monopoly over large-scale violence either by contracting out to private militaries or preferably by establishing a state-funded professional army. Historically, this process is protracted and often involves bargains between ruling regimes and ambitious competitors with own militia (Chifra) which could make the state ungovernable.

Monopoly over large-scale violence ensures law and order at home as well as effective defence of international borders. This task can be accomplished with levies of decentralized citizen-militia (**Zematch**) or a centralized, professional military and security services. Rulers are often tempted to put a high premium on protecting long-distance trade which has historically paved the way for industrialization.

The last two elements pertain to legitimacy which is perhaps the most potent instrument for taming disruptive private and state violence. Internal legitimacy is attained through a mix of patronage, cultural solidarity, the provision of public goods and services, delivering on economic growth, and power-sharing. External legitimacy is earned by a sensible invoking of sovereign rights through effective deterrence which is aided by an international state system that guarantees territorial sovereignty.

Table 1.3 Threat sources, fiscal capacity, and militarization of states

Security threat Revenue base	External threat	Internal threat
High (tax and non-tax base)	A. **Capable state:** • Secure and inclusionary • Civilian control of a professionalized military	B. **Fragile state 1:** • Prone to rebellion and coup d'état but may be developmental • Military: large (fear of rebellion) or small (fear of coup d'état)
Low (debt, aid, loot, or rent)	C. **Fragile state 2:** • Insecure and heavily patrimonial • Military: large (fear of rebellion) or small (fear of coup d'état)	D. **Failed state:** • Insecure and parasitic • Praetorian guards and warlords

Sources and notes: Author. Distilled from various sources, including Tilly (1990); Fukuyama (2014); Besley and Persson (2009); Collier (2009); Bates (2009)

The legitimacy of the ruling elite crucially depends on the strength of non-state economic and social organizations. Where a weak state exists in strong societies, power tends to be diffused or overly decentralized. In other words, the "triangle of accommodation" among state actors--the autocrat, the regional corporate lineages and military strongmen, and appointed governors as well as the bureaucrats—can be chronically tenuous (Migdal 1988).

Successful state consolidation is aided immensely by the presence of a flag-bearer group of nationalists with martial skills, a unifying ideology (religious or secular), an adequate resource base to be mobilized at a low cost, and a bedrock of shared political culture to tame mutually destructive violence over succession and surplus appropriation. The European experience underscores further that success in modern-state building is ultimately predicated on a vigorous industrialization drive (Clark 2007; NWW 2012; Skocpol 2015).

Wherever the central state preempts other power centers, kleptocratic or oligarchic regimes tend to prevail for a long while. Such regimes institutionalize central control of the instruments of coercion, rely on some form of meritocratic recruitment, and enfeeble competing centers of authority. Their preferred mode of governance may include reliance on military slaves, distant outsiders, or eunuchs as in the Islamic empires, and recruitment based on merit as in China, Japan, and Europe (Boix 2015; Skocpol 2015; Fukuyama 2014).

A stylized depiction of the interactions between the nature of the threats facing state elites and the buoyancy of the fiscal base underwrites not just personal patronage but also the efficient provision of key public goods and services. This suggests four distinctive types of states (Table 1.3).

At one end of the spectrum is a capable state which has managed to attain a secure fiscal base and domestic legitimacy. At the other end is the failed state which lacks both fiscal buoyancy and internal legitimacy.

The two intermediate cases apply to most existing states today. Where the root cause of fragility is primarily internal, a hegemonic ruling elite may emerge to either coopt competitors with a reasonable political settlement or to cow them into submission. Where the weakness is primarily external, viability may be obtained only through tenacious nationalist mobilization. William McNeill (1982) goes so far as to suggest that the arms race among warring states, in fact, contributed significantly to the emergence of the industrialized market economy in Europe.

A well-resourced state authority might then gain legitimacy for its nationalist mobilization and security achievements. The citizenry appreciates regular and broad-based taxation, the provision of basic public goods, and progressively inclusive political representation (Tilly 1990; McNeill 1982; NWW 2012; Bates 2009; Acemoglu and Robinson 2012).

War, of course, can unmake the state as easily as it can make it. It turns out that, given the endogeneity of institutions, militaristic and neo-patrimonial regimes have in many countries, including contemporary Ethiopia, succeeded in obliterating civil society and business society alike.

The nature of state-business relations varies by the level of economic development, the type of state, and the strength of the state. This is starkly evident in the differing ways the military is financed and managed today. The postcolonial state in Latin America, Asia, and Africa typically started out as an extractive military-state or as a military neo-patrimonial state. Understandably, though, it is dependent on global powers for military goods to enable it to privilege order over justice.

As noted above, one place to look for useful clues about the drivers of political stability is the changing balance in the relative strengths of the state and that of society at this age of hyper-globalization. In this respect, Migdal (1988) helpfully defines state-society relations in terms of social capability. A strong state is one that has the capability to penetrate society, regulate social life, extract scarce resources, and deploy those resources productively in a determinate way. A strong society, with good organizations and economic base, can resist the determined attempts to fully control economic and political life by a rapacious state elite. The requisite conditions for building strong states, he argues rather counterintuitively, are profound social dislocation, external military threats, and an independent bureaucracy. However, Migdal says precious little about sufficiency.

Where there is an internal imbalance in the social capabilities of the fundamental interest groups in society to mutually constrain each other (aka social capital), a narrowly-based dictatorship may provide time-bound stability. This may be necessary but not always sufficient for prosperity. However, the dictator constantly faces existential threats from below in the form of a mass rebellion, and from above in the form of a coup d'état. Relying on an enduring coordination failure among the masses or the professional neutrality of a mercenary military-security apparatus is a high-risk strategy for such regimes (Olson 1993; Tullock 1974; Wintrobe 2012).

Institutionalized devices of mutual restraint among competing interests (such as checks and balances, Bills of Rights, an independent judiciary, decentralization, and sunset clauses and term limits) are essential for balancing the human passions of

liberty and the predilection of powerholders toward authoritarianism. This imperative explains the central political concern in the developing world—the ever-present need for order and the danger of self-perpetuating dictatorship.[4]

1.4 Transition to Modern Political Order

We have underscored the point that the state, the most important leg of a modern political order, is a bundle of post-tribal political institutions that define the distribution of power in a class-based society. States share the unusual attributes of possessing a centralized source of sovereign authority which is ideally backed by a legitimate monopoly of large-scale violence exercised by the rulers over the ruled. Finally, it is buffeted by a priestly class of sorts providing ideological support or legitimation. This helps to minimize over-reliance on naked violence that would expose the exploitative nature of hierarchical power relations.

The tortuous process of state formation shows certain commonalities across world regions. Tribal warfare, especially between settled farming populations (or urban trading classes) and mobile agro-pastoralists presaged modern inter-state warfare. The need to capture the existing economic surplus as well as to boost its size through gains in productivity favor the search for a defined territory with dense and circumscribed population. Where this is not possible, a precariously loose network of far-flung tributors had to be forged (Table 1.4).

Then there is the need for a pan-ethnic ideology to build trust and foster cooperation among a diversity of autonomous socio-economic groups in society. These stakeholders typically include a hereditary and territorially-based aristocracy, an organized and literate peasantry, autonomous towns hosting merchant and artisan classes, and the church or the mosque.

1.4.1 State Formation

The formation of states as well as the corresponding regimes that controlled them is profoundly shaped by timing. Early-comers such as Western Europe and China differed in important respects from latecomers such as Eastern Europe, Japan, Latin

[4] Micklethwait and Wooldridge (2014: 63) make the interesting point that Marx's ideas about the state proved enormously influential while being insubstantial in an especially dangerous way: "It was not just that Marx had precious little to say about how you construct government. He was wrong to argue that political forms do not matter. There was a huge difference between a liberal London, where Marx could while away his time in libraries, and authoritarian Berlin, where he was a wanted man. Marx also ignored the fact that the state could be an interest group in its own right, as it was to become, in extreme form, in the countries that claimed his blessing. But his bigger failure lay in his refusal to come to terms with Hobbes's great insight that a state is necessary for the peaceable conduct of all human affairs."

Table 1.4 Modes of control over production and appropriation

Forms of distribution	Direct production (wealth creation)	Indirect appropriation (wealth redistribution)
(a) Profit	• Agro-industrial capitalist • Commercial-services capitalist	• Financial capitalist
(b) Rent	• Feudal class (ownership and officeholding)	• Overlord class (officeholding)
(c) Tax	• Strong state (administrative capacity) • Centralization	• Weak state (delegation to intermediaries) • Decentralization
(d) Tribute	• Dependent producers • Urban (guilds and associations)	• Independent producers • Rural (kinship interests)

Sources and notes: **Author**
a: economic means and claims over net income by owners
b: political means and entitlements to income by lords
c: legal means and claims over fiscal revenue by an *embedded* state
d: extra-economic means to enforce claims by overlords
c and d: political means and entitlements to fiscal revenues by an *autonomous* state
➔: arrows indicate the possible pathways of transition to a strong state

America and the later colonies. The differing experiences were shaped by such factors as access to the sea, the presence or absence of medieval towns or burghs, and the degree of reliance on long-distance trade. The dynamics created by internal forces and external forces jointly determined the robustness of states and the choice between constitutionalism and authoritarianism (Spruyt 2011, distills the historical lessons).

One line of argument underscores the fact that the desire to build effective states often comes from elite bargains rather than from effective bottom-up negotiated settlements between elites and subjects or citizens who somehow manage to overcome coordination failure (Boix 2015; World Bank 2017). The incentive for power-sharing arises rationally from a recognition of the interdependence of peace providers and wealth providers.

Modern states which emerged in the age of commerce (1600–1800) and the age of industry (1800–2000) had to contend with certain politico-economic imperatives. One way is to transform mutually self-destructive domestic extractive contests into a contestable but stable equilibrium that optimally reconciles wealth redistribution with wealth creation. A second strategy is to incentivize the specialists of violence to protect producers, not just state elites (Bates 2009). A third avenue is for regimes to exercise self-restraint, honor accepted norms of justice to cement loyalty and legitimacy, and reduce insularity to new ideas from outside.

A viable state elite had to develop a minimum of state capacity to at least ensure peace and security, and the rule of law. This paves the way for a transition from

'tributarity to territoriality' with a secure state, if not one enjoying popular sovereignty. In other words, a successful state is one that manages to transform itself from a multinational state into a nation-state with loyalty eventually undergirded by free citizenship rather than by atavistic kinship or exclusionary religiosity.

I characterize here two major roads to a viable pan-ethnic and pan-religious state: European and Afroasian. I will then proceed to apply the conceptual framework outlined in this chapter to elucidate the Afroasian model of state formation and reproducibility.

The European Road The widely accepted historical marker for the modern European state, emerging as it did from the process of sweeping politico-economic changes of the middle ages followed by slow absorption, is the Peace of Westphalia of 1648. The characteristic features of the canonical Westphalian conception of the state included the notion of *sovereign authority* (based on a combination of centralized control, coercion, and consent), *a defined and unified territory* (with mutual recognition and effective defense), and a weak notion of *popular sovereignty* (with a flag-bearer elite invoking a combination of minimal accountability to the governed and a universalist ideology to legitimize its rule). In the absence of a global authority to enforce the Treaty's linkage of state (rather than citizen) sovereignty to territoriality, effective armed deterrence was the key to state survival.

In the stylized European road, the transition took place from a citizen-militia to a standing army, and from feudal levies to tax collection. The resistance to centralized coercion and the extension of the franchise elicited a stronger state in some and state fragility in others.

One challenge came in the form of a crisis of internal legitimacy which was exacerbated by the conflictual interests of the various factions of state elites, divisions between state elites and economic elites, and power contests between central elites and regional elites. These processes turned out to be protracted until a dominant winner prevailed or a stable coalition of winners was forged.

The second challenge was external legitimacy or how to obtain recognition from well-established states internationally. The post-Westphalian European state sought external legitimacy by skilfully combining preparation for external wars while earning internal legitimacy by prevailing over competitors through a combination of coercion and nationalist ideology.

External, as well as internal legitimacy, are also intertwined since fending off external challenges buttressed nationalist credentials while opening opportunities for minimizing investment in defense. The reasoning for this complexity is as follows: external insecurity arising from a Darwinian military competition favored the survival of those regimes with military dominance, willing to protect wealth creators from predation and taxed them reasonably, and willing to use public revenue wisely.

Delving deeper, Peter Flora (1999), expounding the theory of Stein Rokan, notes that the state-cum-nation building project in Europe revolved around three interlinked interventions into non-political society. They are penetration, integration, and participation.

Penetration is about the hard power of state-building through conquest centers that imposed an institutional infrastructure for the mobilization of resources for common defence, the maintenance of internal order, and the adjudication of disputes. This project requires unification at the level of elites followed by unification at the level of the masses.

Integration is about the soft power of nation-building which requires standardization through the propagation of shared norms and myths. The key conduits are conscript armies, at least one national-official language, compulsory schools, monuments for national heroes, and mass media. These channels fostered direct contact between the elites at the Center and the parochial population of the Periphery which tends to cling to disparate cultural and political identities.

Participation is about progressive inclusion based on the principle of equal political citizenship. Participation calls for ample political space for deliberation and contestation via such mechanisms are organized political parties, mass enfranchisement, and robust civic engagement. This deepening of accountability sharpens the distinction between parochial cultural identity and national political identities diffuses power to stem state capture by a narrowly-based elite, and cements the legitimacy of both state and government.

Successful state-builders were indeed those who ably transmuted parochial ethnoreligious and regional political loyalties into national ones by progressively expanding the universe of actors with input into rule-making and rule-enforcing in the realm of public policy. With appropriate incentives, power-sharing arrangements eventually emerged which made political commitments self-enforcing or at least credible. Eventually, democratic forms of accountability emerged thereby institutionalizing countervailing forces in the form of citizen groups forming effective coalitions for change or preservation. Delegation and the rule of law depoliticized potentially contentious activities by legitimizing the state elite as the guardian and the ultimate authority to settle distributional conflicts.

The famous Brenner Debate on the drivers of Europe's political-economic transition from feudalism (agrarian innovations) to capitalism (commercialization and industrialization) offers three competing explanations for successful state formation. One direction of causality goes from post-Black Death population-growth collapse to the uptick of productivity-driven economic growth. Another mechanism, favored by Brenner himself, traces sustained market-led economic growth to capitalist farmers who managed to gain strength over subsistence farmers via the enclosure and commercial farming. The boosting of agricultural productivity was judged sufficient to overcome **Malthusian** stagnation and underpin a strong state (Aston and Philpin 1987; Clark 2007).

Institutionalists, on the other hand, identify the root causes of the triumph of the state to a steady deepening of respect for the rule of law. This development was facilitated by a liberal cultural base that paved the way for the emergence of open-access organizations. It provided a strong incentive for profitable activity over myopic rent-seeking (NWW 2012).

Tilly (1975, 1990) has proposed another chain of causation in the process of European state formation. The enlightened self-interest of state elites disfavors a

political settlement that combines high economic inequality and low growth. The inequality-stagnation equilibrium then renders power overly contestable. When coordination failure is somehow overcome, however, enlightened rulers tend to opt for a moderate inequality-high growth equilibrium. This is so because the relationship between economic inequality and effective governance is generally a negative one. Excessive economic inequality enfeebles the requisite restraint on power-holders thereby undermining enduring accountability of rulers to the ruled.

In a nutshell, the European experience underscores that the nature of political institutions (state capacity, the rule of law, and accountability) and economic institutions (property rights, regulation, and corporate governance) is one of endogenous co-determination, if not mutual constitutiveness. High state capacity tended to have a close affinity with enforceable property rights and the delivery of basic public services. The prevailing of the rule of law was closely associated with effective enforcement of mutually binding commitments. Finally, and strong political contestability defined the mode of corporate governance as well as state governance.

The Afroasian Road The Afroasian road differs from the Eurasian road in part for its non-reliance on densely settled urban and semi-urban populations (Osafo-Kwaako and Robinson 2013). Osafo-Kwaako and Robinson (2013: 7) put it this way:

> The lack of effective centralized states is clearly a potential factor not just in explaining poor economic performance in Africa since 1960, but also over a much longer duree. Whatever the impact of the colonial period might have been on state formation in Africa, at a factual level the evidence seems to suggest that Africa developed centralized states later than the rest of the world. Though Africa certainly did have states and quite a few emerged and consolidated in the 18th and 19th century (sic), this process seems to have definitely lagged behind Eurasia and at least parts of the Americas (Central America and Andean South America).

These intertwined political and economic processes are distilled in Table 1.5. One reasonable generalization is that there is a 'natural affinity" between the pillars of a modern political order and those of a modern economic order. High state capacity, for example, tends to be positively correlated with a strong enforcement of clearly-defined property rights and the provision of basic public services. Where the rule of law is well-established, fair regulations are likely to be fully enforced. Finally, where power is contestable, there is likely to be a high degree of accountability by state and business elites to a broad set of stakeholders.

Many scholars, such as Herbst (2000), Bates (2001) and Reid (2012), take a Eurocentric view to argue that the absence of state-forming factors (most notably, warfare, high population density, and trade) stunted state formation in a sparsely-populated Africa. This was a product of an adverse disease environment or the lack of domesticable plant and animal species. Others, such as McIntosh (1999), Levine (2011), and Vansina (1999) dispute this suggesting instead that there are myriad roads to effective states.

The logic of African non-feudal tributarism is certainly rooted in ecology as well as in land abundance. State formation was possible in the savannah and some desert

Table 1.5 Affinity between modern economic and political institutions

Features of private and public institutions	Property rights (PR)	Regulation and insurance (RI)	Economic governance (EG}
State capability (SC)	• *Enforcement of property rights*	• Competition and cooperation	• Stakeholder rights
	• *Delivery of public services*	• Affordable safety net	• Disclosure laws
Rule of law (RL: Constitutionality)	• Regulatory bodies	• *Mutually-binding commitments*	• Regulatory bodies
	• Judicial bodies	• *Effective enforcement*	• Judicial bodies
Power contestability (PC)	• Propertied citizenry	• Stakeholder representation	• *Private corporate accountability*
	• Provision of public services	• Social protection	• *State corporate accountability*

Sources and notes: Author. Based on Fukuyama (2014); Kornai (1992); Micklethwait and Wooldridge (2014); World Bank (2017)
Institutional affinity: SC with PR; RL with RI; PC with EG
Power: the ability of an actor to compel others to bend to the former's will or to serve its interests
Capability: the freedom of choice available to an actor to fulfill its economic or political well-being
Contestability: the degree to which all fundamental interests compete for highly-valued public services
Rule of law: a legitimate law that is applies systematically and impartially to elites and nonelites
Governance: the exercise of state or private power that may or may not be contestable and inclusive
Constitutional order: the existence of basic law that is the ultimate sources of all laws, including those that define the form of government, the rights of citizens, and procedures by which major decisions are made

zones while the forest zone remained largely stateless until the advent of European colonialism (Vansina 1999; McIntosh 1999).

In the forest zone of Africa, productivity tended to be low on account of thin soils and flourishing pests; initial occupants sought to exact tribute from latecomers; and society was necessarily communitarian. Polities remained stateless and loosely politically organized.

In the savanna region, higher-productivity cereal and legume production by smallholders facilitated the production, storage, and transportation of economic surplus. Communal or customary land tenure progressively gave way to share-cropping and small-scale slavery to support the formation of classes and then states.

In the dry Sahelian zone and the lowlands, low-productivity pastoralism supported state formation only where long-distance trade between ports and the mineral- and agriculture-rich hinterland generated enough surplus to support class societies and facilitated coordination among the clan-based polities. Richer states absorbed poorer ones, and changes in trade routes or the exhaustion of precious metals induced fragility.

The security-taxation nexus under colonial and postcolonial periods, however, changed the indigenous trajectories of political development rather dra-

matically. As external threats waned, internal threats loomed large. This is in part because external threats, which were pivotal in European state formation, have been stemmed by the post-1945 international system of near-automatic recognition of sovereignty. Exclusionary state elites became unconstrained enough to engage in predation for patronage redistribution toward small selectorates. This process is blamed for warping the process of natural selection that would have give risen to a capable, inclusionary, and perhaps developmental state (Collier 2009).

In its precolonial form, however, sovereignty in Africa and Asia was linked to tribute payment rather than to fixed territoriality. Amin (1980) and Haldon (1993) provide a useful starting point, from a Neo-Marxist perspective, for thinking about social formations that are post-communal but pre-industrial. Their overly-expansive notion of the tributary mode of production, which encompasses the feudal mode as well as the independent-peasant mode, brings out many widely-shared features.

One key feature of tributarism is the existence of an independent peasant economy that is productive enough to support non-productive social classes (royalty, nobility, soldiery, and clergy). A related attribute is the reliance of the tributor state-class on extra-economic coercion to mobilize and redistribute peasant or merchant economic surplus. A third feature is production, even with an extensive market exchange, is primarily for *self-consumption* rather than for profit. A fourth characteristic is the prevalence of distributional contests which, unlike productive contests, discourage sustained productivity growth in agricultural and non-agricultural activities. These four features go a long way toward explaining why tributary empires tend to be exclusionary, and expansionist if only to develop tributary peripheries after pauperizing the core provinces.

Acemoglu and Robinson (2010, 2012) rule out the role of geography or ecology as culprits in the rise to prominence of highly exclusionary political institutions in Africa. They argue instead that Africa's persistent poverty is explainable as a vicious circle produced by the perverse interactions between initially absolutist and patrimonial political institutions and the shocks of slavery and colonialism. The latter reinforced or intensified the extractive economic relations between the producer and the extractor—native or foreign. Even in the case of Ethiopia, where slavery and colonialism played a distinctly secondary role, they claim that the absolutist state-imposed feudal land institutions persisted remarkably until 1974. However, Acemoglu and Robinson do not tell us why Ethiopian "feudalism," unlike its presumed European cousin, failed to pave the way for the emergence of inclusive institutions.

Turning exclusionary and extractive colonial institutions into inclusionary and productive ones is certainly a joint product of domestic and international pressure. Where prosperity undergirds citizen engagement, state elites are compelled to make political concessions, albeit fraught with commitment problems. At the same time, a permissive international state system of treaties bestows sovereignty on weak states in which repressive neo-colonial regimes can rely on foreign patrons even when they are widely considered illegitimate by their citizenry.

1.4.2 Nation-State Formation

The mastery of the political art of building a capable and an accountable state continues to elude much of Africa. Precolonial institutions either remained fragile or fell victim to colonial occupation. Where indigenous communities fell prey to colonial forces rather than to an expansionist-neighbor's forces, the rate of economic exploitation and the level of political disempowerment tended to be the highest. This equilibrium offered few prospects for grand bargains short of outright rebellion. Even then, post-independence state elites inherited exclusionary political and economic institutions to behave much like colonizer overlords.

Civilizational states such as Egypt and China, while failing to meet the challenge of democratization, have nonetheless managed to combine a high degree of state capability (stateness) and a high degree of cultural cohesion (nationness)—see Box 1.1 for details. At the other end of the spectrum, many African countries such as the Sudan and Kenya continue to exhibit both low stateness and low nationness. This leaves us with two intriguing intermediate cases. Fragile or failed states such as Somalia face low stateness despite high nationness while older polities such as Ethiopia grapple with the opposite mix of stateness that is far ahead of a nationness.

Comparative historical studies suggest that structural factors, human agency, and conjunctural factors have jointly shaped the protracted transition from a closed politico-economic orders to an open one. There is little disagreement that nationalist elites established a state long before crafting a **nation** (or a **nation-state**) by assimilating disparate populations via the army, the public educational system, and religious institutions (Hobsbawm 2012; Spruyt 2011). Where this political mechanism succeeded, state elites self-interestedly invested in security and promoted prosperity to enhance the future tax base and thereby ensured state monopoly of access to the instruments of large-scale violence (NWW 2012; Tilly 1990). Both the rule of law and broad-based accountability, being in large part dependent on the malleable norms of the dominant political culture and long-lived organizations, were slow to take root.

One mechanism for synchronizing state and nation is organic territorial expansion to incorporate culturally-related groups to be followed by aggressive assimilation. The steamrolling of other cultures by an expansionist Islam and the hegemony enjoyed by the Han culture would, for example, explain the formation of the modern nation-states of Egypt and China, respectively. Another viable mechanism is a slow process of assimilation, undergirded by episodes of mass migration and intensive economic exchange, which helps to forge a viable nation-state out of a multiethnic one.

The cases of Persia, Japan, Russia, and Korea may fit this trajectory. Then we have incomplete state projects, as in the cases of India and Ethiopia, where a combination of empire building, mass migration, and multiple competing religious ideologies (Christianity, Islam, or Hinduism) have produced a measurable but incomplete synchronization of stateness with nationness. The political Center remains distinct from its Periphery which means that alienated elites may strive for their 'nation' to acquire its own 'state.'

Box 1.1 Polity, Nation, State, and Nation-State

A modern political order is one where a central political authority has transcended parochial identity and privatized violence. Political organization in pre-state polities was historically rooted in narrowly-construed kinships such as bands and clans. Small-scale social institutions are inevitably embedded in genealogical (blood) ties (extended family, clan, or tribe).

A Polity is a culturally cohesive and often territorially-defined clan (*biher*) that lacks central political authority legitimately representing a pan-clan political entity. Tribe (*neged or zewg*) generally refers to an ethnic group comprising several polities or lineages (*gossa*) with a shared culture and history—common customs, religion, genealogical or fictive ancestry along with a strong sense of equality among members. Nation (*hizb*), on the other hand, refers to geographically disparate or contiguous lineages of an ethnic group that is organized into an identifiable governance system—without a state. A State (*ser'ate mengist*) is a territorially- or a tributarily-defined sovereign political institution represented by a government. In a culturally, but not geneologically, homogenous society, a state becomes indistinguishable from a nation.

A state has distinct military and security, legislative, judicial and executive bodies—all designed to assert and enforce its supreme authority. When a state encompasses one nation, we have a nation-state. When it encompasses several polities and nations, a multi-national state often strives to transform itself into a nation-state through a process of political, but not necessarily, total cultural assimilation. Ultimately, bonds of equal citizenship replace bonds of parochial or exclusionary loyalties which explains why modern political systems constitute triumphs over self-limiting kinship and fragmenting mass poverty.

The building blocks of a centralized nation-state generally include a common language, a universal ideology, sufficient coercive power to guarantee law and order, defined and secure territory, a legitimated system of taxation, shared power with all fundamental interests, and delivery of basic public services. As a diverse society, Ethiopian state formation must, therefore, contend with the absence of mono-linguality, mono-confessionality, and mono-culturality. This challenge is also shared by other tributary states (Haldon 1993: 273): "In both the Ottoman and the Mughal states, the ruler never succeeded in eradicating entirely or displacing local nobilities and the tribal, ethnic or lineage ideologies they maintained."

Migdal (1988), Fukuyama (2012, 2014), Huntington (2006), and Acemoglu and Robinson (2006, 2012) offer ideas about the transition dynamics from an exclusionary political equilibrium to an inclusionary one. A necessary but not sufficient condition for a successful transition is some sort of contingent, dislocating shocks such as war or revolution. Sufficiency entails several additional factors, including a conducive global climate, an existential military threat, or the existence of a multiplicity of power centers such as an autonomous and capable bureaucracy and skillful leadership (NWW 2012; Acemoglu and Robinson 2012).

1.5 Political Order and Prosperity

A large literature in social science places an effective state at the heart of successful economic transformation. This is dramatically illustrated by the fact that Ethiopia could not escape the deadweight of **Malthusian stagnation** until 1960 when its real per capita income began a modest but sustained growth. By the time centralized states began to form, two distinct systems emerged in large-scale societies. They were driven by the desire to control over people, land, or both.

In the first case, state elites managed to monopolize access to land and large-scale violence. Where land is abundant, or production is labor-intensive, translating political power into economic power required control over people in a well-defined territory. This fact incentivized direct involvement in the process of wealth creation—feudalism of all varieties, hydraulic empires, and slave plantations come to mind (Domar 1970).

In the second case, state elites managed to acquire monopoly only over the instruments of violence. This means those who sought to translate limited political power into economic power had to content themselves with indirect control rights over income from propertied producers in the form of tribute or service.

This poses a chicken-and-egg problem for ascertaining the sequence or the direction of causality in the emergence of effective political institutions and secure prosperity rights. It is important here to appreciate the pivotal role of context for understanding the variations in the trajectories of political and economic institutions. Let us briefly consider three views on the interface between political order and economic order.

One perspective is the universalist thesis articulated by Acemoglu and Robinson (2010, 2012). It argues that the universal desire of state builders to have a secure economic base impels them to (a) subvert kin-based patrimonial political institutions into absolutist ones, (b) seek to extend their control over non-kin by using a combination of transcendent ideologies (such as Christianity or Islam) and militaristic predation, and, therefore, (c) rely on exclusionary economic institutions and unproductive predation both of which make the incipient state vulnerable to incessant warfare and external capture.

Acemoglu and Robinson (2012) as noted earlier, rely on the distinction between the exclusiveness and inclusiveness to show how history shaped the institutional trajectories of nations. One pathway conceptualizes the transition toward inclusiveness as a product of the interactions between existing institutions and critical historical junctures. This is so because, while extractive institutions permit accumulation-driven growth, only inclusive institutions permit productivity-driven growth.

Another line of thinking is that a combination of absolutism and weak centralization foster fear of creative destruction, as in the cases of Ethiopia and the Ottomans. Where absolutism coexists with strong centralization, it fosters either fully extractive institutions with some room for prosperity (China), or become extractive and stagnationist (Spain). Furthermore, inclusionary political norms tend to promote prosperity and pluralism (England after 1700).

The universalist perspective offers various escapes from the vicious circle of doubly-extractive institutions: a revolution (such as the Glorious Revolution or the French Revolution) empowers both the capitalist and the working classes. Political transformation may also be a product of judicious concessions by the ruling class when the position of the working class becomes strong— as in the case of the European settler colonies.

Institutional drift or random shocks can also create windows of opportunity for significant change in favor of inclusion. Though less certain, change may be a product of spillovers from other societies. This possibility is emblemized by the positive externalities of the French Revolution on political openness in Western Europe.

The most notable implication of this reading of political history is the striking affinity between exclusionary economic institutions and exclusionary political institutions. Secure political control by new ruling classes inescapably favors self-restraint by powerholders to give rise to productive and inclusionary economic institutions. The latter, in turn, pave the way for the emergence of inclusionary political institutions.

The second perspective is the rational-myopia thesis of state (de)formation whose reasoning goes something like this. Given the chronic fragility of a nascent state, privatization of security leads to descent to warlordism. Building extensive instruments of coercion for the internal security of a narrowly-based regime, funded by irregular plunder and regular **economic rent**, limits investment that would have fueled sustained economic growth. It also repurposes the inherited technocratic capabilities of the postcolonial state in ways that promote narrow interests (Besley and Persson 2009; Bates 2009; Bueno de Mesquita and Smith 2011). This reasoning, however, begs the question of what factors shape the prospects for transition, when contingent opportunities arise, from fragility to robustness.

The third perspective is what may be dubbed the *incompatibility thesis*. The argument is that the rational state-builder faces a trilemma of sorts. Repression, economic freedom, and political freedom are inherently incompatible. Only the following duo can produce prosperity: repression with economic freedom, or political freedom with economic freedom (Olson 1993). This means, there are few possible poltico-economic settlements open to exclusionary political elites seeking to deploy a mix of positive incentives (growth) and negative incentives (punitive repression for disloyalty).

The debate on the pathways out of the exclusionary trap boils down to an empirical question. With the specificities of the Afroasian state mind, we offer a fresh take on the behavior of state elites which at best enjoyed a monopoly over violence but certainly not a monopoly over economic assets. In this case, the desire of state builders to have a secure economic base impelled them to rely on officeholding and punitive campaigns to extract tribute from autonomous producers, rely on a network of autonomous intermediary officeholders and tax farmers to collect tribute indirectly and administer justice, and face an endemic see-saw in the power balance between the great classes of wealth-redistributors and wealth-creators. This non-absolutist (and less exploitative), territorially expansionist system nonetheless frustrated the emergence of cohesive states, inclusionary political institutions, and

adequate protection from predation on wealth creators. Absolutism, therefore, is not the only road to poverty and tyranny.

The chain of causality between prosperity and state formation is clear enough if one takes a long political-economy view. Incentive-compatible land institutions, which motivate both producer and appropriator to abide by the established mechanisms for sharing costs and benefits, give rise to an optimally productive economic base. A productive agrarian/trade system provides a strong fiscal base for a capable and accountable state to emerge under the control of elites with a vested interest in supporting and protecting wealth producers.

A strong agrarian fiscal base may certainly be obtained either by a pro-growth feudal or hydraulic system or by a growth-friendly independent-peasant system. There are also alternative routes to economic fragility as well as state fragility. Parasitic feudalism (of the Eastern European variety) or unstable tributarism (of the Afroasian variety) prevents the emergence of a strong fiscal base. It does this by institutionalizing endemic unpredictability for net producer income (hence dis-incentivizing investment in productivity) or diverting agricultural surplus to unproductive activities.

The persistence of exclusionary institutions and mass poverty in Ethiopia is, therefore, explainable ironically as a product of the landedness of its peasantry and the concomitant imperative for the overlord class of rulers to engage in intense distributive contests over the tribute. The Ethiopian tributary system did produce enough surplus to support the formation of an early medieval class-based state. However, it has so far failed, despite the diversification of revenue sources since 1950, to underwrite an integrated nation-state anchored in an industrial economy. In the end, a non-polarizing cleavage, ethnicity, became polarizing while a polarizing cleavage, religion, was rendered non-polarizing with the historical separation of church and state after 1974.

I now employ this comparative analytical framework of historical institutionalism to explore the genesis, propagation, and consolidation of Afroasian states. There are uncanny similarities in the economic bases and the preferred modes of exercise of political authority among the Byzantine, Ethiopian, Ottoman, Safavid, Mughal, and Chinese states. I will then proceed to explore in detail the evolution of three (four, if we include Jimma) major variants of the Ethiopian state since the 1600s to offer one hopefully persuasive account of how political traps and economic traps interacted to prevent the emergence of a prosperous and inclusionary Ethiopian nation-state.

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Chapter 2
The Tributary-Civilizational State

> *The Ottoman state clearly rested on the same fundamental structural principles common to all tributary social formations, where an intermediate class represents the state to the producers, consuming a large portion of the surpluses it extracts in the name of a central political authority and an appropriate legitimating political ideology; and it contains the same structural contradictions in respect of control over the distribution of surplus.*
>
> *John Haldon (1993: 171)*

> *(Precolonial) states across Africa were characterized by the intensification of social hierarchy, territorial expansion and integration, economic specialization, control over labor, long-distance exchange, and the promulgation of state ideologies.*
>
> *J. Cameron Monroe (2013: 21)*

There are many roads to political and economic development. In the ages of European Discovery and Commerce, Afroasia was a pioneer in establishing centralized states, albeit within loosely-defined territories which were occupied by culturally kindred but diverse peoples. Post-feudal Europe was, however, the leader in forging a coherent political order—comprising territorialized states, the rule of law, and functional mechanisms of accountability. The West European state was one that successfully monopolized large-scale violence (via a salaried professional army), established robust central bureaucracies, honored the rule of law, and protected wealth creators from myriad myopic redistributors under the cloak of officeholding.

The shared cultural heritage of a geographically compact Europe was deep-veined enough to pave the way for industrialization and a global colonial project. There are, however, many roads to heaven. A Eurocentric perspective on the history of state formation, therefore, misses much of the rich political accomplishments of such civilizational states as Ethiopia, the Islamic empire-states, China, and India.

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By a 'civilizational state,' I mean a state of great historical pedigree with doubly-hierarchical relations—an internal one between titled appropriators and burdened producers in the core provinces, and an external one between a hegemonic monarchy with suzerainty over dependent tributary states in its periphery (Box 2.1).

Box 2.1 The Civilizational State

A "civilizational state" is understood at two distinct levels. At the regional level, it refers to an expansive hierarchical political order with a dominant state at the Center and tributary states in the Periphery.

A civilizational state headed by an emperor or a caliph comprises a domain state at the center and tributary states headed by kings or emirs, churches, mosques, and chiefs. The central treasury depends on income from domain assets as well as taxes and tributes. This mode of interstate relation is neither colonial nor formally imperial. It is instead an informal empire with dependents expressing their fealty to the distant supreme authority by delivering prescribed gifts to the Court on pain of being subject to punitive expedition for defiance.

At the level of the state, the concept applies to the hierarchical relations between the titled tributors and the burdened producers. The former enjoys customary over-rights to revenue (tax and tribute) collected from peasants and traders in lieu of salary payments from the central treasury. A universal and bureaucratically-managed tax state is not the norm. The defining weakness of this state model, including the relations between the big-brother state and its weakling but autonomous dependencies in the near abroad, is the capacity of the Center to mobilize sufficient domestic and external revenue to meet the insatiable financial needs.

Martin Jacques (2011) characterizes China as a civilizational state with an emperor at its apex. At the regional level, the Chinese Crown historically played the role of a rather benign hegemon with respect to its near-abroad (Korea, Vietnam, or Japan)—at least until 1800 or so. Fiscal constraint explains why mass conscription was the norm in China or Afroasia while sale of offices and loan-financed mercenary armies played a vital role in interstate wars in feudal Europe. China has only belatedly managed to transition to a modern nation-state with delimited borders, a vanguard ruling party and totalitarian ideology, and a standard-bearer (the Han Chinese) to nurture a single national political identity.

I argue in this chapter that there is an impeccable logic for the non-territoriality, decentralized delegation, and episodic economic growth of tributary civilizational states. The expansive tributary politico-economic relation of Afroasia, founded on extractive relations between overlords and tributors, turned out to be a more permissive but also a structurally self-limiting mode of state formation than the European mode of an intensive productive-cum-extractive relations among landlords, serfs, and burghers.

Table 2.1 Sequences of the elements of modern political order and economic order

Region		Political	Sequences			Economic	Sequences	
Western Europe/China	*RL*	*SC*	*PG*	*(stable)*	*RI*	*PR*	*EG*	*(stable)*
East Asia, Russia, Prussia	*SC*	*RL*	*PG*	*(stable)*	*PR*	*RI*	*EG*	*(stable)*
South. & East. Europe, India	SC	PG1	RL	PG2	PR	EG1	RI	EG2
European Offshoots	RL	PG1	SC	PG2	RI	EG1	PR	EG2
Rest of World	PG1	SC	RL	PG2	EG1	PR	RI	EG2

Sources and Notes: Author
Political order: *SC* state capacity, *RL* rule of law, *PG* political governance (accountability)
Economic order: *PR* property rights, *RI* regulation and social insurance, *EG* economic governance
Institutional affinity: SC with PR; RL with RI; and PG with EG

The simple reason is that, unlike the redistribute-with-growth sensibility of economic governance of European states, the redistribute-at-any-cost mantra of Afroasiatic states did very little to nurture a productive economic base within a secure territory. Without a reliably adequate revenue base, the hunter-gatherer method employed by state elites in Afroasia turned out to be a fetter on the consolidation of a modern political order.

2.1 The Feudal European Model of State Formation

Economic history teaches us in this respect that there are four vehicles for the fusion of political and economic power in pre-industrial class-based societies (Table 2.1). They are: control over land, control over labor, control over long-distance trade, and control over the meager economic surplus of the smallholder, the craftspeople, the pastoralist, or all three.

The feudal version of the European model of political order was one that relied on control over land and water (and the scarce labor to work it) and control over trade via towns and seaports. The hydraulic version of the Asiatic model of political order was one that relied on control over land in river valleys and on mobilizing the readily-available labor surplus to man the irrigation works. The generalized Afroasian model, with a widely diffused access to land, had to content itself with an arm's-length capture of the social surpluses of autonomous and far-flung wealth producers.

State builders need to be mindful of the conditions for a sustainable generation of appropriable (redistributable) surplus over subsistence needs. They also had to respect normatively acceptable forms and levels of appropriation. Impunity in extra-economic coercion by rulers enraged farmers, herders, and traders enough to support rebels as a rebuke to imprudent rulers.

Even then, appropriators had to find the right way to distribute the captured economic surplus among political allies to ensure loyalty as well as to minimize damage to wealth creation. Much like unionized factory workers, deeply disgruntled peasants and merchants are known to 'go on a strike' by producing little above subsistence requirements. After all, what is not produced cannot be siphoned off by politicians-turned-administrators. Alternatively, producers invested in weapons to resist recalcitrant overlords—domestic as well as foreign.

These considerations provide us with important clues about the high predisposition of tributary societies for internal strife and their high vulnerability to geopolitical conflict. A myopic but defeatist response to political insecurity is to coalesce into smaller, cohesive groups organized around clan, ethnicity, race, or religious sect. An expansive, but probably viable, example is to establish something resembling a papal state or a caliphate. The Western and the Eastern Roman empires and the Islamic Caliphates are cases in point. In the case of the latter, the sovereign was responsible only for defense and the execution of Islamic laws. Whenever rulers break this delimitation of authority between state and society, they raise the specter of illegitimacy and rebellion.

The canonical European model is associated with feudalism (Box 2.2), a politico-economic system with imperial authority over decentralized lordships which monopolize land ownership and the administration of justice over mainly enserfed but also free populations. This system eventually allowed for significant increases in land productivity over smallholder peasant agriculture, the establishment of towns and cottage industries, and enough centralization of political authority under the crown. This arrangement facilitated the emergence of a modern political order.

The Western experience is associated with a transition from overreliance on private militias to a standing professional army, from indeterminate tribute collection and private debt to a predictable tax collection, from mindless predation to judicious exploitation of wealth creators, and from reliance on crude coercion to selective but wide-enough political representation. Tilly (1990: 76) summed up the profound role of external wars in the non-linear process of European state transformation with his justly famous quip: "War made the state, and the state made war."

Western Europe, of course, offers only one of many possible pathways toward a territorial national state. The context was obviously quite different in that the early incarnation of the state emerged in tandem with commercial capitalism and the modern state emerged with industrial capitalism. The peculiarities include the fact that social development took the form of household-based individualism rather than from kin-based collectivism; inheritance was bilateral; exogamy was the norm; and women had non-trivial rights to property.

State formation was also shaped by the emergence of countervailing institutional actors—an autonomous Church, parliament, feudal estates, and corporate cities. The dispersion of power centers eventually gave rise to progressively accountable governments where economic freedom and rule-bound politics steadily became deeply rooted.

Box 2.2 Feudalism

The feudal construct is often fruitfully applied to the political economy of large parts of medieval (5th to 12th centuries) Europe. It generally refers to a set of reciprocal legal and military obligations among the three estates of the manorial economy and polity: the broader nobility (lords, but also free dependents or vassals, and fief-holders), the clergy, and the peasantry (villeins or serfs). The expansive nobility (the lord or seigneur) held lands (fief or *gult*) in lieu of financial compensation from the Crown in recognition of centrally uncompensated administrative, judicial, and military service to the state. The vassals played the critical role of an intermediary class as free dependents of the nobles by giving to the lord homage and military service. The landless and unfree peasants were obligated to live and work in the lord's demene in exchange for subsistence plots and protection. The lord also provided arm's-length protection for the free towns (burghs) which served as centers of crafts, markets, and education.

The key idea here is that, unlike the tributarism of an independently landed peasantry, this centralized and highly exploitative feudalism based on landless serfs, eventually gave rise to commercial and then industrial capitalism. This is precisely because control over land, labor, and the towns provided the feudal lords sufficient incentive to protect (and provide freedom as necessary) the productive classes which included the budding capitalist class, the guilds, and the merchants of the politically autonomous or free towns.

Where technological similarities are detectable (the iron, the plough, the horse, and the wheel), as in parts of Africa and Asia, the feudal label was overly stretched. In the cases of the hydraulic Asian, Eurasian, and Afroasian empires, the combination of rich river valleys and surplus labor produced feudal-like organized production but under the direct and centralized control by the agents of the Sovereign—as in Egypt, India, and China. Marx confusingly called this the Asiatic mode of production or Oriental Despotism thus evincing the rampant European ignorance and prejudice of his time about non-European societies.

The Eurasian, Asian, and Afroasian variants gave rise instead to a different kind of state—a state that is *tributary* rather than *territorial* (Box 2.3). Such a state needed to effect dual transitions to a modern national state: from a far-flung empire-state ruling over myriad nationalities to an integrated multi-national state, and from a tributary-military state relying on indirectly collected tributes to one relying on a

directly mobilized revenue. That is, the "tributary-military state"[1] was compelled to employ strategies for capturing peasant and merchant surpluses given that it was unable (or unwilling) to build up taxable productive capacity within a well-defined core territory. Tribute-seeking, by favoring the redistributive extensive margin over the productivity-enhancing intensive margin, proved to be a formidable impediment in terms of both the size of the appropriable surplus and the resistance from the producing classes against predation (Jacques 2012; Fukuyama 2012).

Box 2.3 Tributarism

Tributarism is a medieval and pre-industrial land-based or trade-based institution that is built around the coupling of extra-economic relations between titled overlords and propertied producers. While a landowning free peasantry and a class of long-distance traders did have obligations to pay non-fixed tribute (taxes, income rights, gifts, and militia service) to the sovereign, the relationship is not wholly based on reciprocity between the ruler and the ruled.

Agents of the sovereign enjoyed income rights, much like vassals with grants of fiefs, but they did not have the right or the power to arbitrarily dispossess peasants or merchants of the means of production. Nor did they have the ability or the right to direct production to meet the dictates of markets. Tributarism, external between the sovereign and regional kings or internal between the ruling class and the producing class, is ultimately a system for redistributing the endogenously determined economic surplus rather than one that is also concerned with enhancing productivity. In this sense, Afroasian tributarism is less territorial and even more fragmented than feudalism.

While the paucity of specialists of violence and the freedom that comes with the ownership rights greatly render tributarism less exploitative than feudalism, these social relations also engender unstable extractive contests between wealth appropriators and wealth creators. The seesaw between the two great classes of the peasant economy predictably spawned few cities (except in the cases of trading empires) and dented the incentive to invest in long-term growth for fear of being a target of parasitic redistributors.

This goes a long way toward explaining why political authority tended to be over "people" rather than over land; offices were more appointive than hereditary; estates in land were less important for funding large organizations than estates in offices; and infantry dominated over very expensive cavalry as a means of conquest, destruction, or booty.

[1] A fiscal-military state is used to refer to a state with a centralized bureaucracy which can impose heavy taxation and mobilize long-term debt financing of prolonged wars. An efficient fiscal-military state collects revenues by relying less on coercion than on cooperation to ensure that the productive base of the economy is not harmed. Britain and Sweden are often cited as pioneers of this model in the 17th and 18th centuries. An absolutist-military state, on the other hand, combines unchecked monarchical power with militarism and a centralized bureaucracy. The Iberian monarchs of Spain and Portugal are good examples. A "tributary-military state" is a state with a weak central bureaucracy, a small royal army, and overly dependent on tribute and militia-service obligations of its subjects. The Afroasiatic states we study here are great examples of tributary militarism.

I push here, to the its limits, the analytical framework built around the nexus between political contestation and the revenue base of the state to distinguish the civilizational tributary-military state from the territorial-tax state. My primary objective is to explain why only certain circumscribed trajectories of state formation were open to Afroasian civilizational states. The selection of diverse case studies is informed by the conceptual entry points of tributarism, surplus seeking, and political entrepreneurship.

2.2 The Tributary Afroasiatic Model of State Formation

History provides us with many non-European templates of pre-modern states some of which successively transitioned into modernity. One template is the two-millennia-old bureaucratic Chinese state, arguably the oldest in the world. Another is provided by India, where countervailing institutional actors, a strong priestly class, and kinship relations produced fragmented princely kingdoms (Fukuyama 2012). Yet another model is provided by the predatory Islamic empire-state which deployed the mantra of a global Islamic polity religious community as a device of legitimation of the right to rule over an expansive empire (Dale 2010).

The balance between state and society varied from region to region. In the Chinese model, a bureaucratic state organized well before other social actors managed to organize to compete for power. In the Indian model, countervailing political actors emerged, including a strong priestly class which legitimized kinship into a viciously exclusionary Hindu caste system.

In the Islamic world, an inclusive religion helped predatory empire builders to become self-restrained administrators of rich lands. Land rights were conditional on service to the state which prevented the entrenchment of a hereditary elite that was largely independent of who happens to control the helms of the state. Lack of primogeniture led to fragmentation of assets and interminable conflict over succession. In many cases, the state became a mosque. All these features facilitated success in expanding the number of tributary producers at the extensive margin but frustrated sustained gains in productivity at the intensive margin. Few successor states were able to develop indigenous capitalism and thereby switch to a productivity-driven economic base even in the core provinces.

In the world of Eastern and Oriental Christian Orthodoxy (Eastern Europe, Russia, and Ethiopia), many of the features of the Islamic political economy prevailed. Kin-based and bilateral inheritance laws or customs stymied the accumulation of family wealth. Priests can marry and bequeath ecclesiastical benefices to their children. Church and state shared power thereby blurring the spiritual and the secular, the Crown serving as the senior partner. Peter the Great even abolished the patriarchate in 1721 replacing it by a Holy Synod directly appointed by the czar.

The Eastern Church also failed to develop state-like structures such as the separation of the office from the officeholder, the notion of office as exclusively church property, and bureaucratically defined and salaried office-holding.

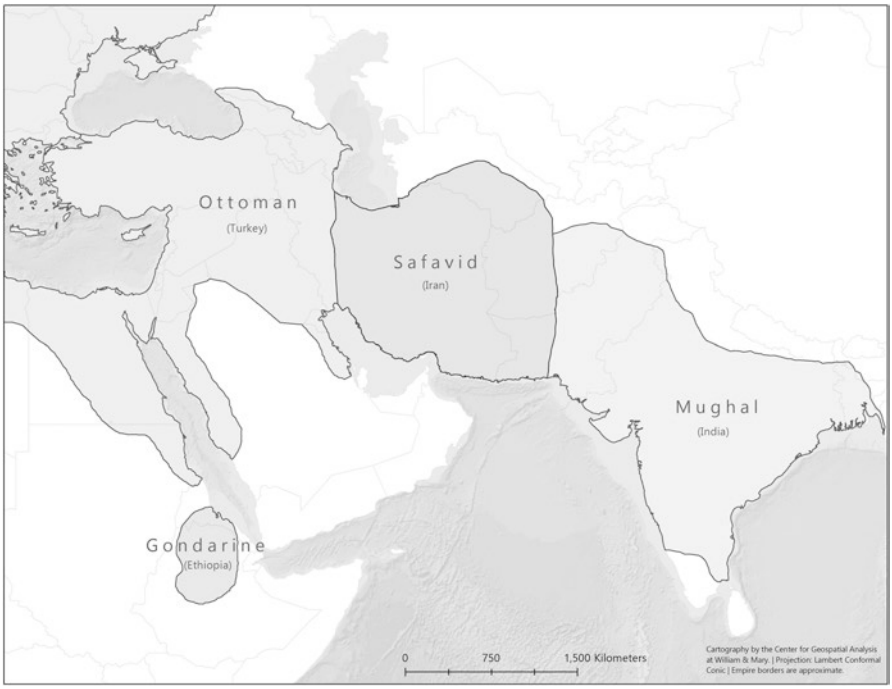

Fig. 2.1 The Afroasiatic empire states, c. 1700

This lack of administrative capacity meant that the imperative of excessive de facto delegation by a weak government prolonged the roving-bandit problems. It perpetuated income and tenure insecurity for the producer class (Olson 2000).

Many successor states of major civilizations (Turkey, Russia, China, Ethiopia, Egypt, Iran, Japan, and Thailand) have managed to become nation-states largely as a defensive move against an aggressive colonial expansion of the Ottomans and then of a rapidly industrializing Europe. But, unlike the European state, the Afroasian state had to contend with binding constraints emanating from external threats and internal threats simultaneously.

We now take a closer look at two sets of non-European state formations during the transformative global centuries that spanned 1600–1900. During the two centuries between 1722 and 1923, three Muslim empires we study here withered and collapsed. In their steads, successor states emerged many of whom (Turkey and Iran independently, and Egypt and India under European tutelage) have managed to complete the transition from civilizational-states to national-states.

The post-medieval Ethiopian state remained multinational and fragile. The Central African state of the Kongo and the West African states of Dahomey and Asante (Ashanti), on the other hand, fell victim to internal strife and then to European colonialism (Fig. 2.1).

Table 2.2 Land and water institutions in the medieval afroasiatic world

Region	Land tenure	Taxation
Byzantium (527–1453): • Claim: all land belongs to the crown. • Village or communal lands (pooled capital; dominant) • Land was well-measured, reasonably taxed, and productively cultivated.	• Freehold peasants regulated by Farmer's Law • Soldier-farmers • Share tenancy on estate lands—split-share with landlord providing capital • Imperial lands cultivated variously by tenants, slaves, and serfs	• Freeholders and tenants paid state taxes of all types on measured land • Aristocracy paid land taxes only • Ecclesiastics were exempt from most or all taxes
Mughal India (1526–1868); British Raj (1858–1949): • *Zamindari* landlord system • *Mahalwari* village system • *Ryotwari* individual freehold system	• Z: Freeholders turned into tenants • Z: Tenants also subject to labor and gift obligations • Freehold: village or individual	• Z1: Land tax fixed permanently • Z2: Land tax lasting 20–40 years • M: Village headman forwards land revenue to the treasury
Ottoman Empire, 1543–1923: • Islamic customary law, *Urf* • Ottoman Code of 1858	• State lands (*mawat* and *miri*), privately cultivated as share tenancy. • Private freehold (*mulk*) • Public land (waqf) • Communal or clan lands (*musha*), pastures, and water resources	• State collects taxes and fees • State collects non-tax revenues from its own lands • *Waqf* lands are free of state taxes
Gondar, 1550–1770: • Rule of ecclesiastical law: • *Fetha Negest* • *Rist* and *Gult* System	• Urban freehold • *Rist* and communal for peasanty • *Gult* for crown and religious institutions	• Taxation of long-distance trade • Tithe, fees, and gifts to emperor, kings and Ras. • *Gult* income rights to appointees and grantees

Sources: Author (see text)
Z = Zamandari; *M* = Mahalwari

2.3 The Islamic Empire State: Ottomans, Safavids, and Mughals

The Islamic gun-powder empires built by the Ottomans (c. 1400–1900), the Safavids (c. 1500–1700), and the Mughals (c. 1550–1850) all shared many of the elements of state building. These include the mastery of firearms to supplement or supplant horse cavalry, and the masterful manipulation of a universalist Islamic ideology to minimize the use of violence by obtaining a begrudging submission of far-flung subject populations (Bertkay 1991). Ideological solidarity, in turn, tamed predatory invaders into self-restrained administrators of rich lands.

More pertinent to our thesis, income rights were conditional on service to the state. This was necessitated by the desire to work around feeble central bureaucracies and to prevent the entrenchment of a hereditary elite. The lack of primogeniture in determining succession, the fusion of mosque and state, and the chronic fiscal crises all feed the propensity for territorial expansion in search of new tributors (see Table 2.2 for a comparative profile).

The Byzantine aristocracy, which was defined by its military character despite a minority serving as judges and administrators, provided a template for the post-medieval Ottoman state (Dale 2010). A notable institution was the *pronoia* which temporarily transferred imperial fiscal rights from land or other sources of revenue to state officials in exchange for public service—an arrangement which gave the grantee conditional possession rather than outright ownership. Unlike their Western counterparts, Byzantine military nobles were fully landed and expected to pay taxes as proof of land rights. This non-feudal class, second in importance to the biggest landowning class led by the Emperor himself, included the aristocracy and the Church—comprising dioceses or parishes, and later monasteries.

The great landed estates of the Byzantine heartland of Anatolia, withstanding for long the incessant attacks across its borders (by Persians, Arabs, Slavs, and Turks), eventually gave way to a system of free peasant farms whose revenue base supported a functional local army to operate throughout the empire. The Farmer's Law governed land tenure as well as communal and contractual obligations (Ashburner 1912; Gorecki 1981). This Law defined in impressively modern terms the sanctioned relations between (free or bonded) peasants and landlords and overlords. It also outlined the rights and obligations of wage laborers, herdsmen, guardians of fruit plantations, merchants, tenant farmers, and soldier-farmers.

Taxation was rationalized with a remarkably accurate system of land measurement, and it was finely differentiated. Tax obligations fell entirely on landowners rather than on tenants. Exemptions were granted to professional solders, members of the militia, and the nobility.

In the end, the imperatives of war financing, predatory taxation, and the Black Death jointly led to the demise of the empire in 1453. Between 1453 and 1526 (roughly coinciding with the incubation of an emirate out of the loose confederation of the Ifat-Adal-Harrari **sultanat**es in Eastern Ethiopia), three major "Muslims empires" emerged on the ashes of the Greco-Roman and Persian civilizations (Dale 2010).

In the Mediterranean, an Ottoman empire was established under the Seljuk Turks. In Iran, the Shi'a Safavid empire emerged with its state elites evincing a Mongol background. In South Asia, Mongols and Turks (the Mughals) established the Delhi Sultanate by imposing overlordship over fiercely independent and fractious local Hindu tributaries until the British Raj took over in 1858.

The three empire-building elites were motivated primarily by redistributive wealth accumulation. This was done through the three channels of the *jizya* tax imposed on non-Muslims, taxes on agricultural production, and taxes on commerce. By establishing an extensive zone of Muslim sovereignty, they sought to acquire enough wealth to ensure a life of comfort for the ruling elite, to expand the empire, and to undertake grandiose projects for the glorification or the legitimation of the dynasty.

Following Byzantine precedents, the dominant economic strategy was to rely on reasonable taxation and to preserve the family farm from fragmentation. Trade was

a prestigious activity, and all three empires strove to provide safe and efficient passage for long-distance commercial travelers. Exportable commodities such as silk, spices, and silverware were highly coveted.

The shared mode of governance of these Turkic-Mongol rulers from Central Asia is often characterized as "patrimonial-bureaucratic." The Ottomans developed a highly bureaucratic Eurasian[2] slave empire; the Safavid were the least bureaucratic; and the Mughals occupied a middle position in the Weberian spectrum. Under the Ottomans, the distinction between the military class and the producer class was the sharpest in newly conquered territories much of which became state lands (*mir*). As in the case of the Mughals, Muslim rulers could not establish a permanently-rooted local bureaucracy the farther one goes from the Center. However, imperial domination was accepted wherever it was seen by the distant tributors as a provider of a public good, i.e., a force for peace and order.

Emperor Akbar, the founder of the Mughal Empire, reserved the most fertile areas as Crown lands while parceling out much of the remainder to the officer class which was regularly rotated. The officer class, in turn, had to devote a good portion of its allotment as temporary holdings (*mansab*) for the support of the military contingents. The defeated Rajput chiefs were also allowed to retain a portion of their lands as well as their autonomy only if they consented to loyally serve the regime. These practices are uncannily like those of the Christian Ethiopian empire of the same period with respect to newly incorporated regions.[3]

The Ottomans taxed agriculturalists, pastoralists, some *timar*-holders, and long-distance traders—later with the help of tax farmers. Modeled on the *pronoia,* the Ottoman *timar* (and *iqa)* was a conditional grant that temporarily transferred imperial tax or tribute rights (from land, customs, fishing, hunting) to an individual or an institution. These grants may be long-term, but ownership remained imperial.

Military districts were run by officers who served as tax collectors and administrators with the right to keep a portion of the tax is in lieu of a salary. Soldiers also received livelihood entitlements to incomes from small towns as well as funds from the central treasury to support the cavalry. Where the centralizing Sultans were energetic, fiefs were replaced by salaries in cash or kind. Where the Sultans were weak, grant-holders evolved into autonomous tributaries or even regional family dynasties.

Unlike the case of the isolated Gondarine state, the global reach of the Ottoman empire-state compelled it to be responsive to economic transformation in Europe during the Commercial and the Industrial revolutions. The merchant class served as

[2] By 'Eurasian,' we refer to the world of the Eastern Church which encompassed European and Neareastern regions where Orthodox Christianity and later Islam coexisted. The term 'Afroasian' will be used here to include northeastern Africa (mainly Egypt and Ethiopia) and the worlds of Constantinople and the Islamic empires of the Ottomans, Persia and the Mughals.

[3] The striking similarities among Ethiopia, Eurasia, and Afroasia in nomad-settler relations, the military administration and punitive land dispossession in newly conquered lands, and the largely indirect mode of surplus and militia mobilization will be presented in the next two chapters.

the most notable agent of innovation. European imperial expansion nonetheless weakened the Ottomans by forcing them to devote more resources to public infrastructure and naval defenses, and to concede autonomy to provincial notables such as Mohammad Ali in Egypt.[4]

Ethiopia began a tepid centralization and modernization drive in the mid-1800s slightly ahead of Russia's abolishing of serfdom and Japan's opting for the Meiji Restoration. I will explore the factors which singly or in combination lead to a fuller understanding of the incompleteness of Ethiopia's dual transformation to a prosperous, modern nation-state. The explanatory variables include kin-based land rights without primogeniture, mutually destructive domestic contests between contiguous states (one Christian, the other Islamic), incessant conflicts among settled, agro-pastoral, and hunger-gatherer communities, and relentless aggression by Ottoman and European imperialist forces or their surrogates.

2.4 The Precolonial African State I: Gondar

The contemporary contender of the civilizational Islamic states was the Christian Gondarine State of Ethiopia which was distinctively tributary. While it seems exceptional from its African and Western Asian peers, it shared most of their fundamental features. However, it notably lacked gun-power capability.

The two successor dynasties of the maritime empire of Axum, the Zagwe and the Solomonid in the first half of the second millennium, left important institutional legacies on which subsequent Ethiopian states could build. The post-medieval Ethiopian state went through four distinct stages of evolution over the subsequent 700 years: Wollo-Shewa (c. 1270–1520), interregnum 1, Gondar (c. 1550–1770), interregnum 2, and Shewa (1889–1974).

This pedigreed inheritance included a core people in the central highlands with a supra-tribal consciousness to legitimize a pan-Ethiopian state, a uniting ideology provided by Eastern Orthodox Christianity (peddling a spiritual manifest destiny, the sanctity of royal authority, and a written code as a source of ecclesiastical as well as secular laws as interpreted by the Emperor). This was capped by an exaggerated claim of Semitic heritage which provided an aura of cosmopolitanism, a largely landed peasantry subject to overlordship by Church and State. More importantly for

[4] By mid-1800, the archaic *timar* system was abolished, and the military organization was centralized and salaried. The administration of the *waqf* was also centralized and excess holdings transferred to the Crown. The *Tanzimat* (ordering) proclamation of 1839 initiated a period of reforms which climaxed with the announcement of a written constitution in 1876 as well as a parliament. Mohammad Ali, who ruled Egypt under Ottoman tutelage during the first half of the 1800s, modernized Egypt by building a hyper-militarized state, raised farm productivity, nurtured a secular civil service and the army, introducing advanced education and health services, and launching an import-substituting industrialization. His successors, especially Khedive Ismail built railway lines, harbors, bridges and the Suez Canal before the British made Egypt and Anglo-Egyptian Sudan colonies until the mid-1900s (Maddison 2007).

the economic base, a plow-based mixed farming economy dominated cereal and livestock production in the central highlands. A world-class culture (cuisine, music, and art) is adorned by an equally sophisticated indigenous Geez script and literature that is unique in Africa (Tamrat 1972; Levine 2000, 2001; Isaac 2012).

As I explain in the next chapter, the most important institutional legacy for state formation came in the form of overrights to tributary income. The overrights were granted to the Crown's regional administrators and soldiers in lieu of a salary from the poorly-resourced central treasury. The well-established Ethiopian Orthodox Church, and the provincial kings and lords enjoyed a high degree of autonomy from the emperor. This means religion and region were the two primary anchors of political identification. Non-primogenitor smallholder farms in the highlands and communal agro-pastoral systems in the predominantly Muslim lowlands produced a combination of producer autonomy, land fragmentation, and a lackluster class consciousness.

One legacy that successor states failed to hold on to was secure access to the Red Sea which had made Axum a cosmopolitan seafaring empire which was fully integrated with the worlds of the Mediterranean Sea and the Indian Ocean. The spread of Islam into the interior regions of the Horn of Africa from the tenth century on predictably gave birth to several Muslim principalities in the lowlands which frustrated reliable access to the ports along the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden.

Much like Orthodox Christianity, the unifying power of a pan-tribal Islam enabled the various principalities to coalesce politically to mount incessant raids on nearby non-Muslim communities in search of pasture and new converts. This drive culminated in an Ottoman-supported, decade-and-half-long occupation of much of the non-Muslim highlands in the first half of the 1500s.

Ahmad ibn Ibrahim al-Ghazi's *jihad* managed to destroy in less than two decades much of the Ethiopia's literary, architectural and cultural heritage. It also resulted in forced resettlements of Christian farmers in isolated and defensible uplands or the malaria-ridded and otherwise less hospitable lowlands (Trimingham 1965; Henze 2000). The destruction of churches, the forced mass conversions and re-conversions, the widespread looting of smallholder property by the soldiers of fortune, and the resultant paranoia rendered the Church even more isolationist, prone to internecine doctrinal conflict, overly conservative, and immobile.

The classic but temporary triumph of Muslims over Christians and pastoralists over farmers turned out to be a pyrrhic victory of mutual destruction. The loose confederation of Islamic principalities under the Adal state virtually disappeared by 1600. It subsequently took the Christian state the better part of the sixteenth century to recover from the mayhem.

The final straw was the massive invasion and migration to the heartland of the agro-pastoral Oromo from the southern borderlands, especially during 1550–1700 (Bahriy 2002; Pankhurst 1997, ch. 24). The relentless penetration of the settled historic provinces by the stateless Oromo clans, much like the movements into settled society by the Mongols and the Manchu of Central Asia, shaped Ethiopia's demographics and state formation in important respects. It bifurcated the Abyssinian heartland along a north-south axis.

In due course, culturally assimilated and ethnically hybrid Amara-Oromo political houses emerged in central Wollo, Yeju, Gojam, and Simien. This paved the way for the era of the warring princes that hopelessly weakened the Gondarine emperors (Abir 1968). Finally, southern Oromo clans (in Shewa, Wollega, and Keffa) mastered the art of statecraft and co-founded a number of kingdoms which were ensconced on the conquered Omotic or Sidama kingdoms in the southwestern highlands.

Following the destabilizing *jihad*, the traditionally roving Christian emperors progressively moved to the northwest periphery of the medieval empire to finally establish a permanent capital in Gondar around 1630.[5] The Gondarine state lost effective control of the Red Sea coast in the east to the Ottomans and was besieged by Muslim principalities from the Sudan in the west. The country subsequently became remarkably insulated from the influences of the early modern period (1500–1750) of the West which included the Age of Discovery, Mercantilism, the Renaissance, and the Enlightenment.[6]

Strong Gondarine emperors from time to time took measures to make offices appointive rather than hereditary. They rightly preferred central regiments to the private militia of powerful provincial kings serving as provincial governors, or periodic mass conscripts of unpaid citizen-soldiers motivated by war booty. They also opted for highly personalized politics centered in the **Court.** The extant social forces were too weak to push for a governance system of broadly representative parliaments and technocratic ministries.

Some monarchs, for sure, were fully cognizant of the fact that a centralized mobilization of revenue is impossible without a salaried bureaucracy and vice versa. The Achilles Heel of patrimonial rule, having to cede substantial state revenue rights to officialdom in lieu of compensation, made it necessary for the emperors and the provincial kings to rove around the empire to assert their tenuous authority, to feed their large retinue by rotating among rich regions, and wage military campaigns into borderlands to discipline ever-rebellious tributaries.

The Emperor was ultimately as strong as the palace guard and other central troops, the effectiveness of the patron-client relationships with the hereditary nobility and handpicked underlings (with own militia), and the degree of resignation or tacit acceptance by the landed peasantry. The latter supplied the tribute (in kind and in labor) and the mass-conscripted militia.

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[5] Although Gondar the town was exceptional in becoming a permanent capital with impressive castles, the meager surplus of the smallholder could not be supplemented by income from a good access to the global trading network (unlike the case of the Islamic empires). With a population of 60,000 in 1700, the accounts of travelers consistently suggest that Gondar was far from an urban commercial-industrial center. It was hardly comparable even to provincial towns in contemporary North Africa or the Middle East. As Gamst (1970) suggests, Ethiopia did not manage to develop the material basis for developing urban centers which could last to the present era.

[6] This is not to suggest that the country became a complete intellectual wasteland. For example, Zara Yaecob's philosophical Treatise or *Hattata* (written in Geez in 1667) is now favorably compared with later works of Descartes and Locke in its commitments to rationality and the power of reason that is normally associate with the European Enlightenment. Zara Yaecob's precociously modern liberal views on such fundamental questions as the indefensibility of slavery, the defensibility of the equality of religions, and the equality of the sexes are quite remarkable (Sumner 1976).

Central authority inevitably waxed and waned as the emperors tried to gain leverage over the nobility as well as over the soldiers of fortune by employing several stratagems. The most reliable instrument involved nurturing a meritocratic system for recruiting tenaciously loyal servants, especially those "raised from dust."[7] Another method was to decouple control over land routes and trade routes from control over office-holding. This way, powerful members of the aristocracy and the nobility are turned into appointed state officials who can be shifted at will from office to office (promotion-demotion) or from region to region to prevent them from acquiring powerful political bases. The third, strategic political marriages and concubinage, served as a deterrent against the buildup of strong lineages. This innovation seems to be all-too-often lost on many contemporary political commentators.

Enhancing the productivity of the estates of the nobility and the smallholder at the Center could not, however, be sustained since the power centers (the Crown, the nobility, or the heterogeneous landed peasantry) were not always decisively hegemonic. Gondar tragically fell into an insidious power struggle and low-intensity civil wars during a momentous century in world economic history. Between the death of Iyasu II (1755) and the crowning of Tewodros II (1855), state collapse led to uncontrolled predation of the borderlands and pillage of the highland smallholder became the norm. The incessant redistributive contests among state elites in the heartlands of the empire, therefore, hold the key for a fuller appreciation of the self-limiting nature of tributarism with respect to prosperity and state consolidation alike.

2.5 The Precolonial African State II: Asante, Kongo, and Dahomey

An overview of the pre-colonial formation of other African states corroborates the generality of the tributary thesis. Precolonial Africa is often simplistically divided into large-scale state societies and small-scale stateless societies. A good fraction of the African population did indeed reside in clusters of market and administration towns or dispersed hamlets under traditional governance systems of kinship that facilitated collective risk-sharing. Many village communities were, however, either absorbed by hierarchically organized African empires or grew to form their own chiefdoms and kingdoms. Those who failed to do so eventually fell victim to stagnation, sporadic pillage, enslavement, or colonization by North Africans or Europeans.

The extant literature on the subject points to important features of the organic evolution of precolonial African states south of the Sahara. These include the following (Monroe 2013; Curtin et al. 1995; Crummey 2000; Reid 2011). African political institutions are widely considered products of power struggles among indigenous political entrepreneurs and economic entrepreneurs. Long-distance trade and mass

[7] Two illustrious such leaders in the Court of Menelik II are Fitawrari Habte Giorgis Dinegde (1851–1926) and Dejazmatch Balcha Safo (1863–1936).

population movements (such as the historically unprecedented Bantu migration) also shaped state formation profoundly. Depending on the circumstances, stat elites instrumentalized corporate power (age sets, secret societies, title societies, and the like) as well as various ideologies as symbols of power in order to legitimize authority and wealth accumulation—in people, land, or both.

Before the Atlantic slave trade and a colonized Africa, most Africans lived in class- or ethnic-differentiated societies with a distinct political order. The basic features of this political order included *de facto* decentralized and functioning states, notions of the rule of law that were informed by customary or religious norms, and varying forms of accountability that are mediated by public service, lineage, reciprocity, age relations, tributary or servitude relations, or co-residence. In some cases, such as Mali or Songhay, kings amassed near absolute power based on their ability to protect productive activities (agriculture, trade, and metal and textile works) and to collect revenue and tribute to fund functionaries and a strong army (Fig. 2.2 and Box 2.4.).

As Bellucci (2010: 14) puts it,

> The great West African empires, such as Ghana in the 8th Century, Mali in the 14th Century, and Songhai and Bornu in the 16th Century, were organized politically on the basis of trade with the Arab world. Their towns were built on the banks of rivers and dominated vast expanses of the hinterland. They were characterized by religious and political ties, by personalized power, by lack of a written language, and by a decentralized organization. The central authority held a monopoly on material goods and lived off tribute paid in goods and men, and revenues from taxes on harvests and cattle, levies on metals, customs duties, and booty from warfare.

In regions which were conducive to settled agriculture, supra-lineage authority emerged but rarely in despotic forms. Where sufficient agricultural surplus was supplemented by revenue from long-distance trade, the consolidation of the state was facilitated—albeit, at the risk of erosion of communal tenure and collective decision-making. Where prolonged agrarian crisis or loss of control of trade routes occurred, vulnerability to state collapse or takeover by outsiders increased markedly.

Precolonial societies in the Sahel and the drier savannah were the most prone to fragility. This was compounded by the fact that, in the face of a high land/man ratio in much of precolonial Africa, access to the instruments of violence was key to imposing control over people (including slaves) to undergird state formation.

Between the tenth and the sixteenth centuries, several West African empire-states emerged, most notably Ghana, Mali, and Songhay. Their emergence and consolidation were facilitated by the discovery of gold, iron, and copper; the expanding opportunities in trans-Saharan but also trans-Atlantic trade in precious metals, salt, slaves, and cloth; the spread of unifying ideologies, especially Islam; and control over smallholder agriculture in the borderlands. Their demise inevitably followed changes in caravan routes, external invasion from the Maghrib, failure to diversify the economic base, or internal strife over succession.

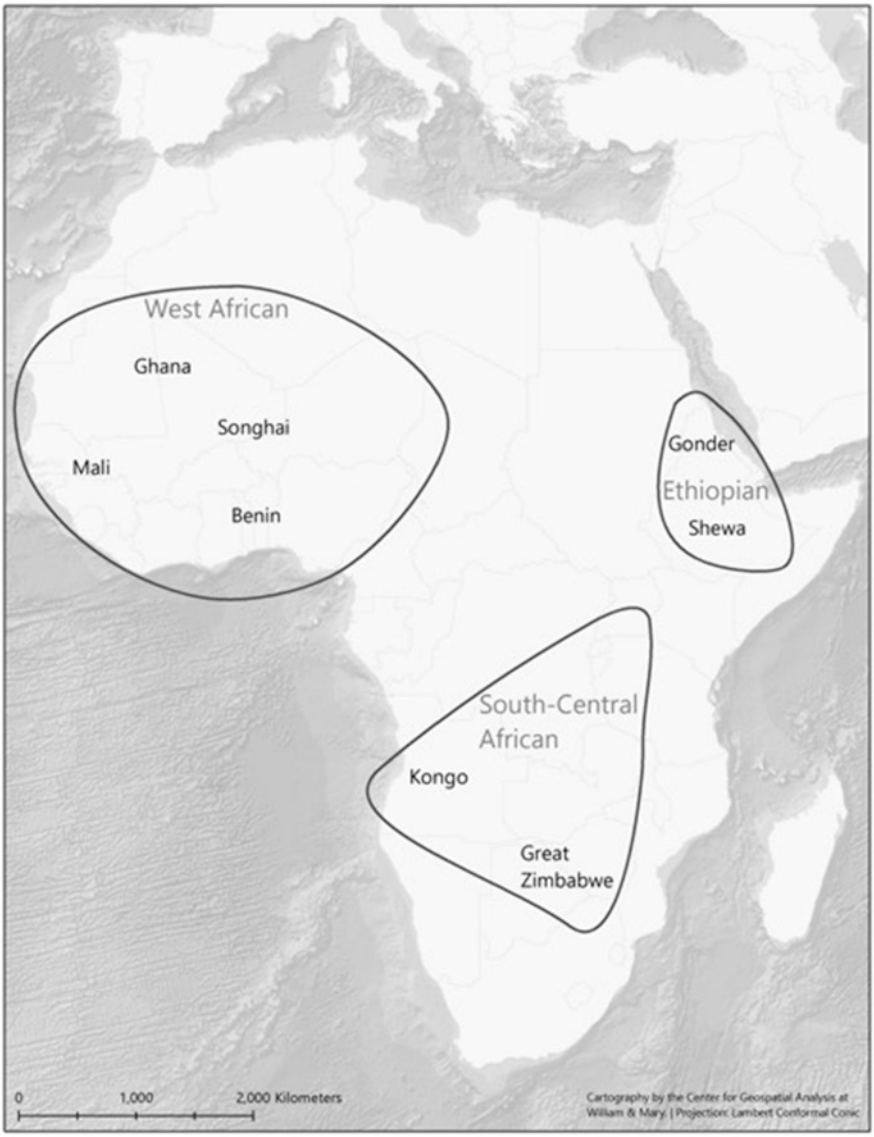

Fig. 2.2 Precolonial African kingdoms, c. 1700

Centralized governments (monarchical or oligarchic) with the capability to collect taxes, regulating commerce, and mobilizing armies were most common in intensive-agriculture societies. Egypt, Nubia, Ethiopia, Ghana, Mali, and Songhay were examples of kingdoms and empires with reasonably centralized governments. Notable non-Islamic African precolonial kingdoms included Kongo, Dahomey, and Asante (Curtin et al. 1995).

Box 2.4 Absolutism
Absolutism refers to a political doctrine that upholds the undivided and unlimited sovereignty of a ruler over legislative, justice, and executive responsibilities. It is justified by the presumed divine right or superior knowledge enjoyed by such a ruler. To ensure clarity about the seat of ultimate authority, little or no room is permitted for power-sharing or for imposing restraints on power-holders from such competing sources of authority as the religious establishments or autonomous economic elites.

Monarchical absolutism invokes the divine right of kings. Vanguardist-party absolutism invokes the idea that the sharing of power or any limits on it is unjustifiable since the ruling group has superior knowledge and wisdom about what is best for society.

Africa's persistent poverty is often explained in terms of a vicious circle produced by the perverse interactions between initially absolutist and patrimonial political institutions and the shocks of slavery and colonialism. These features intensified exploitatively absolutist economic relations between producers and rulers.

A supposedly Hobbesian conception of the centrality of personal power and the norm of absolutism are said to underlie fears of political anarchy in Ethiopia when a dominant authority figure is removed. The folk saying puts it this way: 'The king can never face justice, just as the sky can never be tilled.' In the absence of a centralized bureaucracy and army, the absolutism of the strongman is however rarely sustainable in large tributary states.

Some empires and kingdoms, such as Mali, were justly infamous for their large towns or small- to medium-size cities (Coquery-Vidrovitch 2005). Regardless of economic organization, political or social identity had more to do with membership in family, kinship groups, or language group than in being a resident of a given jurisdiction. African domestic slaves augmented the labor power of their masters' extra-subsistence production. Here are three illustrative examples.

2.5.1 The Kingdom of Kongo

The Kongo state (1390–1914) encompassed modern-day Angola and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. An independent state from about 1390 to 1891, and a vassal state of Portugal subsequently, the Kongo monarchy was abolished upon the Portuguese victory against the Kongo revolt of 1914.

By the end of the sixteenth century, Kongo's population was probably close to half a million people in the core provinces. Its capital city of Mbanza Kongo showed evidence of a high degree of centralization with 100,000 residents around 1500 A.D. This allowed resources, soldiers, and surplus foodstuffs to be readily available at the request of the king.

The Kingdom of Kongo is arguably one of the most sophisticated states in Africa south of the Sahara. It was a mix of a centralized state united by a syncretic Catholicism faced fierce competition over succession to the throne at the Center (members of the royal council as well as the top echelon of the Church hierarchy) and periodic challenges to central authority from distant governors and tributary principalities in the Periphery.

The economic base of the Kongo state was multifaceted. It boasted an extensive trading network. The state exploited mineral resources and ivory. Residents also engaged in manufacturing of copperware, ferrous metal goods, raffia cloth, and pottery. These skills also show up in remarkably sophisticated artifacts (Fromont 2017).

Like its contemporary precolonial counterparts, Kongo also relied on tribute-based revenue from communal-land assignments (*renda*) and forest products to finance its bureaucracy and military. The latter was supplemented by mass levy and European mercenaries. Tributarism also encouraged expansionist wars on neighbors in search of land and loot. Enslaved captives were valuable assets as loyal soldiers and as exportables which attracted steady Portuguese penetration, and eventual colonization, of the Kingdom (Lamphear 2016).

2.5.2 The Kingdom of Dahomey

The Dahomey Kingdom (1600–1894), centered in present-day Benin, was a major regional power before falling into a vassalage status to the Yoruba Oyo Empire and its eventual annexation into the French colonial empire.

The Kingdom of Dahomey was an important regional power with an organized domestic economy built on conquest and slave labor. It also enjoyed significant international trade with European powers, a centralized administration, a system of taxation and tribute, and an organized military.

Much like its African counterparts, Dahomey started out as a coalition of various insecure ethnic groups threatened by incessant conflict and the encroachment of the Atlantic slave trade. In the end, it became an integral part of the notorious Slave Coast and fell victim to the unstable coalitions that full centralization would have avoided (Monroe 2014).

2.5.3 The Asante Union

The Asante Union (1701–1957) was an Akan kingdom in modern-day Ghana. Combining an effective military strategy and access to firearms, the Asante built a sophisticated political culture and architecture in a domain that stretched from central Ghana to the present-day Ivory Coast. With the Golden Stool as a unifying symbol across a diversity of clans and a centralized army, the Union managed to

gain access to the Atlantic coast. This feat enabled it to engage in trade (in gold bars, cocoa, and kola nuts) with Europeans to buttress its staples base of maize and root crops. The Asante Union was eventually folded into the Gold Coast colony.

Much like its contemporaries in West Africa and Central Africa, the Ashanti (aka Ashanti) Kingdom was remarkably centralized in its administration but with de facto checks and balances provided by organized interests in the society. They also relied on enslaved captives to staff the domestic economy as well as to engage in the Atlantic slave trade. Just as importantly, the royal house supplemented its trade-based revenue by tributes and taxes on the smallholder population. This strategy enabled the Union to appease political competitors, expand into less-defended neighbors, and challenge external invaders until it was finally overcome by the voracious British Empire (McCaskie 2003).

2.6 Tributarism and Underdevelopment

Studies of state formation need to identity the mechanisms by which certain economic bases and social networks inherently foster expansionary and predatory surplus seeking. Such pathways turn out to be non-developmental in the sense that state elites cannot afford to allow autonomous centers of power to emerge or to devote a reasonable share of the appropriated economic surplus to productivity-enhancing public investment. The mechanism of political centralization by tributarism in Afroasia rendered it vulnerable to implosion under external pressure. The reason is that such a system tends to undermine its own fiscal foundation by dis-incentivizing long-term investment and hence growth (Besley and Persson 2009).

Consider, for example, an agro-climatic ecology that is well-suited for rain-fed smallholder mixed farming that tends to foster a landed peasantry. In terms of incentives, the small-producer class living in a predatory state has a strong incentive to invest in defense or to limit the size of the appropriable, above-subsistence economic surplus. The class of titled overlords with income rights only would correspondingly have a strong incentive to invest in instruments of coercion to enforce their redistributive income rights.

The endemic extractive contests between producer and extractor as well as among extractors inevitably dissipate much of the economic surplus. In such a setting, grand bargains between wealth producing citizen-soldiers and the state elite will have to embrace the security of smallholder property rights and the extension of the franchise (Abegaz 2005; Acemoglu and Robinson 2006). This politico-economic settlement is, however, a rarity.

The arms race between contenders for state power, in the end, enhances vulnerability to capture by imperialist powers as upstarts betray uber-nationalists by seeking

alliances with foreign forces in exchange for weapons and diplomatic recognition. The imperatives of loot-seeking also intensify predatory expeditions to peripheral regions in search of precious metals, forest products and slaves thereby distorting the process of state building and pauperizing neighboring peoples. The endemic wars at home and incessant conflict with foreign invaders end up perpetuating a weak state and a subsistence economy.

The economic base of a subsistence economy, especially if buffeted by revenue from long-distance trade, may sometimes be adequate to support the institutionalization of a modern administrative and military bureaucracy. This presupposes control over a well-defined territory and substantial inroads toward the creation of a citizenry with a shared political culture through assimilationist institutions. This vital political task was undertaken by some of the rump states of the Islamic empires and the Ethiopian Shewan State, but only after 1941 (see Chap. 4 for details). By then, the external threat virtually disappeared for most under collective security guarantees while the internal threat faced by exclusionary regimes continues to loom large to this day.

What about the mechanism that links tributarism to the prospects of economic development? A compellingly causal mechanism I explore below goes form ecology and geography to endemic wars and underdevelopment. The proximity between sedentary agriculturalists and transhumant agro-pastoralists creates incentives especially for the latter to engage in hit-and-run battles in search of loot and pasture. Repeated attacks by highly mobile barbarians on cities and large villages have historically disrupted the political equilibrium between tributors and tributaries.

Upstarts also rationally engage in unrestrained rent-seeking to build up a war chest against rivals which inevitably triggers an arms race. The wealth-producing class is impelled to allocate a good portion of its resources to investment in defense while the extractors do likewise with judicious investment in the instruments of war and coercion. Talented individuals from modest backgrounds historically preferred to join the priesthood, the soldiery, or the Court as clerks or even servants. This vicious cycle weakens the state further and, unless a hegemon emerges quickly, it makes the fragile state vulnerable to incorporation into another empire or total dissolution.

In the end, insecure producers resort to subsistence production. They also rationally invest in various forms of defense against gratuitous predation. As Bates (2009) shows, physically insecure communities (as in pastoralist-cultivators in Northern Kenya and South Sudan as well as Gamo-Gofa and Illubabor) rationally choose limit wealth accumulation or remain poorer than they can as a a cruel deterrence against predictable predators.

This hit-and-run extractive mechanism ensures a Malthusian trap that is ensconced in a political trap of tributaries. Played over and over throughout central Asia and much of Africa, this dynamic explains the bias toward underdevelopment in these societies. Without rootedness in their hinterland populations, sound fiscal systems, and effective military organization, tributary states could at best reproduce themselves. They needed to be jolted by auspicious external shocks to transmute themselves into superior politico-economic equilibria.

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Part II
Three Ethiopian Tributary States

Chapter 3
The Gondarine Tributary-Military State

If one is to begin to answer the question of why the development of Ethiopia lagged and why social classes remained little advanced in their formation despite some considerable economic change, the devouring of surpluses by the soldiery must be a point of departure.

Richard Caulk (1972: 22)

Man is free; land is tributary.

Emperor Ze-Dengel (1606)

This chapter provides a critical analysis of the suggestive but largely descriptive literature on Ethiopian agrarian history in search of an explanation for why war makes and then unmakes the tributary state. Using the theoretical framework developed in Chap. 1 for thinking about the dynamics of transition from a civilizational-state to a territorial state, I explore the self-limiting but functional *rist* and *gult* land institution of Ethiopia. This politico-economic institution and the hostile external climate together conspired against the metamorphosis of the Gondarine state (GS) into a territorially-defined tax state (Table 3.1 for a comparative summary). However, Gondar provided a template for a modern Ethiopian state that compares quite favorably with its Afroasian peers.

3.1 The Weight of Triple Legacies

The 250-year-old Gondarine state was the inheritor of three illustrious legacies: (i) the institutional heritage of Axum (as refined by the Zagwe and Solomonid emperors), (ii) the emergence of Islam as a political force spearheaded by the Ottoman empire encircling a predominantly (two-thirds) Christian Ethiopia (hence, the apt metaphor of a 'Christian island in a sea of Islam'), and (iii) the massive insertion of

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Table 3.1 Three Ethiopian states: Gondarine, Shewan, and Revolutionary

Period	Ethiopian context	Global context
Gondar 1: Fixed capital with restoration, c. 1600–1770	• End of fission between two states: Christian and Muslim following the Jihad • Massive invasion by Oromo pastoralists • Rule of ecclesiastical law: *Fetha Negest* • Precarious control over Red Sea coast	• Age of discovery and commerce • Settler colonies in the Americas, South Africa, and Australasia • Eastern Church and it empire falls to the Ottomans
Gondar 2: fragmentation restoration, c. 1770–1875	• Gondarine emperors lose power too regional (mostly Wollo and Yeju) warlords and lose control of much of the south and the eastern lowlands • Incessant internecine wars • Absorption of northern Oromo elites into Christian state • Loss of seacoast to Ottomans, and incursions from Sudanese Mahdists	• Enlightenment • Renaissance • American and French revolutions • First industrial revolution • Industrial catch up by continental Europe and European offshoots • Serfdom and slavery abolished
Shewa 1: Recentralization & expansion: 1875–1935	• Expansion of empire and imperial capital southwards; 1916 coup d'état • Restoration of emperors in Addis Ababa and reabsorption of Eritrea • Fending off two Italian invasions • Tentative modernization of market and state institutions	• Second industrial revolution and world wars • European offshoots, Russia, Japan, Turkey, and successfully managed late industrialization • Scramble for Africa
Shewa 2: Modernization and hyper-centralization: 1941–1974	• Monarchy (1955–74): new constitution; tribute to taxation; professional state bureaucracy; semi-modern social service and market institutions • Populist (1955–2005): nationalization all of land; hyper-centralization of state; politicization of ethnicity under two authoritarian regimes	• Decolonization of Africa • New age of economic globalization: aid, trade • Catch-up industrialization in East Asia and L. America • State fragility and Cold War networks of external control in the Horn of Africa
Revolutionary 1: Garrison Socialism, 1974–1991	• 1974 coup d'état; nationalization of all land and big urban businesses; hyper-centralization of state and society; multiple civil wars; Red Terror • Literacy and basic education campaign; villagization; mass organizations;	• Global economic crisis • Cold War: US an USSR switch alliance for Ethiopia & Somalia • Great Famine, 1984–85 • Limited development aid, mainly from the EU
Revolutionary 2: Ethnocentric Capitalism, 1991–	• 1991–2000: consolidation of EPRDF; ethno-federalist constitution; boycotts of elections by opposition parties; marketization under overbearing state • 2001–: rapid public investment-led growth; repression of any & all opposition	• Resumption of large Western economic aid followed by FDI • Global economic recovery • Big entry of China as contractor, lender, investor, and importer • Fragility of the Horn of Africa

Source: Author

Oromo pastoralists into the central highlands on the wake a devastating *jihad* against the Christian state. By the time the state regained its footing around 1550, GS found itself stuck between a rock (incessant contest with neighboring Muslim kingdoms) and a hard place (endemic contests among state elites and between them and a predominantly landed peasantry).

The maritime empire of Axum, which was no more by the end of the first millennium, provided the template for the successor Ethiopian states (Tamrat 1972; Levine 2000; 2001; Isaac 2012). They included a core people with a supra-tribal political consciousness to be loyal to a sovereign state; a uniting ideology provided by Eastern Orthodox Christianity; the notion of the sanctity of royal authority; a written code as a source of ecclesiastical as well as secular laws; a national mythology of Semitic heritage which provided an aura of cosmopolitanism and legitimacy for the imperial throne[1]; a landed peasantry subject to overlordship by a Church-State; a plow-based mixed farming economy; and a world civilization.

Axum's legacies also included overrights to tributary income, due the imperial Crown being granted to its administrators and soldiers in lieu of salary. The well-established state-church as well as the mostly hereditary provincial kings and lords enjoyed a high degree of autonomy from the emperor. This reality effectively made religion and region the two primary sources of political identification. The predominantly smallholder land tenure and agricultural systems of the highlands produced an adequate economic surplus to support a ruling class.

Ser'ate mengist (state), inspired by the rough template provided by the wellspring of the remarkably cosmopolitan institutions of Axum, revolved around the royal court (*alga*).It was nonetheless constrained by competing intermediaries (local nobles, dynastic families, Church/Mosque notables, and other retainers) with a capacity to credibly mete out disruptive violence. The crucial institution of orderly succession was, therefore, absent. The balance of forces rather than the incumbent's designation held sway.The Court, a far cry from an autonomous bureaucracy, introduced a state language (Amharic) with the rise of Amde-Tsion I at the beginning of the fourteenth century (Crummey 1988).

This rich political culture subsequently underwent five distinct phases of political evolution in the second millennium: the Zagwe state (960–1270), the Wollo-Shewan state (1270–1570), the Gondarine state (1650–1770), and the Shewan state (1889–1974). In each case, agro-ecology favored unfettered smallholder access to land. It also cemented a path-dependent fusion of extractive economic institutions (tribute-seeking in the center and predation in the periphery) and exclusionary political institutions (monopoly over overlordship titles and appointments).

[1] For an interesting comparative look at the civilizational forms of a Sinicized Japan and a semitized Ethiopia, see Levine (2001). He examines the common features, along with nuanced differences, of the two countries thusly: receptive insularity, idealization of an alien culture, sacralization of an imperial homeland, parochialization, religious pluralism, political decentralization, hegemonic warrior ethos, and hierarchical particularism. Parenthetically, mid-nineteenth century Japan had a literacy rate comparable to Europe, well-developed transport and tax systems, commercialized agriculture, and agro-processing workshops that supplied manufactures to a growing urban economy.

GS was both a contemporary and a variant of the Afroasiatic mode of state formation in the Red Sea and its western littoral. We take up here the intriguing question in Ethiopian political and economic history: Why did the post-*Jihad* Christian Abyssinian state, anchored in Gondar, fail to transform from a respectable tributary-military state into a tax-based, territorial national state by integrating the myriad kindred polities within its tributary reach?

Various explanations can be gleaned from the thin literature on Ethiopian nation-state formation. Factors invoked include centuries-old isolation born of encirclement by a hostile Ottoman Empire and later by European colonialists (mainly Italy and Great Britain), political fragmentation resulting mainly from non-navigable rivers and erosion-prone watersheds bordered by unforgiving hot and dry steppes, and unbridled rent-seeking by state elites who were impelled to squander the scarce resources on internecine warfare and public feasting to the detriment of productive wealth accumulation.

Our working hypothesis is as follows:

> *Building a nation-state entails developing a centralized bureaucracy and a professional army, and for power-holders to accede to reciprocal restraints (through autonomous Crown Councils, Constitutions, and a multiplicity of manageable power centers) to pave the way for accountability to the ruled. Tributarism, as a form of rent-seeking, is an efficient form of financing a self-reproducing state wherever state elites are unable to monopolize access to land and trade. However, tributarism is also self-limiting since it relies on indirect rule and puts a high premium on perennial extractive contests over smallholder surplus. By undermining the emergence of an autonomous farmer class or a business class, endemic predation stunts the fiscal basis of the state and undermines its legitimacy. This would explain the failure of the historic Ethiopian state of Gondar to pave the way for the emergence of a full-fledged nation-state.*

I attribute the partial success of state building to the existence of a predominantly landowning peasantry which nonetheless preempted the emergence of neither a feudal class nor a monarchy with an adequate fiscal base to underwrite robust political centralization. This is not to deny that the income from the large estates owned by the members of the royal family, the nobility, and the provincial governors were significant (Perham 1969; Abegaz 2005).

The primary source of income for the military aristocracy was tribute in the form of usufructuary rights over state lands or over-rights to taxes and service transferred by the state to its office-holding agents as payment for their service. In other words, accumulation of wealth was dependent on the quantity and quality of land and labor under one's crown-sanctioned jurisdiction (as the benefices of office) rather than on the size of one's family estate (landlordism) or direct state-elite participation in trade or industry.

To make sense of the preference for this mode of production and appropriation, we invoke the now-famous Domar thesis about labor regimentation and land scarcity. These relationships fall into two categories: the case where both factors of production are scarce or abundant, and the case where one factor is abundant, but the other is scarce.

Evsey Domar (1970), in a classic article, applies impeccable economic logic to explain why serfdom (or indentured servitude) was an institution that rationally arose in a great territorial expansion of the Russian state into the steppes. His generalizable insight was that, in a Malthusian society with a low land/labor ratio, there is no point in enslaving or enserfing a man since the wage you would have to pay him, or her will

not substantially deviate from the subsistence level (as in the case of densely-populated Egypt or South Asia). However, where land is abundant and labor scarce, labor cost is likely to be high since the opportunity cost (the foregone income from being an owner-cultivator) sets a high wage floor. Landlords, state or private, then have a strong incentive to enserf peasants by tying them to the land and enforcing this absolutist control by monopolizing both landownership and the instruments of violence.

The abundance of land and a moderately dense population in the core highland provinces of GS trailblazed a third route of an independent smallholder peasanty becoming the norm of the agrarian system. Unable to monopolize access to land and even weapons, GS and its predecessors had little no choice but to make unprecedented concessions on land ownership to the peasantry but also to redress this by making bewilderingly purpose-specific claims of tribute (with such ridiculous excuses as peasant obligations to host itinerant visits, to pay bird taxes, and even contribute the costs of weddings and funerals). What makes this system of overlord-producer contest economically damaging is not, however, the rate of exploitation per se (since it is much lighter than feudalism or hydraulism) but the capriciousness of the obligations (Pankhurst 1966; Abegaz 2005).

3.2 Gondar as a Tributary-Military State[2]

It bears repeating that a viable state must meet four conditions to impose its will on domestic society and to defend itself against external aggression. The first condition is a solid fiscal base either through decentralized revenue mobilization by delegating authority to private actors (tax farmers, fief holders, or lenders) albeit at the risk of loosening control, or through a centralized bureaucracy. The second requirement is attaining a monopoly over large-scale violence either by contracting out to private militaries or by establishing a state-funded professional army. The third is internal legitimacy or popular consent which can be obtained through a mix of patronage, cultural solidarity, the provision of public goods and services, support for economic growth, and power-sharing with regional communities. And, the fourth condition is external legitimacy that is earned by devising an effective deterrence against aggressors.

Gondarine state re-builders faced two sets of structural challenges concerning these requirements. They needed a robust defence against recurrent invasions by the Ottomans or their surrogates. So, the emperors had to organize a core of imperial troops.

Monarchs also had to manage effectively the internal competition for power and wealth among innumerable family dynasties. They had to fend off constant challenges to the Crown from competing political houses, and ensure that office-holders transfer to the imperial treasury a sufficient portion of the revenue collected from independent farmers, traders, and tributary principalities in the near abroad.

They needed to protect international trade which was essential for acquiring arms (swords, helmets, spearheads, muskets) and prestige goods (silk products,

[2] A reasonable rendering into Amharic of the tributary-military settlement is "*gult sireet-sir'at*" since the *gul*t income over-right defines the core of landholder obligations to the state, and *Sira't* means state administration which includes both civilian and military components.

church vests and umbrellas, and carpets). The emperors participated in the trade through royal agents and collected revenue from it through taxation. Caravan routes radiated mainly from southwestern Ethiopia—a main source of slaves, ivory, gold, wax, civet, khat, and coffee (Abir 1980; Pankhurst 1998; Wolde Aregay 1984).

GS, like its contemporary Afroasian peers, was quintessentially *tributary* rather than *territorial*. It was also militaristic and top-down authoritarian by necessity. GS was a tributary-military state. Such a state was neither bureaucratic nor absolutist. It was rather a decentralized entity relying on church-based legitimacy inter-elite intrigue, marriage alliances, and occasional punitive expeditions to keep itself viable. Ethiopia took a good century after the demise of GS to forge the broad outlines of a modern state, including a recognizably contiguous territory, and a relatively centralized administration on the heels of a ruthless competition among regional lords reduced the number of autonomous regional kingdoms from 25 in 1800 to 4 in 1900.

A tributary state must undergo dual transitions to a modern national state: from a far-flung loose **empire state** ruling over myriad nationalities to an integrated national state, and from a tributary-military state that relies on indirectly collected tributes to finance its wars to a bureaucratically mobilized revenue base. That is, the tributary-military state is compelled to employ decentralized and inefficient strategies for capturing peasant and merchant surpluses (through title-holders, revenue farmers, punitive expeditions, and the like) rather than to build up taxable productive capacity within a well-defined core territory, and fiscalizing it moderately in exchange for providing security and basic public services.

The spread of Islam into the interior regions of the Horn of Africa in the second millennium gave rise to several Muslim principalities thereby endangering reliable access to the ports along the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden. Just as importantly, the incessant raids on nearby non-Muslim communities (mostly Agew, Oromo, and Sudanic) culminated in an Ottoman-sponsored occupation of the Christian state in the early 1500s (Fig. 3.1). The classic but temporary triumph of lowlander-Muslim over highlander-Christian, of nomads over farmers, turned out to be short-lived but with long-lasting adverse consequences for both communities.

The Oromo penetration of the historic provinces subsequently shaped the Gondarine state in at least three important respects. It suspended Pax Ethiopica until 1900 by bifurcating the Abyssinian provinces into the Gondarine and later the Shewan ruling houses. In due course, the culturally assimilated Oromo ruling houses emerged in the districts, most notably the Mammadoch of central districts of Wollo and the Yeju of northeast the province of Wollo, which paved the way for a protracted civil war that lasted nearly a century (1770–1855). Other Oromo clans mastered the art of statecraft and co-founded a number of kingdoms with the conquered Omotic, Nilotic, and Sidama peoples in the south-western highlands (Abir 1968; Hassen 1990; 2017). We will explore the political significance of these counterfactual developments in the next chapter.

The traditionally roving Christian emperors moved to the northwest periphery and established a permanent capital in the Gondar region toward the end of the sixteenth century. The favored technique of territorial expansion was the establishment of military colonies which served as core populations from which Aksumite high culture, a Semitic language, and Christianity spread. The military colonies as well

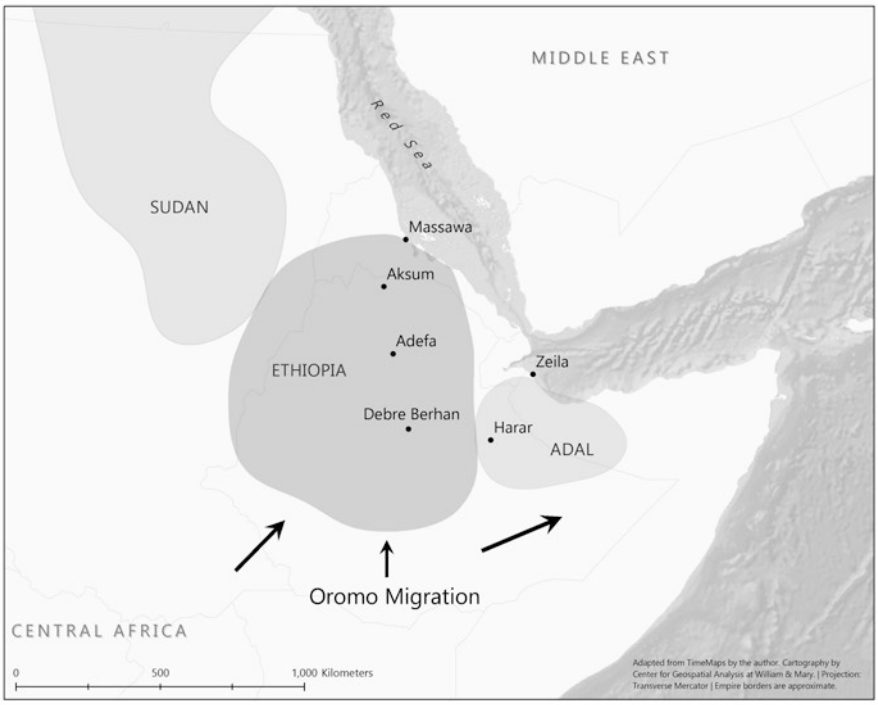

Fig. 3.1 Solomonic Ethiopia, c. 1600

as monasteries in the frontier districts eventually created pockets of Semitic-speaking groups such as the Argobba, Gafat, Gurage, and Harari (Fig. 3.1).

In the end, Gondar (especially under Sarsa Dengel, Fasiladas, and Iyasu II) managed to centralize political power by reforming the military and administrative system against the resistance of the regional nobility and the aristocracy. It also resumed the project of regaining lost territories and even territorial expansion, and re-invigorated the assimilation of the Oromo and the Muslims.

Other recurring forms of Gondar's institutional heritage include the social banditry of peasants and disgruntled nobles which frustrated the emergence of a durable hegemony of the state elites to transform a tributary state into a commercial or an industrial state. Lack of technological dynamism (wide stirrup over toe stirrup, and fixed capitals over roving tent encampments) is, as Wolde Aregay (1984) rightly argues, attributable less to lack of knowledge due to isolation than to an institutional failure to fully exploit what is already known.

The underlying impediments were the inability to provide security of income from ownership of land, trade, and control over office. As he puts it (Wolde Aregay 1984: 143): "In the final analysis, therefore, Ethiopian society was one where emperors, noblemen, soldiers, peasants, and traders were all insecure, a society where even the law of the jungle would seem fair and where individualism and the creativeness which comes from it never took root".

But this somewhat harsh indictment still begs the questions of why and how. We will try to demonstrate why the combination of a landed peasanty, a plow-based

agrarian system, a variegated agro-climatic endowment, and encirclement by Islamic (and later European) empires all contributed to the attenuation of the indigenous impulses for a robust state formation in Ethiopia. Citizen deference to stat authority, more out of respect than fear, has historically been high in Ethiopia—a hallmark of a civilized society.

The Gondarine Crown, not unlike its Afroasian peers, was forced to cede much of its revenue over-rights to titled officeholders who kept much of the indeterminate tribute in exchange for service. The Crown relied on a mix of imperial troops and the militia of regional lords (supplemented by self-provisioned peasant militia) to fight major wars. It also had to live within the limits of an Ottoman-enforced isolation from international commerce.

The flagbearers of GS were state-elites had mixed genealogies through political marriages at the top and considerable intermixing among the Agew, the Tigre, the Amara, and northern Oromo clans. Despite the paucity of urban centers, the establishment of a fixed imperial capital (since Axum and Roha) indicates the attainment a sufficient fiscal base which eventually proved inadequate as the emperors progressively lost the capacity to enforce their income rights from a distant capital.

The bedrock of shared political culture and a unifying ideology had contradictory consequences. They made the Crown the target of competition by the ambitious regardless of ethnicity or geographic origin while stemming, albeit in a limited way, mutually destructive violence over tribute and imperial succession.

Though enfeebled by domestic extractive contests and the imperatives of external defense, the Gondarine state left many notable legacies which served as a springboard for a modern territorial state. It rebuilt the Christian state following the defeat of the Muslims by 1570. GS absorbed the first onslaught from the lightening mass radiation of the mobile Oromo, albeit by abandoning much of Wollo and Shewa. It contended with a Jesuit attempt to make Catholicism the state religion and the self-inflicted disarray within the Orthodox Church vaingloriously wallowing in esoteric theological disputes around Christology.

The tributary-military model that GS tried to perfect in the subsequent 250 years turned out to be inferior to the European fiscal-military or absolutist-military models. The latter progressively managed to develop a centralized civil service, a professional army, and a secure tax base anchored in a growing economic base. GS instead succumbed to internecine strife during 1770–1855 by which time Western Europe had mounted an industrialization drive and Japan and Russia were about to join.

GS, in whose heydays ruled over 2.3–3.0 million people, lost effective control of the Red Sea to the Ottomans (Table 3.2). It then became remarkably insulated from momentous global developments. What then were the political, ideological, and economic foundations of an inward-looking GS?

3.2.1 Competition for Officeholding

GS provided an early model of state governance comprising three competing centers of political power (Table 3.3). The primary agent of political power was the nobility coalescing around the Imperial Court (*Gibbi*) with its semi-religious

Table 3.2 The Population of medieval and modern Ethiopia, 1000–2015

Year	Population (in millions)	Notable developments
1000	1.00	Zagwe Dynasty: consolidation of Axumite heritage, and southward and westward march of Christianity; Penetration of Islam from two fronts: Dahlak Island and Zeila
1500	2.00	Height of the Neo-Solomonic Dynasty; the great plague; treaty of Westphalia; the commercial revolution and the age of discovery
1600	2.25	Post-Jihad consolidation of diminished empire; Oromo penetration of core provinces
1700	2.50	Height of the Gondarine period
1820	3.15	Age of warring princes; the industrial revolution in Europe
2000	68.00	Ethio-Eritrean war
2015	100.00	Popular uprisings commence in the regional states of Amhara and Oromia against EPRF's dictatorial rule

Sources: OECD, The World Economy (Maddison databases). Table 6.1. http://theworldeconomy.org/statistics.htm. World Bank, *World Development Indicators 2017*

Table 3.3 Fiscal, military, and administrative systems of Gondar and its successors

Attribute of the modern state	Gondarine, c. 1570–1770	Shewan, 1889–1974	Revolutionary. 1975–2015
Centralization of revenue collection	• No bureaucracy • Crown lands, trade taxes and tributes • Fiscal state	• Progressively centralizing • Crown lands, and nontax revenues	• Hyper-centralization • Hyper-nationalization of property
Centralized, professional Army	• Palace troops • Militia of regional lords • Peasant militia	• Palace guards • State military • Militia of regional lords	• Professional, ethnicized military • Regional and local police forces
Domestic legitimacy	• Common culture • Public goods • Patronage (esp. state offices, or *shumet*)	• Cultural diversity • Public goods • Patronage (especialy, *shumet*)	• Cultural diversity • Public goods provision • Patronage to party loyalists
External legitimacy	• Deterrence • Adeptness in forming alliances	• Deterrence • Colonial, League & U.N. system	• Deterrence • U.N. system of sovereignty
State-society balance	• Weak state • Strong society	• Moderate state • Weakening society	• Strong state • Weakened society

Source: Author

mystique about a God-anointed emperor exercising personalized power over the most important decisions. The second group comprised the hereditary provincial kings (*negus*), chiefs, and aristocrats with local political base and powerful military governors (at the rank of *Ras* and *Dejazmatch*). The third group consisted of the influential courtiers by virtue of their loyalty as *protégés*, however modest their social backgrounds might have been.

These state elites occupied ever-contested positions that made martial skills the most valuable assets for attaining and retaining power. The hereditary provincial

kings and lords, being a de facto military aristocracy, enjoyed an uneasy autonomy from the king of kings (the *Neguse-Negest*) which made religion and region important sources of political identification. Control over military assets was thus pivotal for challenging higher authority, enforcing tributary payments on the peasantry, and raiding the periphery for booty and expanded tributary clients. This system persisted until World War II and, as Perham puts it rather vividly (Perham 1969: 163), "It might almost be said that every large-scale campaign in Ethiopia had some of the features of a civil war."

The arms race could be broadly construed to include control over well-trained central troops, the militia under the control of the nobility, and conscripted smallholder. The citizen militia participated with its own weapons and provisions—mobilizable in times of conflict which often lasted 1 or 2 months. Unlike many of its European counterparts of the same period, Gondarine high offices were not secure enough to be sold for cash to the highest bidder. Nor was there a class of urban-based, rich financiers to debt-finance wars.

Central authority waxed and waned as the emperors tried to gain leverage over the nobility, often reduced to the status of ordinary soldiers of fortune, by employing several stratagems. The most reliable institution involved, as noted earlier, nurturing a meritocratic system for raising loyal servants hailing from distant districts or modest backgrounds. There is nothing novel in this practice which dates from at least the Zagwe dynasty. Going into service was also an important channel for the upward mobility of ambitious individuals of humble origin in Europe and Eurasia.

Another strategy was to decouple control (through ownership or overrights to tribute) from appointive office-holding by making the latter non-hereditary. This way, powerful members of the aristocracy (***mekwanint***) and the nobility (*mesafint*) are turned into appointed state officials (*shumamint*) who can be shifted at will from office to office (promotion-demotion or *shum-shir*) or region to region to prevent them from cementing powerful political bases. The third was strategic political marriages and concubinage to cultivate wide-ranging alliances which effectively served as a deterrent to the buildup of strong lineages.[3]

It is, therefore, essential to have a good understanding of Ethiopia's land institutions since they have underpinned political power in the country from time immemorial. Ethiopia, in fact, provides a fascinating model of a tributary-military state which ceded authority over uncentralizable and hence indeterminate state revenue base to titled office-holders in exchange for state service (Abegaz 2005).

[3] The longstanding practice transcended not just ethnicity but also religion. When Ahmad Gragn entered Hadya in the 1520s, the number one complaint made to him was the humiliation involved in having to deliver an annual tribute of Muslim brides and concubines to the Christian Court. In later periods, the wives of some of the most fanatical Christian emperors (notably Tewodros II and Yohannes IV) came from Muslim or nominally Christian families. More tellingly, many Christian mothers of the imams of the Mammadoch clan of Wollo groomed their sons for leadership by sending them to church schools (see Box 4.1). Mohamed Ali was a devout imam as the last head of the Mammadoch and a devout builder of churches as Ras Mikael. The powerful Yeju families of the nineteenth-century Wollo are so ethnically and religiously mixed (Ras Ali the Great and Ras Ali II, both of whom reigned in Gondar and built Debre Tabor, come to mind) that it becomes absurd to try to dichotomize their malleable identity in mutually exclusive Christian or Muslim, and Amara or Oromo terms (Ahmed 2000; Ahmad 2003).

3.2.2 The Fiscal Base of the Gondarine State

The economic foundations of the tributary-military GS were the ***gebbar***[4] system which was anchored in a plow-based mixed or *enset*-based farming in the highlands, and taxes and augmented by fees from domestic long-distance and external trade involving mining products, spices, forest products, and slaves from the borderlands. The Ethiopian peasantry was largely landed (***ristegna***) which meant that it enjoyed autonomy in the production sphere, practiced a non-primogenitorial system of inheritance that encouraged land fragmentation but was egalitarian, and endured much uncertainty over control of output distribution between producer and tributor.

Where land is abundant and cultivators scarce, especially where the capacity exists to resist coercion from a ruling class, neither serfdom nor tenancy can prevail. Unable to be a landlord class by monopolizing access to land, the state elite instead became an overlord class dependent on overrights to land-based tax and tribute. The posture of the historic Ethiopian state toward the peasantry was therefore unavoidably extractive.

Donald Crummey (1980), after talking of Abyssinian feudalism, changed his mind as encapsulated in the following observation (Crummey 2000:2):

> Though they lived their lives within the framework of the millennial Ethiopian state, in one important respect Ethiopia's farmers were autonomous of it and their lords… Ethiopian noble families did amass something resembling the feudal estates of European and Japanese tradition… but never directed a manorial economy… nor did the country's great churches and endowed monasteries.[5]

3.2.3 Land Institutions 1: The Rist Sireet

The confusion about the land institutions of Ethiopia is understandable in the light of the enormous variations emanating from the ever-changing balance of power between producer and appropriator at the local level, the myriad mechanisms for

[4] The *gebbar* institution in its narrow form emerged in Shewa and Wollo, the Amhara provinces where the Oromo made significant inroads, in the latter part of the Gondarine period in these. The agrarian system was later extended in a modified and harsher form to the southern provinces. The concept of *gebbar* system is often misunderstood. In its generic meaning, *gebbar* meant a landed payer of obligatory state fees, taxes, and services. So, technically, all rist-holders are *gebbar* (who pay *gult*, tithe, and perform service--*gibir*) to the Emperor (the fictive owner of all land) or his agents. In its narrow meaning, it refers to cultivators of land in militarily administered districts who must meet both customary tribute obligations as well as extra-ordinary labor obligations until the administrative system was normalized. In both senses, being a tenant or abandoning *rist* land frees one of all the obligations (such as being obligated to significant corvee or even being bonded) which is tied to the land. Only in labor-scarce regions and in the initial stages of conquest (since soldiers and administrators cannot cultivate government-granted, in lieu of salary or *maderya*, lands), do we observe people being compelled to cultivate the land and hand the bulk of the produce to the soldiers (*neftegna*). In this sense, the *gebbar* is neither a *chisegna* (renter) or a serf (which, in addition to being tied to the land, has no personal freedom).

[5] After reading my paper (Abegaz 2005), which argues against the feudal thesis and in favor of the tributary thesis, Donald Crummey wrote me a long email noting that he is now convinced that the tributary interpretation of Ethiopian agrarianism captures the Ethiopian system rather well.

matching of income rights, and the plethora of state functions to which they are dedicated. For our purposes here, it will suffice to focus on the big picture and on the most recurrent forms of land tenure appropriate for a society where control over the bundling of land and labor is the foundation of wealth and political power.

Land tenure (*yemeret sireet*) defines the producer-appropriator relationship between the landowner and the socially-sanctioned residual claimant (usually the producer or the entire community). The property right in land often comes in circumscribed forms, including the right to income (from own cultivation or leasehold), the right of use (usufruct), the right of transfer (by temporary gift or an encumbered mortgage), and the right of alienation by gift or sale.

Tribute or *gibir*[6] is an economic as well as a political relationship among a hierarchy of classes or estates—the state elite (*bete-mengist*), the Church elite (*bete kahnat*), and the tribute-paying clans or polities (*bete-seb* or *bihere-seb*). Internal tributarism is an institution that defines the relations between the endogamous soldier-patrician-priestly overlords and the producer-plebian peasant, artisanal, or mercantile classes of the core provinces. This mode of administration of the income and service rights of the state is the defining feature of the much-maligned g*ebbar s*ystem.

The mode and intensity of extraction of surplus, in the form of tribute rather than in the form of fixed taxes and fees, differed among the three historically distinct geographies of power. In the old core provinces of the Gondarine state (Eritrea, Tigray, Begemdir, Simien, Wolqait, Amhara, Wag-Shum, and Gojam), the polity was defined by a securely landed peasantry (*ristegna*), a titled aristocracy, and a well-endowed state-church. In the core regions of what later became the greater Shewan state (Amhara, Wollo, Yeju, and modern Shewa), a mixture of *rist*, church and monastery fief endowments, crown lands, and fiefs of imperial soldier-administrators coexisted.

The endemic nature of large-scale violence is encapsulated in Table 3.4. As they say, uneasy lies the head that wears the Crown.

The tributary provinces in the rest of the south, the east and the west existed under a system of indirect rule conditional on annual tribute payments and militia service to the imperial court. This was also the norm in relations with tributary polities in the periphery of the borderless empire. It effectively defined the arm's-length but a hierarchical relationship between the Court in Gondar and several autonomous, but not foreign, kingdoms and chiefdoms under the orbit of its authority and culture area. Rebellious provinces in Greater Ethiopia were routinely subjected to punitive dispossession of land and military administration as a harsh instrument of deterrence (Levine 2000; Pankhurst 2012).

[6] For our purposes here, "tribute" is construed as a regular and variable form of payment obligation of a subject (or a tributary) to an agent (or a tributor) of the state. It has the following attributes: the actual amount is not fixed (except for the tithe) although customary levels may exist; obligations may take several forms (payments in cash or kind, customary gifts, and military and non-military service, and the tributary (*gebbar*) may be an individual of any political rank, an organization, or a self-governing dependency. A predictably known or fixed tax obligation (with a preset tax base and tax rate) is not a tribute payment. So, the tithe (regardless of on whom the incidence falls) and various transaction fees for public service are not tribute either. It is the contestable and negotiable nature of the non-fixed ex-post tribute payment which makes it both inevitable in the early stages of state formation and inherently indeterminate and, hence, uncertain.

Table 3.4 Ethiopia: major external and civil wars fought, circa 1600–2000

Emperor/head	Period	External Wars	Internal Wars	Comments
GS 1. Sarsa-Dengel	1563–1597	• Ottoman occupy port of Massawa (D)	• Recovery from super- jihad • Oromos overran Shewa, Enarya, Bale, Dawaro, Damot and Shewa	• Imperial guard established • Garrisons in the Shewa-Enarya moved to North
GS 2. Susenyos	1607–1632	• Attacks from the Fung of Sennar (V)	• Incorporation of Oromo warlords into the nobility	• Conversion to Catholicism • Assimilation of Oromo
GS 3. Fasiladas	1632–1667	• No major external threat	• Doctrinal wars in response to Catholicism • Isolation of key tributaries	• Gondar as imperial capital • Restoration of Church • Permanent capital, 1635
GS 4. Iyasu I	1682–1706	• No major external threat	• Emergence of Gibe Oromo kingdoms over the Enarya and Keffa tributaries	• Powerful praetorian guards • Rasses, Gibe-Keffa kings, Wollo-Yeju sheiks, Shewa
GS 5. Bekaffa	1721–1730	• No major external threat	• Solomonic nobility loses crown largely to assimilated northern Oromo elites	• Stabilized then disintegrated • Oromo elite assimilation: Qwara, Wollo, and Yeju
TR 1. Zemene Mesafint (Warlordism)	1769–1855	• Egypt, as successor of Ottomans, occupies port of Massawa (D)	• Era of warring warlords for control of the Crown Islam spreads in highlands	• Christology: Hulet Lidet (Tigray-Gojam) vs. Sost Lidet (Gondar-Shewa) • Northern trade-route decline
TR 2. Shewan Kingdom (Sahle Sellasie)	1813–1889	• Egypt grabs Harrar (V)	• Consolidation of Greater Shewa with a series of skirmishes and alliances	• Amhara-Oromo melding • Southward expansion • New trade routes
TR 3. Kingdoms: Oromo, Keffa, Harrar, Janjaro, & Wolayta	1830–1897	• Egypt occupies Harrar Emirate (D) • Italy at Adwa (V) • Scramble for Africa (V)	• Menelik's expansion to fulfill *Ethiopia irrendenta* • Conflicts among warlords and with Menelik	• Autonomous kingdoms and sheikdoms either retained autonomy with tribute or became provinces
TR 4. Tewodros II	1855–1868	• British expeditiary mission to Meqdella (D)	• Expeditions to Tigray, Wollo, Shewa and Gojam seeking ruler submission	• Reunification of Abyssinia by defeating the lords of the Gondarine provinces

(continued)

Table 3.4 (continued)

Emperor/head	Period	External Wars	Internal Wars	Comments
TR 5. Yohannes IV	1875–1889	• Mahdist invasion (V) • Italians at Dogali (V)	• Punitive expeditions to Shewa and Gojam	• Muslims as fifth column • Defending intl. borders
SS 1. Menelik II	1889–1913	• Italy at Adwa (V) • Ethio-Somali 1 (V)	• Greater Ethiopia via (re) incorporation: Wollega, Keffa, Sidamo, Bale, Arsi, Harrar, Ogaden. and Awssa	• Modernizer in Shewa • Autonomy for tributaries • Federation with Eritrea • Ethiopia's borders recognized
SS 2. Haile Selassie I	1930–1974	• Italy occupies (D) • Italy expelled (V) • Ethio-Somali 2 (V)	• Woyane rebellion • Regional insurgencies • Revolution	• Modernizer • Skillful foreign alliances • Reintegration of Eritrea
RS 1. Derg	1974–1991	• Ethio-Somali 3 (V)	• Eritrea & Tigrean rebellion	• Nationalizations • Military dictatorship
RS 2. EPRDF	1991–	• Ethio-Eritrean war (V) • Ethio-Somali 4 (V)	• Ogaden insurgency • Ethnic clashes	• Ethnic-based governance • Anti- "Shewan-Amara State"

Sources and Notes: Compiled by author from various sources. See Appendix 3.1 for details
Outcome: *V* =victory for Ethiopia, *D*=defeat for Ethiopia
State type: *G*=Gondarine (GS), *S*=Shewan (SS), *R*=Revolutionary (RS), *TR*=Transitional period

For our purposes here, we need only focus on six dominant bundles of land rights, each with a well-defined political role. *Rist* (kinship-based), Private freehold (individual), Corporate (tribal or religious institutions), *Mengist* (Crown or State), and *Gult* (income overright). The first two are non-state rights while the latter two fall in the sphere of state administration.

Rist (patrimony) is a circumscribed freehold which is shared more or less equally by all kin who can trace their bloodline to the estate-founding ancestor (*abbat*). *Rist* land is owned by families rather than individuals, and hence heritable only within the extended family. In this sense, *rist* is both private and weakly communal. The land is privately but corporately owned (but individually farmed) by all eligible members of the extended family. While residence-based *rist* prevailed in highland Eritrea, this form of ownership should not be confused with customary, communal tenure (where the locus decision-making is outside the family) that defines lowland Ethiopia and much of Sub-Saharan Africa until very recently.

The ancestor may have acquired initial ownership by a state-sanctioned colonization of state-claimed land (*aqgni abbat*) or by a state grant of dispossessed land (*tiklegna abbat*) in exchange for military-related service. Founder-legitimized *rist-land* is customarily inalienable for any reason other than state crimes or refusal to fulfill tax, tribute, or militia obligations tied to the land itself. These obligations are

generally met jointly by the corporate descent group through a chosen leader of the kinship group known as the *Aleqa.*[7] Interestingly, *rist* inheritance did not exclude daughters (at least in the Amhara heartland); and the right to sell one's share was conditional only on the right of first refusal by members of the descent group (Bekele 1995; Hoben 1973; Pankhurst 2014).

Wherever primogeniture existed, as in much of Europe, the inheritance system's favoring of a controlling-owner prevented fragmentation thereby expanding the scope (scale economies, access to credit, and the like) for enhancing its productivity and market connectivity (Kuran 2001). This was so because inheritance is limited to close family members and the widespread adoption of primogeniture broke down loyalties to clan, tribe, or caste. Primogeniture is widely credited for promoting accumulation, and for reinforcing the sense of belonging to a nation-state (Maddison 2007: 314; Goody 1971).

Ethiopian egalitarianism, while promoting individualism, preempted the emergence of a manorial economy by empowering the peasantry in terms of access to land and control over production while denying the producers full control over their output (Abegaz 2005). To see this, we need to dig a little deeper.

One central feature of the canonical Ethiopian system is that the tithe and the tribute obligations were *tied to the land* rather than to the people owning or working the land. These obligations typically also included payments in cash or kind (usually a quarter of the harvest, or payment in the form of goods such as gold, salt bars, honey, or household articles), and variable additional obligations (gifts, or labor) to the local governor. Some or all of these obligations may be waived in exchange for sending a family member on extended military campaigns, supplying provisions for billeted troops, or providing corvée for major public projects. Because of a long agency chain and informational asymmetry, the principal (the Emperor) typically faced a low pass-through of revenue from the agents. Officials who expected to be frequently rotated or see the end of military-rule also had a strong incentive to engage in predatory behavior with guile.

Ye-Mengist land was under the control of the Crown to cover the administrative, military, and retainer expenses of the Court and its regional officers. This was the norm until the Emperor's personal property began to be separated from that of the State, circa 1900. Cultivated by unpaid labor (corvée) or by sharecroppers, proceeds from state lands were designated for the upkeep of palace troops and retainers, not to mention the lavish banquets (also aptly called *gibir*). In addition to meeting the needs of the central palace, royal farmlands located in the periphery were granted to

[7] The parallel with the land institutions of the Byzantine Empire is rather striking. Byzantium's agricultural manpower was predominantly smallholder cultivators and herders who were collectively liable for tax or tribute payments. The basic unit of fiscal administration, the village, required a pooled payment to the state conveyed by an appointed head of the family clan. Despite the superior bureaucratic capacity of Byzantium, this system also facilitated conscription of peasant militia (Ashburner 1912; Gorecki 1981). The civil code and the church cannon of *Fetha Negest* (Law of Kings), Ethiopia's equivalent of the Magna Carta of the sixteenth century, was inspired by the Byzantine system (Tzadua and Strauss 2009).

members of the royalty and the military aristocracy as *rist.* Instead of being managed as feudal estates, these big landholdings were farmed out to smallholder tenants who employed inefficient traditional farming techniques.

There, in fact, were two kinds of tenants managing the family estates of big men in historic Ethiopia. One was the ***chisegna,*** a sharecropping or rental tenant who resided on a landlord's else's land and typically paid one-fourth to one-third of the produce, net of the tithe. The *chisegna* was different from the *temaj,* a resident plowman, who had gone into service to tend a rich man's estate. Non-resident tenants were also contracted for specific tasks such as tilling (*temaj or zega*) or cattle-rearing (Bekele 1995; Tegene 2009).

These arrangements are often, but must not be, confused with feudal estates since some two-thirds of the Ethiopian peasantry was landed. Unlike most of its counterparts in Egypt, the Sudan or the Euro-Asian empires, Ethiopian peasants also enjoyed a remarkable degree of freedom which included formal equality before the law, few sumptuary or inter-class marriage codes, and an opportunity for social mobility by signing up for the soldiery, the priesthood, or commerce (Crummey 2000; 2005; Spaulding and Kapteijns 2002). And yet, peasants under this seemingly permissive agrarian regime nonetheless remained pauperized economically a puzzle we are striving to elucidate, if not solve.

Whenever the Emperor is strong, the Crown enjoyed enormous authority over land as well as over its subject producers and intermediary appropriators. Since the customary rule of law was at times tenuous, landholders can lose their property rights at the whim of an upstart or when a territory changes hands because of the seemingly never-ending jurisdictional and territorial contests.[8]

Corporate land was the property of arguably the only perpetual corporations besides the State—Church and Mosque. Tribal lands under customary tenure may also be included in this category. Royal churches and large parishes (***Debr***) were especially well endowed with inalienable land charters which accounted for as

[8] Some examples will suffice to make the point. Ras Gugsa Mersha of Yeju, after usurping the Crown in Gondar from 1799 to 1825, claimed all land in the country would be managed as crown property. With unprecedented hubris, he did manage to temporarily dispossess the gentry and the well-endowed churches upon which the losers proceeded to ravage the countryside as soldiers of fortune. A generation later, Emperor Tewodros also introduced an unsuccessful land reform program and proceeded to redistribute church lands and transfer the landholdings of the nobility to the Crown. In 1857, an aggrieved priest in Shewa boldly castigated Tewodros II to restore church lands and resume of the age-old practice of roving imperial tent cities in order to spread the burden of the large court on localities (Pankhurst 2012: 142): "Remain 4 months in Gondar, and eat up Armachaho, Segade, Wolqayt, and Tigre, then establish yourself for another 4 months at Aringo and eat up Begamder, Lasta, Yeju, Warra Himano, Wallo and Shoa, and then make your residence at Yebaba to eat up Macha, Agaw, Damot and Gojam as was done in the past." Emperor Menelik II also threatened *rist-holders* in Tigray and Wollo with expropriation should treasonous activities continue (implemented in the Islamic belt of central Wollo). A good deal of land in Shewa was expropriated by the Crown under various pretexts which explains why post-Gondarine Wollo and Shewa constituted intermediate cases between the old north and the new south. Finally, the Italians abolished the kin-based rist system in favor of residence-based village tenure in the highland districts of Eritrea after 1880 to obtain land for Italian settlers and to undermine resistance to colonialism by the *ristegna* gentry.

much as one-quarter of the cultivable land (Crummey 2000; Pankhurst 2014). Often, the church-owned land was distributed to priests and deacons on an inheritable basis on the condition that the holder carries out the specified church service.

Again, the service obligations were tied to the land which meant that lay people often cultivate church lands for generations, and even transfer them by sale (Tegene 2009). The same principle applied to ***waqf*** lands except that their use was limited to permanent settlements—most notably, in Adal and Awssa, Hadiya, Fatagar, Dawro, Harrar, Beni Shangul, and Jimma.

3.2.4 Land Institutions 2: The Gult Sireet-Sir'at

Gult (fief),[9] in narrow economic terms, is an income overright to a portion of the tribute. It is transferred by the state to its appointees or ecclesiastical supporters. *Gult* rights were rarely inheritable. The holder was entitled to a share of the production, but the land belonged either to the *ristegna* or to the state. Where *gult* rights became inheritable with the office, the *gultegna* often became *ristegna* on state land or on ristland alienated from former owners who were fairly (by not paying taxes or performing customary services) or unfairly.

Broadly construed, *gult* shaped the extra-economic power relations between the rulers and the ruled. Since the state lacked the bureaucratic capacity to assess income levels, collect the taxes and pay its functionaries, the Crown was compelled to transfer its income rights conditional on continued service. *Gult*-based compensation was differentiated according to the needs of local administration, the resistance of the producers, and the rank of the grantee.[10]

The bulk of *gult* benefices from the emperors (or the kings as well as the lesser aristocracy) went to perpetual corporations (churches and monasteries). Individual members of the aristocracy benefitted from this gimmick, much like the case of the Islamic *Waqf,* by assuming inheritable responsibility for the administration of the ecclesiastical *gult* grants.

This trusteeship arrangement benefitted holders of *aleqnet* (trusteeship) in at least three respects. First, by endowing land to a respected institution such as a church or a monastery, land-rich households could shield a portion of their large landholdings from confiscation by capricious rulers. As guardians of all church (*rim* and *semon*) lands,

[9] Fief is generically an income right (usually from the heritable revenue-producing property) granted by a landlord or his/her agents in return for symbolic allegiance or actual service whose cessation leads to the land (or offices and tax farms) to revert to the patron. Under common law, "fee simple" is the ownership of real property that subject to property tax and credit obligations while "fee tail" is hereditary, non-transferable ownership of real property. The Ethiopian *rist* fits the fee tail form of ownership while g*ult* is widely understood as a fief. When a gult-linked office is inheritable, it was called *riste-gult*.

[10] It is interesting to note that in successful civilizational states, the civilian bureaucracy needed to effectively manage an empire was substantial. Medieval France, for example, had a royal administrative corps numbered 80,000 in 1665 (Fukuyama 2012: 329).

they are in a good position to siphon off a good portion of the income leaving just enough to underwrite basic religious services. Furthermore, *aleqnet* allowed the nobility to hire agents to perform the designated religious services while keeping the extra income and bequeathing the office to their children (Crummey 2000). Itege Taitu and Negist Zewditu were two savvy manipulators of *aleqnet.*

Ethiopian tributarism was too shallow to support cities, big castles, or perpetual estates. The Crown and the nobility supplemented *gult* income from their own family's *rist* estates and predation on weaker principalities. And yet, most gult-holders were little more than rich peasants. The emperor derived income from several sources, including his own estates to supply the Court (such as (mad-bet and *hudad* lands), and collections from provincial governors and autonomous tributaries (tributes in kind, taxes, customs duties, and fees). Over time, tribute in kind was only incompletely converted into taxes, payable in cash or gold.

Trade was controlled by Muslim or foreign resident merchants who enjoyed the protection of the political elite. Long-distance trade connected scattered market centers and garrison towns going north-south from the Shewa to Eritrea, and east-west to the sea outlets controlled by the Ottomans. Post-Axum Ethiopia never became a great trading country. It was instead reduced to exalting the warrior and the priest instead. Poor communications, constant predation on the producer class and high transport costs all made exports uncompetitive.

The *Fetha Negest* (the cannon Law of Kings) provided some pre-Enlightenment guidelines about the rights of subjects, contractors (Box 3.1), and property owners (Jembere 2000). The power of the Emperor was only theoretically absolute. Lacking the requisite fiscal base to underwrite a central bureaucracy and a salaried army, emperors had to make concessions to the regional warlords and the peasantry to ensure responsiveness to requests for levies.

This necessarily meant that the mode of surplus extraction was too indirect for higher-ups to involve themselves in promoting innovation. Success in war was key for GS domestically as well as externally. As one can see in Table 3.4, incessant wars made and then unmade the beleaguered Ethiopian state.

3.2.5 A Game-Theoretic Perspective on Tributary Statism

Bargaining power and control rights over land involve a two-way process which frustrates a clear identification of the direction of causality. One instructive way of identifying the set of feasible politico-economic equilibria in the Gondarine society would be to couch the governance problem in terms of strategic behavior. In game theory, rules that facilitate commitments and cooperation are considered efficient (World Bank 2017). Where rulers depend on assets controlled by dispersed landholder such the *ristegna*, overlords rationally offer generous concessions about extraction rates and might even extend the franchise as in the case of the U.S.A. and Canada (Acemoglu and Johnson 2006).

Box 3.1 Fetha Negest and Kibre Negest

The Fetha Negest (Law of the Kings) is a legal code compiled around 1240 from various Byzantine, Syro-Roman, and Coptic codes. The first written Ethiopian canonical laws were enacted by the fanatically religious scholar-king, Zara Yaqob, as *Fewse Menfesawi* (lit. spiritual redemption). A dissatisfied Emperor Zara Yaqob is said to have commissioned the Geez translation the *Fetha Negest* which was ready in 1450 (Jembere 2000). The *Fetha Negest* became the supreme ecclesiastical and secular law of the land a century later under Emperor Sarsa Dengel. It also inspired the two imperial constitutions of 1930 and 1955 granted by Emperor Haile Selassie I.

The first part of Fetha Negest deals with cannon law covering such ecclesiastic affairs as the structure of the Church hierarchy and the sacraments. The second part deals with civil law such as family law, debt, and civil administration.

The Kibre Negest (Glory of the Kings) is a compilation of ideas from biblical and secondary sources. It is centered on an account of the genealogical origins of Ethiopian emperors who invoked a Solomonic pedigree in their dynastic struggles with the (presumably non-Semitic) Zagwe emperors.

The Kibre Negest contains an embellished account of how the legendary Queen of Sheba (apparently confused with the Queen Makeda of Ethiopia) who visited King Solomon, begot a son (Menelik I) who managed to bring the Ark of the Covenant to Ethiopia after the great Jewish Temple was destroyed. Menelik I then became the found of the Solomonic Dynasty.

Ironically, the preeminent symbol of Judaism, The Ark of the Covenant (a tablet containing the Ten Commandments of Moses), has subsequently become a symbol of Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity. The Church teaches that the Ark reaffirms that Ethiopians, as the most faithful Christians of all, replaced the unbeliever (of the New Testament) Jews as the "new chosen people." Levine (2011: 314) rightly reminds us of the antiquity of the country's enviable sense of nationhood: "One remarkable feature of this epic is its consistent reference to Ethiopia as a sovereign, inclusive polity, ignoring the numerous ethnic divides within historic Ethiopia." Interestingly, communities are named by their region of residence rather than by linguistic or other ethnic markers.

The relevant consideration here is to contain potential violence that induces existential angst by making the right concessions to aspiring challengers. A simple game-theoretic model makes the point. The model has rules that define the incentives and the constraints which are chosen carefully to capture the probable alignment of major political actors.

Consider, for example, a non-cooperative game of chicken between two contending parties for power, the Emperor as the principal and the titled provincial rulers as agents (Olson 2000; Zhou 2011). Let us also assume, not too unrealistically,

Table 3.5 A mixed game with nobility constantly testing the limits of imperial provocation

KING		
EMPEROR:	Aggressive	Submissive
Defensive	A x, 2	B 2, 1
Punitive	C −1, −2	D 1, −1

Source and Notes: Author
Max-Min: King—Submissive; Emperor—Defensive if $x > -1$, Punitive if $x < -1$. King has a "dominant" strategy (submission) but Emperor does not: B (normally) or D (bad times)

that self-enforcing contracts of mutual consent are near impossible under tributary relations precisely because the central state lacks impartial and effective mechanisms for enforcing the rules of the game.

Agents understandably seek to accumulate wealth to cover the cost of provisioning and equipping an army or militia to defend existing authority or to mount a bid for more power. The Emperor, as the king of kings, seeks deference from appointed or hereditary officials by employing the right mix of positive and negative incentives.

Let us also make the following simplifying assumptions without sacrificing relevance. All players are individually rational; the payoffs are expected values; players pursue a tit-for-tat strategy in a repeated game since a track record of cooperation is rewarded and a pattern of noncooperation is likewise punished, and commitments which make threats credible serve as an effective deterrence against renegades.

Two definitions are in order. A *dominant strategy* is a stable outcome of a political game in which each participant is doing the best that can regardless of what competitors are doing. A *Nash equilibrium* is a set of stable actions given what other players are doing, i.e., each player is doing the best it can for a presumed set of actions of its opponents. This means dominant strategies are special cases of Nash equilibria.

A game with specific net payoffs is as shown in Table 3.5. The illustrative payoffs capture each of the four common situations in which Gondarine patrons and their clients often found themselves. Several observations can be made. First, B is not a Nash equilibrium because the strategy of challenge has a higher payoff if the emperor happens to be conciliatory. If challengers limit their probing for any weakness of the emperor below the threshold that would trigger a punitive expedition, the payoff for the emperor of pursuing tolerance becomes a probabilistic outcome (x) rather than a constant. Second, if $x > -1$, then the optimal strategy for the emperor to deal with small provocation is to be conciliatory. If, on the other hand, $x < -1$, then the Emperor is impelled to take a punitive measure. An arms race with shifting coalitions is likely to prevail with uncertain outcomes. Third, strategic cycles in decision sets may also result as contingent behavior produces alternating and sequentially repeated outcomes.

A payoff matrix that accords with the norms that prevailed in medieval Ethiopia are one where constant threats of external invasion and autonomous governors forming alliances with foreign aggressors (in exchange for weapons) and other domestic contenders to capture the throne induces the incumbent Emperor to be rather cautious or even paranoid. This is depicted in Table 3.6 where the Nash equilibrium entails over-taxation of peasants.

Table 3.6 Cautious nobility with emperor facing incessant external invasion

	KING:	
EMPEROR:	Aggressive	Submissive
Defensive	A −5, 3	B 5, 2
Punitive	C −1, −3	D 1, −2

Source and Notes: Author
Emperor—punitive; King—submissive: D (Nash but non-dominant for both)

Table 3.7 Aggressive nobility incessantly challenging a weak emperor

	KING:	
EMPEROR:	Aggressive	Submissive
Defensive	A −5, 3	B 5, 2
Punitive	C −1, 5	D 1, −2

Source and Notes: Author
This does not involve a Prisoners' Dilemma (dominant strategy for both)
Emperor—punitive; King—aggressive; C (dominant for King only)

The central point here is that the *rist* and *gult* system and the uncertainty of the level of extraction did not generate a category of landless people but produced a Malthusian lock-in by failing to provide an incentive-compatible mechanism whereby the tributors and the tributaries would find it in their best self-interest to promote farm productivity. Another interesting payoff matrix (Table 3.7) shows why the emperor would over-react in punishing insubordination because accommodation has a low payoff, or the emperor is reckless or hot-headed.

One manifestation of the contestability of both high offices and the Crown itself is the high intergenerational mobility and instability in Ethiopian political culture. The royalty and the nobility openly practiced dynastic marriages of convenience and rampant concubinage despite church prohibitions of polygyny and politically-motivated dissolution of sanctified marriages. Even among the lay population, divorce rates (with almost equal rights of inheritance by all children) were traditionally high which explains the difficulty of asset accumulation as well as the high remarriage rates.

The least protected, short of outright rebellion or abandoning of farming, were the peasants who were subject to extra-customary demands for tribute by local officials and billeted soldiers, looting expeditions by neighboring warlords or marauding nomads, not to mention militia obligations tied to the land (Caulk 1978a, b). The ideal principle to guide the tributary mode was enunciated by a populist but short-lived Gondarine Emperor, Ze-Dengel, who boldly declared in 1606: "Man is free; land is tributary.[11]" Ze-Dengel and Tewodros II are remembered as tragic reformers who did not fully appreciate the power of a coalition of vested interests in the tributary system (Box 3.2).

[11] In the original Geez, it reads **"seb hara wo'gebbar midir"** (see Box 3.2). Ze-Dengel's reign lasted less than two years (Crummey 2000).

Box 3.2 Tragic Reformers: Ze-Dengel and Tewodros II

A good emperor or empress is one who is open to new ideas and adaptable. His or Her Court is diversely represented; dispenses justice fairly and wisely; skillfully uses political marriages and delegation of power to regional notables to cement loyalty; and balances the relative power of the Crown, the nobility, the Church, and the militia.

Failure to appreciate the stiff resistance to major reforms that empower the Court at the expense of the soldiery and the priesthood is dramatically illustrated by the tragic ending of two rash reformer emperors—one trying to pave the way for and the other to build an alternative to the collapsed imperial throne of the Gondarine State. In both cases, reforms born of enlightened self-interest, lacking an effective coalition and good planning, were defeated.

Emperor Ze-Dengel (1603–04), a nephew of the powerful Emperor Serse-Dengel (1563–96), wanted to consolidate his power by reforming the two key institutions of the tributary system: the *chewa* regimental system of specialists of war being granted income over-rights (*gult*) imposed as a tax obligation on hereditary land (*rist*). The new emperor soon passed two edicts: (1) a mass levy of able-bodied people to staff an army directly under the Emperor's own command; and (2) reasserting the rights of farmers over the land on payment of fixed tribute (not including service) as a condition of ownership. This gem of reform is encapsulated by the slogan, "Man is free; land is tributary." The *chewa* troops, initially established in Denbya by Emperor Serse-Dengel in 1575, managed to kill Ze-Dengel in battle. On pain of abolishing the monarchy altogether, they were persuaded to support the crowning of Susenyos as emperor who proceeded to restore their *gult* rights along with service obligations from the farmers.

Emperor Tewodros II (1855–1868), an ambitious upstart without a patrimonial network to tie him down, tried a Ze-Dengel-type reform of the age-old tributary system. He proposed to have the regional governors and judges as salaried appointees of the Court. He also wanted the militia, then under the control of the garrison governors of the military colonies in the frontiers of the empire as well as the hereditary regional overlords, to be fully integrated into a national army under the Emperor's command. Fixed salaries would replace *gult* rights and indiscriminate pillaging. To implement this ambitious program of centralization, he had to go against the grain by forcibly overcoming the resistance of the richly-endowed churches and monasteries as well as the *chewa*. A good shibboleth for him is: 'Soldiers eat; peasants provide.'

One manifestation of the bitter struggle over the revocation of all ecclesiastical income rights from land to the minimum necessary was that he broke tradition by failing to generously endow churches. Another was his predisposition for punitive destruction and self-sacrifice. A spiteful Tewodros even plundered and burned the illustrious capital city of Gondar twice during 1864–66 to punish church resistance to his reforms. One of the most admired Emperors in Ethiopian history, Tewodros II ended the tragic saga by committing suicide in 1867 upon losing a battle with a British expeditionary force in his fortress capital of Maqdalla, abandoned by the deeply alienated clergy and betrayed by the disgruntled regional lords.

The political implications of the failure to monopolize access to both the land and the instruments of violence continue to be momentous long after the demise of GS. *Shiftnet* (political banditry) indeed was a highly romanticized and age-old form of rebellion by disgruntled peasants or political upstarts targeting mainly superiors (Crummey 1986; Caulk 1978a, b).

This analytical prism also uncovers why the political logic of redistributive overlordship favored the extensive margin, i.e., the strategy of expanding the universe of tribute payers. People in newly annexed territories, therefore, suffered the lowest protection of land and income rights, especially if they resisted fiercely. Ironically, because of the higher fertility of the land in the reintegrated and newly annexed provinces alike, less-landed peasants enjoyed a higher standard of living than those in the core provinces where nearly all were subsistence owner-operators. Ownership alone does not necessarily mean higher economic welfare where natural-resource endowments are denuded, or the dysfunctional institutions discourage shared economic growth.

3.3 Unstable Equilibrium: The Era of the Warring Princes

Gondarine Ethiopia was a land-rich and ecologically diverse country with heavy dependence on rainfed settled farming in the highlands and semi-nomadic pastoralism in the dry lowlands. As we keep insisting, the peasantry was not generally subject to European-type feudalism or Asian-type **hydraulic despotism** (Wittfogel 1963). Because some two-thirds of the peasantry was landed (family-based or clan-based), the ruling class had to rely on a different mechanism of exploitation: the benefices of the "official title" assigned to it by the Crown. In other words, much like the Islamic empires, this is a case of the conversion of political power into economic power rather than vice versa.

A bedrock of shared political culture and a unifying ideology served two purposes. It made the Crown the target of competition by the ambitious regardless of ethnicity or geographic origin. It also stemmed, with limited success, mutually destructive violence over tribute and imperial succession.

Robustness became elusive as the emperors progressively lost the capacity to enforce their income rights from a distant capital after the mid-1700s. The favored governance technique of GS involved the establishment of military colonies which served as core populations from which Northern political culture and Christianity spread. Military colonies and monasteries were established farther afield in the frontier provinces among the Sidama people of the central highlands as far south as Keffa and Ennarya.

The demise of GS coincided with the beginning of the modern period in world history which was inaugurated with two momentous political revolutions (the American and the French) and the industrial revolution which soon engulfed the Continent and the European offshoots. The nineteenth century gave the world the idea of the "sovereign citizen," the demographic transition, and a boom in global demand for primary goods and cheap labor (Findlay and O'Rourke 2009).

For Gondar, the limits of tributarism became evident in the most incongruous of time. By 1770, the territorial control of the Gondarine Emperor had shrunk to the environs of the city of Gondar. Heads (*ras*) of powerful political dynasties from Tigray, Gojam, Yeju, Wag, Simien, and Wollo took turns in reducing the emperors to mere puppets during what is called the era of the warlord princelings—euphemistically but misleadingly dubbed *Zemene Mesafint* since few, if any, dared claim royal blood to declare themselves emperor (see Appendix 3.1 at the end of this Chapter).

The steady erosion of the Crown's authority to myriad regional warlords lasted some 85 years (1770–1855) or perhaps 100 years (1755–1855) before a drive to restore central authority finally succeeded. A regional upstart rose to the level of the emperorship in 1855. Crowned as Tewodros II (r. 1855–1868), he restored the authority of the monarchy by subduing regional pretenders, reducing church lands, and centralizing the collection of revenue in the hope of creating a modern military and administration.[12]

He was soon followed by another warlord, crowned as Yohannes IV (1872–1889), who was less of a reformer than a restorer of the state-church against Islamized political contenders from Wollo as well as from the Mahdists of the Sudan. It was not until after the geographic center of political power moved south to Shewa that a modern territorially-defined state would emerge for the first time in modern Ethiopian history.

In sum, the Era of the Princes ironically revealed the remarkably successful political assimilation of the northern Oromo elites of Gondar, Gojam, and especially Yeju and Wollo which took place over two centuries. It was also the culmination of the intra-Christian conflict related to the unsuccessful Jesuit attempt to introduce Catholicism from the top. Things were also exacerbated by the self-destructive and vainglorious fissions within the Orthodox Church reflecting a combination of regional monastic rivalries and a doctrinaire approach to Christological debates.

The tragedy was that, while Europe was entering the industrial revolution and the consolidating the modern nation-state, and parts of Asia were beginning to do the same as a defense against encroaching colonialism, the Gondarine monarchy was unable to hold even the core provinces together. This led to the pauperization of all, including church elites, princes, military-administrators, and the gentry. Unbridled tributarism perpetuated isolationist underdevelopment in medieval Ethiopia and its legacies persisted well into the twentieth century.

[12] Tewodros II tried to form centrally-controlled and integrated regiments rather than relying provincial militia led by regional chiefs. He also had plans to have a salaried officer corps, proposed reductions in the size of the clergy, and apparently intended to redistribute land from huge church endowments to peasants who were to pay fixed taxes to the treasury rather than indeterminate tributes to local chiefs.

The incompleteness of the project of fusing state-building with nation-building continues to challenge the remarkably resilient[13] Ethiopian civilizational state with periodic threats of disintegration. Paul Henze (2000: 342) may very well be right when he claims rather optimistically that

> Ethiopia's tradition of independence and self-government, its ability to produce effective leaders, its cultural pride and the population's deep-seated sense of history give it intangible advantages in facing the future. Ethnic diversity has never been a source of great weakness in Ethiopia. Neither has religion. Ethiopians have an inherent ability to interrelate as well as a proved capacity for energy and discipline.

Three reasons can be adduced for the failure of the age-old monarchy to transform itself from resiliency to robustness. For one, there was little threat to the emperor from an economically and politically autonomous church since church and state were mutually dependent. The head of the church was the Emperor, the Patriarch himself was and imported foreigner from the persecuted minority church of Egypt which, while supporting one pretender or another in succession contests to the throne, had no power to challenge the institution of the imperial court.

A second reason is the economic backwardness of the country which militated against the emergence of a strong and united gentry to constrain the emperor's powers. A united peasantry to transmute tribute into tax was certainly out of the question given the daunting task of effective coordination of parish-minded farmers and ever-mobile pastoralists. Thirdly, the geography of the country facilitated fragmentation from within and encirclement by Islamic forces from without to prolong Ethiopia's isolation from the rest of the world. Its incomplete modern political order, despite the early start, was then the joint product of all these inauspicious factors.

The primacy of the internal constraint on robust state formation, therefore, was rooted in the comparatively egalitarian land institutions. By allowing only certain modes of surplus extraction to be feasible, they constricted the state's the fiscal base. A vicious circle of sorts seems to have set in for good.

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[13] Marcus (1975: xvii) also notes: "[F]rom time to time, the nation had disintegrated into parts, but it had never disappeared as an idea and always reappeared in fact. The Axumite Empire may have faded after the seventh century, but the Zagwe followed in the eleventh century; and, of course, the succeeding Solomonic dynasty created a state that incorporated at least two-thirds of the country's present area. In the sixteenth century, that empire lost its will to rule after being ravaged by Muslim armies waging holy war, and it sharply contracted in the seventeenth century as the Oromo successfully invaded the devastated and depopulated highlands… From the Axumite period, public history in Ethiopia has moved from north to south, and the twentieth-century state developed along this well-trodden path. Menelik and his governors ruled Ethiopia's heterogeneous population indirectly, largely through accommodation and co-option. Haile Selassie centralized the state and expanded Ethiopia's civil society as a counterweight to ethnic forces. He fostered unity through the development of a national army, a Pan-Ethiopian economy, modern communications, and an official culture whose main feature was the use of the Amharic language in government and education."

Appendix 3.1: Chronology of Ethiopian Emperors, 1563–1974 (from the 28th Emperor to the 56th Emperor)

Reign	Emperor	No of years ruled	Notes
1563–1597	**Serse Dengel**	**34**	**Pre-Jihad Gondarine, 1563–1633**
1597–1599	Abeto Yakob	6	
1603–1604	Ze-Dengel	1	
1605–1633	Susenyos	28	
1633–1668	**Fasilades**	**35**	**Post-Jihad Gondarine, 1633–1770**
1668–1682	Yohannes I	14	
1682–1706	Adiyam Seged	24	
1706–1708	Tekle Haymanot I	2	
1708–1711	Tewoflos	3	
1711–1716	Yosotos	8	
1716–1721	Dawit II	5	
1721–1731	Bekaffa	10	
1731–1755	Iyasu II	24	
1755–1769	Eyoas	14	
1769–1770	Yohannes II	0.5	
1770–1778	**Tekle Haymanot II**	**8**	**Zemene Mesafint, 1770–1855**
1778–1785	Tekle Giyorgis I	7	
1785–1789	Ras Ali I	4	
1789–1794	Ras Aligaz	5	
1794–1800	Ras Asrat & Ras Wolde Gebrael	6	
1800–1826	Ras Gugsa	26	
1826–1828	Ras Yimam	2	
1828–1831	Ras Marye	3	
1831–1831	Ras Dori	0.25	
1831–1854	Ras Ali II	23	
1855–1868	**Tewodros II**	**13**	**Restoration of the crown**
1868–1872	Tekle Giyorgis	4	
1872–1889	Yohannes IV	17	
1890–1914	**Menelik II**	**24**	**Shewan, 1990–1974**
1914–1917	(Lij or Abeto) Iyasu V	3	
1917–1930	Zewditu	13	
1930–1974	Haile Selassie I	45	*Monarchy to republican, 1974*
1975–2017	Republican period	**42**	**Revolutionary state**
1974–1991	Military/Derg	17	*Garrison socialism*
1991--	TPLF/EPRDF	26+	*Ethnocentric capitalism*

Source and Notes: Based on the compilation by Ato Tekalign Gedamu from various authoritative sources (until 1974). The notes and the transliteration from the Amharic are mine

Some 58 imperial sovereigns ruled Ethiopia (as emperors or as regents) beginning with Zoskales of Axum (ca. 108 AD). Among the longest-reigning emperors are Ezana (40 years), Dawit I (32 years), Zera Yakob (35 years), Libne Dengel (32 years), Serse Dengel (34 years), Fusillades (35 years), and Haile Selassie I (40 years, net of the Italian Occupation).

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Chapter 4
The Shewan Fiscal-Territorial State

> *The kingdom of Shawa was well situated to exploit the development of coffee exports from the south-western highlands, and they would have assisted Shawa's efforts to distance itself from upheavals further north during the Zamana Masafint. The coffee trade may therefore have been more significant in the rise of Shawa in the later eighteenth and earlier nineteenth centuries than historians have hitherto allowed.*
>
> *Merid W. Aregay (1988: 25)*
>
> *Oromo societies had no legacy of state structure.*
>
> *Fernyhough (1986: 60)*

As the two restorationist emperors, Tewodros II and Yohannes IV, reached the limits of what can be done to reclaim the supreme authority of the post-Gondarine Crown, the regional kings of Shewa and Gojam, with ambitions to claim the emperorship, launched aggressive territorial expansions in the closing decades of the nineteenth century. By 1900, the central province of Shewa won the competition to become the seat of a much larger Ethiopian state under a remarkably restorationist Emperor Menelik II.

The modern Shewan state of 1889–1974 was uniquely positioned to regain the epicenter of the Ethiopian state it had hosted earlier for 250 years (c. 1270–1520). As noted by Merid W. Aregay, the rise of Shewa on the ashes of Gondar is primarily attributable to revenues from the coffee trade which started in the Harrar and the Gibe regions and accelerated during 1750–1850 (Wolde Aregay 1988). It also benefited from the disruption of the Solomonic order and the emergence of an alliance between Amara and Oromo elites in the central provinces.

The restoration of the Christian monarchy took place under a radically different global environment. It took place in the age of industry and the colonial scramble. It also took place in a domestic environment of massive territorial expansion southwards which boosted ethnoreligious diversity, integration into the global economy

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through cash-crop exports, and the centralization of state authority in the geographic center of the country.

Hesitant attempts at modernization were, however, insufficient to fend off Italian encroachment which at the second try dislocated the old ruling class. The ceding of Eritrea as a colony in the 1880s and Italian Occupation in the 1930s also provided an impetus for the introduction of modern interconnected administrative centers which later grew into important centers of commerce. The post-liberation decades to 1974 witnessed a drive to centralize and modernize the state by a determined Emperor Haile Selassie I.

The exclusionary economic and political institutions of this fiscal-territorial state reflected the longstanding redistributive preoccupation of state elites. The Shewan state was savvy enough to earn domestic legitimacy and resilient enough to gain international recognition of its sovereign borders by rebuffing the European colonial onslaught. The century-old experiment at centralization and proper fiscalization of tribute nonetheless failed once again to produce a robust state and an accountable political order.

4.1 Colonialism's Rude Encounter with an Indigenous State

After 1900, the trajectories of Ethiopian state formation and nation formation became sharpened. For the conservative states of Gondar and Shewa, viability entailed effective management of the concentric circles of authority. The emperors had first and foremost to consolidate control over the core provinces by forging close alliances with a network of provincial lords and appointed governors. To expand the tributary base and to ensure a secure access to the sea, submission by tributary chiefdoms and sheikdoms had to be established and enforced with implied threats made credible by occasional punitive expeditions.

The sense of urgency for initiating a catchup modernization drive came in the form of a response to two major wars with imperial Italy (in 1896 and again in 1935). The weaknesses thereby exposed by the confrontations induced the establishment of civil and military services, and the trappings of a modern market economy.

The modern Shewan state (SS), which arose in the age of industry and the Scramble for Africa, upheld the icons of a recognizably Axumite-Gondarine political culture. These impressive legacies included a national vernacular in Geez-Amharic, a state church, the idea of semi-sacred emperorship, the legal code of the Kibre Negest, and the *Gult Sireet-Sir'at* system of extracting tribute to finance the Court and its decentralized administration (Fig. 4.1).

By mid-twentieth century, SS had succeeded in introducing the rudiments of a modern bureaucracy and a professional army to be considered neo-patrimonial. It transformed the historic *tributary state* into a *territorial state* by obtaining a grudging international recognition of its borders doubling the territorial reach of Gondarine Ethiopia. Furthermore, it laid down a reasonably secure fiscal base strung together from disparate sources, including new economic links with the world economy.

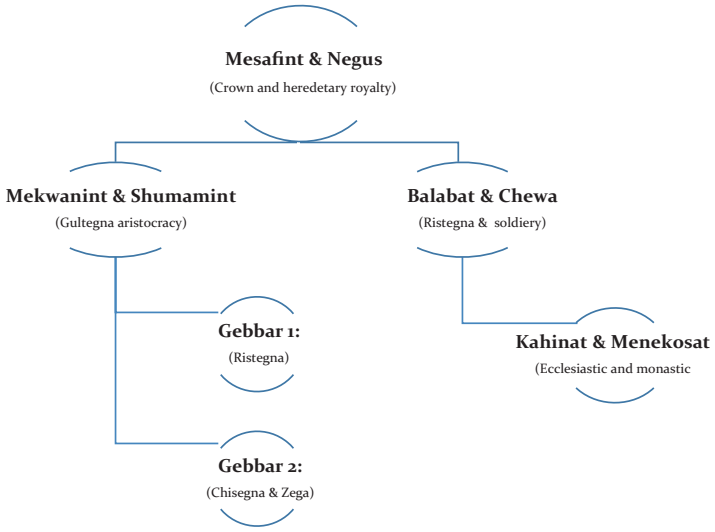

Fig. 4.1 Class hierarchy of the *Sireet-Sir'at* system of the Shewan State. *Ristegna* = land-owning peasantry with customary rights and obligations, *Gultegna* = state agents with over-rights of varying duration to taxes and fees, *Gebbar* 1 = all owners of tax-obligated land, titled or ordinary, *Gebbar* 2 = a class of tenants, voluntary or pressed, with little legal protection, *Chisegna, Temaj* or *Zega* = live-in tenant (zega, temaj) or contractual tenant (chisegna), *Mekwanint* = titled nobility, *Shumamint* = *titled high officials*. (*Source*: Author)

This chapter seeks to answer the question that continues to animate our overall inquiry: Why did an early-starter Ethiopia so belatedly and only partially transitioned from a tributary-based military state to a tax-based territorial state? To answer this question satisfactorily, we must first identify the stylized historical facts about the country's ever-changing political economy in the century spanning 1875–1974, and identify the actual and the counterfactual pathways it could have taken.

The dawn of the nineteenth century saw several region-based contenders for the Gondarine throne. The ensuing protracted civil war ended with the crowing of two ruthless upstarts who managed to restore the authority of the Crown but failed to institute radical reforms in land institution and state administration-- Emperor Tewodros II (1855–1868) and Emperor Yohannes IV (1872–1889). In the end, King Sahle Selassie's grandson bested them all to become not just a king of Shewa in 1875 but also Ethiopia's most accomplished modern statesman culminating in his crowning as Emperor Menelik II (r. 1889–1913).

The Scramble for Africa was fended off with the spectacular defeat of a European power (Italy) in Adwa in 1896—an improbable feat predating the other two European defeats in the hands non-European powers—the Japanese over Russia in 1905 and

the U.S. over Spain in 1898.[1] This encounter also exposed the backwardness of the country relative to its detractors—a fact dramatized by its inability to regain Eritrea.

Greater Shewa[2] was indeed a region with certain distinctive historical, geographic, and demographic characteristics which uniquely qualified it to spearhead the project of building of a modern Ethiopian nation-state. This geo-economic center looked northward for cultural inspiration, southward for a secure fiscal base, and outward for technological diffusion. The re-incorporation of even more ethnolinguistically and religiously diverse peoples was managed by a state elite that was much more diverse in its demographic reach than its predecessors.

In the process, SS went through three distinct phases of development. The Menelikian phase (1875–1913) is distinguishable by the notable achievements of territorial expansion and the establishment of quasi-modern government institutions with some autonomy from the Imperial Court. The interlude (1913–1941) was one of overly cautious modernization and uncertainty about imperial succession (an Achilles Heel of the tributary state for centuries) and a five-year Italian occupation. The Shewan state emerged in full form under Emperor Haile Selassie I (1941–74).[3]

One clue to their success is that the flagbearers of SS boasted mixed genealogies through political marriages at the top and considerable intermixing especially among the Amara, the Tigre, the Oromo, and the Gurage—two of the latter being

[1] Jonas (2011: 333-4) has this to say about the unexpected potency of the tributary-military system in mobilizing massive resources to resist existential threats from abroad: "Nations, if they are to endure, are defined not by religion, ethnicity, or race but by the scale at which freedom can reliably be defended. Only on the scale of Ethiopia itself could resistance have succeeded. Adwa reminds us that the only freedom we truly possess is the freedom we are able to defend…The Adwa campaign spanned 5 months and 580 miles. It was rivaled among nineteenth century military campaigns only by Napoleon's Russian campaign, which took 3 months and logged 490 miles from Vilnius to Moscow. Unlike Napoleon's Russian campaign, the Adwa campaign ended in victory. This is greatness." Regarding the entrepreneurial motivation of the unpaid citizen-soldiers who were required to respond to the call for war mobilization, Jonas (2011:55) also observes: "Wealth wasn't just incidental to the campaign; it is what drove it. Ethiopian soldiers were compensated in the form of what they could herd, prod, or haul away."

[2] An integral part of the Abyssinian political orbit, what I call "greater Shewa" refers to historic Amhara districts of modern Wollo south of the Beshilo River and modern Shewa north of the Awash River. This was the seat of the medieval Ethiopian state during 1270–1550. The disintegration of the post-1270 neo-Solomonic empire of Amde-Tsion in the early 1400s under the onslaught of jihadist wars spearheaded by the Muslim Adal sheikdom and then the massive migration of the segmentary clans of the Oromo triggered a shift of the administrative center of the empire from Debre-Birhan in Shewa to Gondar. Gondar ruled over much of the highlands of today's Eritrea, Tigray, Begemdir and Simien, Wollo, Gojam, Shewa, and Wollega. What we will focus on here is Menelik II's Shewan State with its eventual capital in Addis Ababa and ruling over contemporary Ethiopia until its demise in 1974.

[3] One can reasonably argue that the empty state coffers when the Italians were expelled, and British insistence (as co-liberators) on extending their military administration until the end of World War II in 1945 both prevented the Emperor from assuming full control of the state. By 1955, however, the Emperor had skillfully managed to free himself of this de facto trusteeship and financial dependence to introduce significant legislative reforms of the land tenure system and government administration, restored Eritrea and the Haud to Ethiopia, and introduced a revised Constitution which granted limited political rights to citizens.

politically prominent peoples of the southern provinces. Unlike the Gondarine state, however, contests over the Crown became exclusively an affair of cliques within the Shewan dynasty instead of being between the Crown and the regional political houses nationwide. This was not to be until after another multiethnic but thoroughly assimilated political elite from Wollo put up a remarkable last stand to claim Menelik's throne for Abeto Iyasu (Box 4.1).

Box 4.1 The Self-Reinvented: Ali the Great of Yeju and Mohammed Ali of Wollo

In the last quarter of the eighteenth century, two hybrid families managed to establish regional dynasties which played a central role in the Era of the Princes by contending for imperial power as king makers. They symbolize the remarkable genealogy of inter-ethnic mixing, two-way cultural assimilation, and a history of conversion and reconversion between Orthodox Christianity and Sunni Islam. This heritage of intercultural fluency gave ambitious politicians to show a remarkable adeptness in navigating what on the surface looks like a political culture of contradictions.

One political dynasty was the ***Worreshekhoch* clan of Yeju.** The Yeju who are believed to have hailed from Ifat (Qawat) in Shewa. They were Christians at the beginning of the Jihad but had mostly converted to Islam by the time they settled in the northeastern Wollo region of Angot on the heels of the great Oromo migration. The Yeju spoke Amharic and had successfully assimilated with the Amhara and the Oromo of the region as well as into the social and political structures of Christian Ethiopia.

Ras Ali (I) the Great, the son of Gelebu Faris of Lasta and Abba Gwangul of Yeju, was the founder of the *Werreshekhoch* political family of Yeju. He was an important player for the control of the Emperor in Gondar in the 1780s and served as Ras of Begemdir and Regent of the Emperor until his death in 1788 (buried in Lalibela). Like most members of his extended family, and despite his Muslim name, Ras Ali founded Debre Tabor as his dynastic capital, established a new *gult* system for troops which were accountable to him rather than to the Gondarine Emperor, and endowed new churches there as well as in Woldya. Debre Tabor assumed the role of Gondar city, having benefitted from the rise to prominence of his son, Gugsa the Great and grandson Ali II who was also a Regent until his deposition in 1855 by his son-in-law, Emperor Tewodros II.

The other was the ***Mammadoch* clan of Tenta.** Located near Meqdella, the dynasty was established by Mohammed Ali Abba Jibo in the middle of the eighteenth century by imams of the Muslim central belt of modern Wollo Province. Their core comprised the central districts between Tehuledere in the East, Dessie Zuria in the Center, and Worre-Himeno in the West. This powerful family, known for its cavalry and Islamic religiosity, was an important

(continued)

Box 4.1 (continued)

player in regional politics (contending with the neighboring Amhara, Lasta, Tigray, Gondar, Gojam, Shewa, and Yeju dynasties) but also in the national politics of the nineteenth century.

Internal strife for the title of imam and being wedged in the path of the territorial unification project of Tewodros II hopelessly weakened this political clan. However, the two widows of imams helped to open political space for two successors--Mestawet for her son Amede Liben, and Worqitu for her stepson Mohammed Ali. Only in Wollo would the children of imams be educated in Medresas and Orthodox monasteries to prepare them for high political leadership in such a multi-faith and multi-lingual Abyssinian society.

Imam Mohammed Ali was later baptized as Mikael by Emperor Yohannes IV in 1878 and received the coveted title of *Ras*. His son, Lij Iyasu, heir to the throne of Menelik II, appointed him Negus of Wollo and Tigray. Negus Mikael, who counted Menelik's daughter and Iyasu's mother as one of his wives, died in 1918. He was the founding father of Dessie, and became a deeply devout Orthodox Christian and a dedicated builder of churches. The political histories of the two Ethiopian family dynasties testify to the remarkable assimilating power of Ethiopian political culture. While GS and SS are rightly celebrated, the centrality of Wollo in post-Axumite Ethiopia remains under-appreciated.

The historic North became politically cellularized into a number of competing fiefdoms (such as Temben, Inderta, Simien, Gondar, Gojam, Wag and Lasta, Wollo, Yeju, Shewa) with increasingly unsustainable economic bases and ruled by imperial appointees from Shewa (Marcus 1975; McCann 1987). The three pillars of the so-called Abyssinian political economy became anachronistic with the new hinterland and market nexus enjoyed by SS.

First, a landed peasantry and Orthodox Christianity dominated. This meant that political power was based primarily on **overlordism** of titles rather than in the landlordism per se. To put it simply, non-feudal landlordism supplemented classic overlordism. Shewa, along with Wollo, had the highest level of tenancy among the core provinces (more on this in Sect. 4.2).

Second, the two overlapping rights over land, the inalienable and kin-based freehold right of the "*ristegna* peasantry" and the income rights of the state-affiliated "*gultegna* aristocracy," were mediated by the monarchy. The aristocracy itself was interconnected in an intricate web of hierarchy. In other words, every *gultegna* was also a *ristegna* and, therefore, a tributary to those with higher titles.

Third, political relations were defined by the security of tenure with respect to office, tribute-obligated land, and non-inheritable titles for the aristocracy. Class consciousness was attenuated by low urbanization and the teachings of the Orthodox Church about the need for acceptance of predestined social hierarchy and a conservatism born of a prolonged siege mentality.

Aside from centralizing and consolidating the Northern provinces, an energized Emperor Menelik II expanded the territorial claim of the Ethiopian state. Between 1875 and 1905, some self-governing kingdoms and chiefdoms were administered directly from Addis Ababa (Gurage, Kembata, Sidamo, Borena, Gimira, Gamo, Bale, Ogaden, and Illubabor) or indirectly through loyal traditional rulers (Keffa, Wollega, and Adal).

As noted earlier, the decisive defeat of Italy in the Battle of Adwa (1895–1896) ensured that the new borders were internationally recognized by the big powers of the day. Menelik arguably remains the most politically dexterous nationalist Africa has produced in the Age of Imperialism (Marcus 1975; Jonas 2011).

The reincorporated southern provinces were diverse culturally and economically, but can also be usefully grouped into three. The first comprises the predominantly Muslim region in the east—the trading city of Harrar, the Oromo of highland Harrarge and Bale, the Sultanate of Afar, and the predominantly pastoral Somali. The second consisted of the densely populated and ethnically diverse principalities of the Gurage, Hadiya, Arsi, Sidama, Wolayta, Keffa, Kembata, and other peoples. This region relied on the root crop of *enset* and corn in the highlands and agro-pastoralism in the lowlands. The third was the western region which was dominated by the Muslim Sidama-Oromo Gibe states and Wollega-Kellem, Beni Shangul, and the disparate ethnicities along Kenyan and the Sudanese borders. These communities long suffered looting expeditions by various Highlander state elites from both the Ethiopian side and the Sudanese side as well as constantly raid each other.

Three coexisting variants of the state can, in fact, be identified in Menilek's pre-1995 Ethiopia. The most successful and hegemonic one is the church-state anchored in Shewa at the heart of the central highlands. Then we have a number of nominally Christian tributaries, going back to the Gondarine period, in the southwest which includes Goma, Keffa, Ennarya, Kembata, and Wolayta. At the other end of the spectrum, we have small but disparate Muslim sultanates and emirates with various ethnic colorings such as Adal, Awssa, Bali, Hadya, Harrar, and Jimma.

The ethnically and ecologically diverse Southern peasantry was thereby bifurcated for much of the nineteenth century. While communal access to land prevailed in the agro-pastoral lowlands, the highland regions of intense crop and *enset* cultivation were under various despotic Omotic, Sidama, and Oromo kingdoms practicing big landlordism where the estates of the ruling class were cultivated by serfs, landless tenants, and slaves. This subversion of age-old communalism, as we will see below, was rather retrogressive by the standards of the *rist-gult* system of the historic North (more on this in Sect. 4.3).

Lacking the capacity to pay imperial troops and the militia from the central treasury, the SS employed the age-old strategy of granting soldier-administrators land that they can cultivate or rent out. Where this was not feasible either because the land was already occupied by the native population or the soldiers have not been demobilized, their upkeep was ensured, consistent with the Axumite-Gondarine tradition, by the state transferring state rights over taxes and tributes to the solders

according to rank. This system of quasi-military administration of new or chronically rebellious provinces was a variant of what existed in some of the older provinces, particularly in northern Shewa and southern Wollo.[4]

With the help of modern weapons and an affordable mix of salaries and tribute overrights, imperial regiments quartered in garrison towns and commanded by the appointees of the Emperor supplanted the private militia of the provincial lords. Modernization took the form of a central administration and modern infrastructure--a bureaucracy with a ministerial system, a railroad, banking, telephone and telegraph, trade and commercial centers, educational institutions, and a more buoyant fiscal base for Addis Ababa.

Post-incorporation, two types of systems emerged in the greater South. Some of the despotic chiefdoms and kingdoms (such as Jimma, Leqa, and Awssa) which submitted with little resistance, were allowed to keep their political fiefdoms (minus slavery) conditional on payments of stiff tribute to the Crown. During the initial decades of administration by military governors, wholesale confiscation of land took place in many areas for reallocation to the Crown, the Church, and the native gentry or the peasantry—roughly a third each. Military governors, top ecclesiastics, and soldier-administrators emerged as landlords on state land grants on a freehold basis. However, most of the occupants of confiscated lands kept their land-use rights as sharecroppers until commercialization in the 1950s exposed the insecurity of a legally undefined system of tenancy between political unequals.

I offer here an explanation for this mode of governance by invoking internal as well as external factors. The internal factor deals with the nature of age-old land institutions which vested ownership in extended families while granting elastic income rights to officeholders. By preventing the emergence of a hereditary landed aristocracy, these land institutions encouraged extractive contests over peasant economic surplus. The external factor pertains to the encirclement by hostile Islamic forces, and European colonizes both of which forced the Crown to devote much of its resources and energy to defending the country.

The modern Shewan politicians subsequently managed to define the Ethiopian state for a century with the remarkable coalition-building skills of Menelik beginning in 1875 and the virtual elimination of the regional nobility as an autonomous political force, especially under a centralizing Emperor Haile Selassie I. However, the reckless neglect of the impoverished northern core provinces (Tigray, Wollo, Begemdir/Gondar, Gojam, and Northern Shewa), the flagbearers of Ethiopian nationalism since the dawn of the second millennium, was a major contributor for the tragic undoing of the Shewan State.

[4] The pre-WW II SS had an agricultural fiscal system that was based on administrative-territorial units in well-secured (non-military) provinces: 11 *gizat* administered by the top-ranked *Ras*, 17 *negarit* administered by the next-ranked *Dejazmach*, and 8 *wuchi* under *Kegnazmach,* 12 under *Fitawrari*, 22 under *Kegnazmach,* 7 under *Grazmach,* and 8 under *Balambaras.* Emperor Tewodros II had a different policy known as *hager beje* administered directly by the Emperor's personal representatives, the then powerful *Mislene* (Wolde Mesqel 1970). This age-old military-administrative system of Afroasia in newly annexed territories is sometimes misconstrued, deliberately or out of ignorance of the economics of the tributary system, as internal colonialism.

Wars of external defense and incessant internal redistributive contests, I shall argue below, produced a central state (*betre-mengistawi sir'at*). More specifically, I explore the support for the following hypothesis:

> *The modern Shewan state managed to build up the capacity to defend itself from colonial assault and adroitly exploited the opportunity to mount a territorial expansion, consolidation, and modernization drive in the closing decades of the nineteenth century. By the mid-twentieth century, it had built up an internationally recognized and rapidly modernizing national state with a professional bureaucracy embracing the icons of Gondarine political culture with a richer fiscal base. It was, however, more successful in state centralization than in national integration precisely because it could not manage to produce a diversified and buoyant revenue base.*

As suggested by the hypothesis, a credible explanation for the admissible modes of Ethiopian state formation and the endogenous persistence of economic underdevelopment may be underpinned by the causality going from the country's diverse ecology and peculiar geography to the peculiar politico-economic institutions. Ecologically, the midlands had a high man/land ratio, and three complementary agro-economic zones reflecting the modification of tropical latitude by variable altitude (highland, plateau, and lowland). This mix allowed for diverse but fragmented politico-economic centers to persist, and for overreliance on unreliable rain-fed mixed farming.

The Shewan fiscal-territorial model constituted an advancement over the Gondarine tributary-military model. It was powerful enough to shore up its revenue base and provided expanded public services. And yet, it was not powerful enough to institute significant reforms (land reform, investment in human capital, and political reform) to embrace political participation and sustained prosperity. It embraced a bloated Court and Church entourage to enhance its legitimacy and became impervious to the new political ideas of participatory and accountable governance that the times demanded. To appreciate the continued feebleness of a reformed but not transformed tributarism, we need to understand how the fiscal base of SS differed from that of GS.

4.2 The New Fiscal Base and Governance

What I call the *fiscal-territorial state* of Shewa differs from the older Abyssinian mode of political and economic governance in many important respects. First, the peasantry, while predominantly landed, included a significant proportion (about one-third) of tenant households. Second, being led by an insurgent dynasty, SS was more aggressively expansionist territorially.

Third, its reliance on tithe revenue and the granting of fiefs to officials was much lower than that of its northern counterparts. There are two reasons for this new development: the newly incorporated regions offered large tracts of fertile and more sparsely-populated land as well as rich tributary kingdoms and chiefdoms. The new territories became a major source foodstuff for the Court as well as hard currency

from exportable cash crops (coffee, forest products, mining products, and slaves). These additional resources provided an edge for the Shewan state elite in the perennial arms race with domestic and foreign contenders.

The fourth, and perhaps the most notable, feature of SS was that the monarchy progressively reduced its over-reliance on the powerful nobility through an expansion of reshufflable offices over inheritable offices. Toward the end of the period, adeptness at mobilizing foreign military and economic aid facilitated centralization.

Finally, large alienable (sellable) land grants were given to the royalty, loyal governors, local notables, and soldier-settlers. Unlike the rigid *rist* system, this mix of the old and the new land tenure systems facilitated the progressive emergence of market relations in land, labor, and cash crops. The proliferation of garrison towns also made it easier to enforce the peace, secure taxable trade and off-farm activities, and implement the widely-resented measurement of land to better gauge the agricultural tax base.

These important institutional innovations went a long way toward overcoming the constraints of the Gondarine tributary-military institutions. The enduring southward shift in the geography of power from Gondar to Addis Ababa became the flipside of the lingering marginalization and the alienation of the gentry of the older provinces both politically and economically.

This redefinition of the foundations of state power also meant that an increasingly urbanized and market-connected ruling elite steadily severed its personal and collective ties to its most reliable rural constituencies. To put is rather colorfully, the state elites operating almost exclusively out of Addis Ababa willfully kept up appearances while leaving the rural base hopelessly pauperized. This, it turned out, came at a high political price for both the elite and the country. The 1974–1975 Revolution exposed the utter helplessness of the urban-based ruling class to defend its interests or to save the state from full capture by narrowly-based military officers and, later, by secessionist forces from the Periphery.

To see this, imagine rather simplistically but usefully that the modern SS comprised three distinct religious polities: North, South, and Center. In the Ethiopia of the historic North and Center, the Abyssinian legacy refined by Gondar was ubiquitous, and the Amara-Tigre-Agew synthesis of the political culture was well entrenched (Kebede 1999; Levine 2000). SS boasted variants of the *gebbar* land institutions with distinct geopolitical histories. The *rist* system was preponderant in the older provinces of highland Eritrea, Tigray, Begemdir, Simien, Gojam, and Wollo (north of the Beshillo River).

A mix of *ristegna* and *chisegna* (tenancy) prevailed in the central highlands of Wollo (south of the Beshillo River) and Shewa (north of Awash River)—roughly 60%:40% in favor of *rist*. This system, which was largely a product of the long-standing practice for the military administration of rebellious Muslim districts of central Wollo and the predominantly Oromo districts of Shewa, was extended to the southern highlands after 1900 (Table 4.1).

In the post-1875 Menelikian south, a diverse community of subjects (ranging from pre-state polities to well-established kingdoms such as Jimma, Wellega,

Table 4.1 Rights in land in the old and new provinces, 1900–1974

Region and type of land tenure *(Sireet)*	Arable land under:	State and overlord claims to farm income *(Sir'at)*
1. NORTHERN "*Rist-Rim*:" Eritrea, Tigray, Begemdir & Simien, Wag & Lasta, Wolqait, Gojam	(*Tint Hager--North: 40% of population*)	Northern peasantry and local gentry were landed
Rist (kinship, village)	70%	Gult, tithe, tax, service, gifts
Maderya (secular); Rim (clerical)	20%	Tithe, rest granted in lieu of salary
Crown	10%	The whole income, net of rent
2. CENTRAL "*Rist-Rim-Chisegna*:" Wollo, Amhara, Yeju, Shewa, Wollega	*(Mehal Hager—Center: 10% of population)*	Central peasantry and gentry was like northern when landed; otherwise tenant (gebbar)
Rist (kinship)	50%	Gult, tithe, tax, service, gifts
Maderya (secular); Rim (clerical)	20%	Tithe, rest granted in lieu of salary
Crown	10%	The whole income, net of rent
Private	10%	Tithe and taxes
3. SOUTHERN "*Rist-Rim-Private*-Chisegna:" southern highlands; eastern, southern and western lowlands--(re) incorporated after 1870	(*Dar Hager—South: 50% of population*)	Southern peasantry in high-resistance regions lost two-thirds of land to militia (Neftegna), the church and the crown; lowland pastoralists kept communal land but not the irrigable
Rist (Balabat, aristocracy, church, solder-settlers, communal)	50%	Gult, tithe, tax, service, gifts
Maderya (secular); rim (clerical)	20%	Tithe, rest granted in lieu of salary
State	10%	The whole income, net of rent
Private	10%	Tithe and taxes
Communal/pastoral	10%	Tithe and livestock taxes

Sources and Notes: Author. Based various sources cited in the text
1. In land-rich and labor-scarce regions in all three regions, various forms of labor arrangements prevailed (ranging from rental/sharecropping to resident ploughmen and non-resident farmers with service obligation to officials
2. Property rights to land also varied from right of use only (*Maderya*), right of inheritance and transfer (*Rist*), right of alienation with dedicated service obligation on the land (*Rim/Semon, Riste-Gult*), and right of sale (Private)

Wolayta, and Keffa) was incorporated into the resurgent Shewa-centered state (Fig. 4.2). In these regions, two kinds of land tenures prevailed in addition to rist held by the local gentry). Some autonomous kingdoms were permitted to keep their private estates on payment of a fixed tribute to Addis Ababa.

The rest of the greater South (most notably Arsi, Keffa, Sidamo, and Harrarge) joined the central provinces of Wollo and Shewa. It fell under an onerous version of the *gebbar* system traditionally employed for administering rebellious or newly conquered provinces. The state (as well as disgruntled warlords), unable to pay its

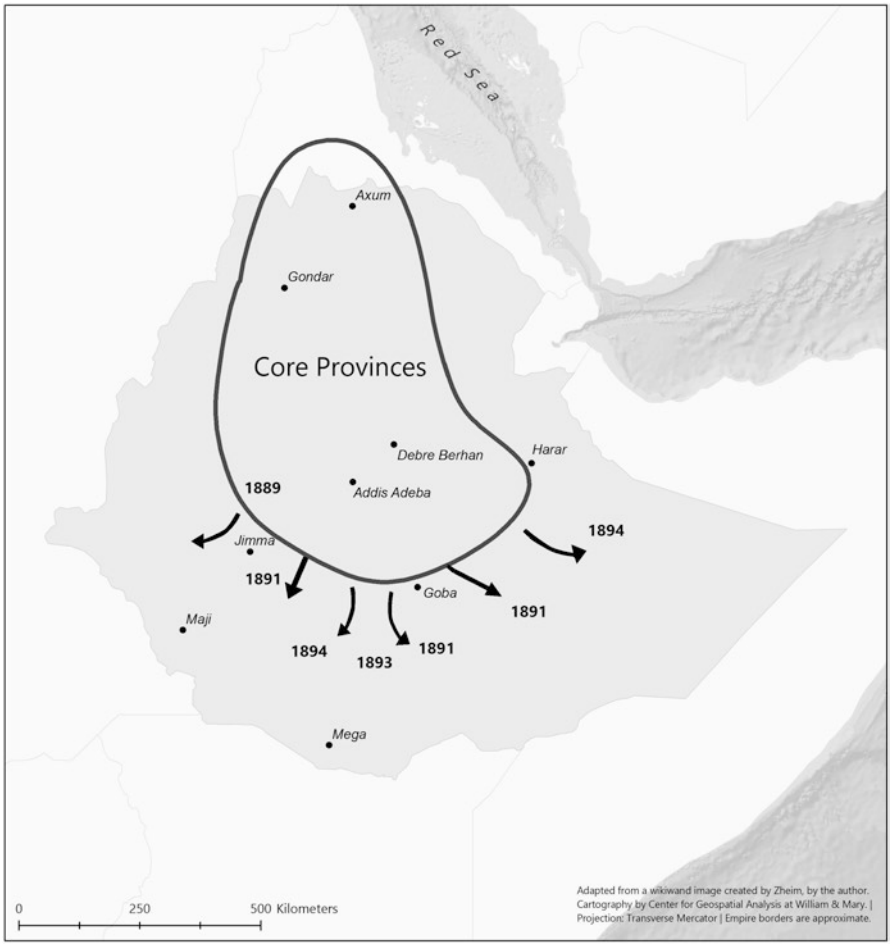

Fig. 4.2 The making of Menelikean Ethiopia, circa 1900 (*Sources and Notes:* Affar/Adal, 1900–1935; Haud (Ogaden), 1957; Eritrea, 1952. Ethiopia had a population of 5 million in 1855, 10 million in 1905, and 15 million in 1955)

soldiers and administrators in these far-flung territories, resorted to granting dispossessed or unoccupied land to loyalists to be either self-cultivated (in the case retired soldiers or *neftegna*) or rented out to local tenants (*chisegna*).

This *chisegna* and freehold (roughly 50%:50%) dispensation was harsher than the Shewa-Wollo model of land tenure in its application. Two reasons can be adduced. The cultural, but not necessarily ethnic, distance of land grantees and tenants was wider though its economic impact is easy to exaggerate. The soldier-administrators, we now know, are often Amharic-speaking Oromos from Shewa or other Southerners. Furthermore, it took place in the context of territorial expansion

Table 4.2 Shewa: modes of land ownership and surplus extraction

Ownership & extraction	Kinship/institutional	State/Crown
Rent/sharecropping (*chisegna*)	• Individual (Rist) • Church (rim/Semon)	• Hudad • Mengist • Maderya
Tribute, taxes and fees (*core; periphery*)	• Corvée and gifts • May be exempt	• Gult (to state assignees) • Gibir (to state or crown) • Corvée and gifts • Tithe (to state)
Self-management (*temaj zega; hired hands; slaves*)	• Individual (Rist) • Church (rim/Semon) • Official (Maderya)	• Crown demesne to partially provision the court • Slave-based estates (Jimma)

Source: Author. Synthesized from the various sources cited in the text

by a tributary state which was unable to pay its administrator-soldiers from the central Treasury. In the Eastern and Western pastoral lowlands, communal holdings continued along with large estates owned by the nobility or the State along rich river valleys.

It bears repeating here that the tithe and tribute obligations are *tied to the land* rather than to the people owning or working the land. These obligations typically also included payments in cash or in kind (usually a quarter of the harvest, or payment in the form of goods such as gold, salt bars, honey, or household articles), and variable additional obligations (gifts, labor) to the local governor. Some or all of these obligations may be waived in exchange for sending a family member on extended military campaigns, supplying provisions for billeted troops, or providing corvée on major public projects (Table 4.2).

Gult was also the lowest administrative unit with the Emperor at the apex, followed by the provincial governor (which may be a king, or a *Ras* or a senor appointee known as *Enderasse*), and the district governor (*Awraja Gezhi* or *Melkegna*). The *Melkegna* of Shewa enforced the collection of levies destined for the hierarchy of higher administrators ending with the Emperor. The *Melkegna* also administered local justice and the mobilization of the citizen militia with assistance from the *Mislene* (sub-district governor), a *Balabat* (a member of the local gentry typically appointed in newly conquered territories) and the C*hika-Shum* (a rotating position for **headman** among *rist*-holding families).

The mix of outright land grants, labor requisitioning, conditional land-use grants, and tax over-rights depended on the land/labor ratio of a district. McCann (1995) suggests that the southward diffusion of the relatively advanced technology and annual crop regime of the ox-plow complex may have contributed more than inter-regional migration to the national integration of the north and the south. The correlations between land endowments and labor supply are depicted in Table 4.3, and they seem to have shaped the architecture of institutionalized arrangement.

Table 4.3 Correlation between factor endowment and mode of surplus extraction

Land/labor ratio	Land: abundant	Land: scarce
Labor: Abundant	**1** • Land grants to settlers in exchange for service to the state • Smallholder cultivation	**2** • Smallholder cultivation—The norm for much of the country
Labor: Scarce	**3** • Large grants to nobility and royalty • Labor servitude: Tied corvée tenants	**4** • Good land in unhealthy borderlands • Expeditiary looting of agro-pastoralists

Source and Notes: Author
1 = the early stages of *rist* areas, 2 = the later stages of *rist* areas, 3 = newly conquered areas (one-third of population), 4 = the tribal periphery

The treatment of the southern *gebbar*[5] was certainly worse than in the north-central provinces. This was a product of a number of factors including the unprecedented power of the Court over the appointive regional governors (constant reshuffling thereby nurtured a spoils-of-war mentality), the great need of the state for marketable surplus to import firearms, and the cultural distance between the agents of a pedigreed state and a subject population accustomed to communal or rather despotic governance systems.

In densely populated districts, lands granted to churches, local gentry, soldiers and administrators, and those reserved for the Crown were cultivated by tenants (Pankhurst 2012). Where labor was scarce and the grantee, being on public duty, could not self-cultivate the temporary or long-term land grants received in lieu of salary, onerous service obligations had to be imposed on locals. Peasants were requisitioned to cultivate the maintenance grants of the soldier-administrators and the garrisoned soldiers.

One of the consequences of the Shewa-led restoration of greater Ethiopia in the last quarter of the nineteenth century is the enhancement of the capacity of the emperor to derive a substantial part of her or his income from domain lands under the control of the Court-State. This would have been the envy of the Gondarine

[5] A noted earlier, the term "gebbar" has been rendered various shades of meaning in the literature (see, for example, Pankhurst 2012, chapter 4). In the older provinces, it refers to all manners of landowners (*rist* land or private land) with tax and tribute obligations (*gibir*) to the state as a condition of access to land. So, a *gebbar* is the occupant of a gibir-paying land. In the newer and military-administered provinces, it is used variously to refer to (a) those with *gult* or *gibir* obligations where payments are replaced by equivalent service (corvée) on lands granted by the Crown to support its non-farming functionaries; or (b) those in labor-scarce regions who are compelled to transfer the tithe, onerous tribute obligations and service to the soldier-administrators on pain of losing their customary rights to the land. The Oromo agro-pastoralists who conquered much of southern Ethiopia in 1550–1800 surprisingly converted the vanquished (still owners of their plot of land) into servile tributaries through coercive and fictive adoption. As Mohammed Hassen (1994: 63) puts it, "The Oromo adopted the *gebbaro en mass*, giving them clan genealogy, marrying their women, and taking their young into service for herding." The term gebbar is often confused with landlessness (or *chisegna*) which is not necessarily the case since tenants may be better-off farms with capital and labor to rent in more land.

monarchs. Furthermore, the state expanded the independent domains of its agents by freehold grants of large tracts of sparsely occupied land as well as well-settled lands which bitterly resisted the imperial army.

Ye-Mengist Meret was land under the control of the Crown to cover the administrative, military, and retainer expenses of the Court and its regional offices. This was the norm until the emperor's personal property began to be separated from that of the State by Emperor Menelik II. Cultivated by unpaid labor (corvée) or sharecroppers, proceeds from Crown or state lands were designated for the upkeep of Court troops (**Mehal Sefari**) and retainers, not to mention the lavish banquets. In addition to meeting the needs of the central palace, crown lands located in the periphery, were granted to members of the royalty and the military aristocracy whose landlordship was comparable to the Jimma state.

Private freehold, with the right of alienation, was the exception to the rule. Prior to the twentieth century, it was the norm in the garrison towns and the capital city. With the southward expansion of the state at the turn of the twentieth century, freehold in farmland was permitted but still accounted for a small fraction of the arable land during the period under review. However, as we will show below, some kingdoms, most notably Harrar and Jimma, dispensed entirely with communal tenures to create full private ownership rights in land.

Precisely because these regions were under a military administration, at least until new legislations were introduced in the 1940s, soldiers and officials had a free hand to demand extra-customary payments and services.[6] This onerous system, born of expediency, was sometimes unhelpfully analogized with serfdom which, at least in its European or Japanese forms, tied landless peasants to both the land and the administrator-judge landlord who usurped even the social rights of the serfs.

In this respect, one often encounters the hasty conclusion that the thesis of the northernization of southern tenure systems is inapt since landlessness was much higher, and the ethnicity of the ruler often differed from the ruled (Donham 1986; Tareke 1991). While this helps to explain the regional variations in the extent of "decentralized *balabatism*," there is little evidence in the historical record or the core Ethiopian political culture to support the claim that the monarchy based in Shewa introduced an alien system that had not existed in the older districts of the Empire and Shewa itself.

The history of the ethnically diverse North instead shows that territorial annexation, punitive military expeditions, international migration, the establishment of military colonies, and cultural assimilation were the most widely shared strategies among tribute-seeking peoples (Tigre, Agew, Amara, and Oromo) for imposing

[6] Perham (1969: 307) characterizes the system this way: "The military practice almost universal in the south may be illustrated from Limmu. Menelik quartered some of his own soldiers in eastern Limmu, and families of the Galla [Oromo] inhabitants were made into *gabars*, each one obliged to support a soldier… They had to build his hut and to provide, according to his will, all that he required from them of their agricultural produce, meat and honey… The *gabar* families were registered upon a list and it was the duty of the local headman to see that there were enough of them to support the soldiers."

overlordship over their subjects. Having an outer ring of tribute-paying dependencies in the periphery was indeed an important mechanism for relieving the intense pressure on an already overburdened economic base at the center. Ethiopian history is full of accounts of autonomous principalities paying or refusing to pay tribute in gold, grain, concubines, or slaves to overlords depending on the ability of the latter to credibly enforce these claims.

A reinvigorated SS finally undertook long overdue institutional reforms. Beginning in 1942, the newly restored imperial government issued a series of decrees and proclamations with the intention of minimizing state reliance on overlordship and rationalizing landlordship in a bid to build a unified and modern system of taxation. However, differences persisted across the regions especially the presence of large holdings by Church, Crown and state lands (especially in Arsi, Gamo-Gofa, and Sidamo) and significant absenteeism (especially in the larger provinces of Shewa, Harrarge, Keffa and Sidamo).

Illustrative survey data on landholding, tenancy and land-use patterns by province in the mid-1960s are provided in Table 4.4 (see Woldemariam 1984, for a critical evaluation of the survey data by the Ministry of Land Reform Administration). The national agrarian system that emerged after the legislative reforms of the 1940s had an interesting profile (Mantel-Niecko 1980; Hoben 1973; Bekele 1995). Firstly, half of the farms had less than 1 ha of tilled land, and the large inter-provincial differences in land quality are positively correlated with differences in average size holdings. Secondly, while 90 percent of small farms in the northern provinces (Tigre, Begemdir, Gojam, and Wollo) were owner-operated, this was true for only half of the farmers in the southern provinces. Thirdly, a little less than half of the land in the southern provinces was under *rist* and freehold tenure while over three-fourths of the land in the northern provinces was *rist* land of various colorations. Moreover, slightly above one-third of both the cultivators and the cultivated land were under tenancy arrangements (mainly share tenancy).[7]

In the ensuing three decades, Emperor Haile Selassie I managed to incorporate the overlord class into a centralized state bureaucracy. As a result, the upper echelon of the regional nobility (now uprooted and predominantly urban-based) became politically rootless as was the smallholder peasantry. The state's fiscal base has now become more secure due to the shift towards import-export taxes (especially coffee) and foreign economic assistance. Toward the end of the period, agricultural income taxes accounted for no more than a sixth of government revenue (Cohen and Weintraub 1975; Chole 1990).

[7] Share tenancy has two key economic attributes: it allows for risk sharing which is important in a highly uncertain environment; and it discourages tenant investment if productivity-sharing is not matched equitably with cost-sharing (Deininger 2003). The combination of incipient commercialization and absentee landlordism triggered tenant evictions in a handful of districts that were being integrated with the urban economy. A half-hearted tenancy reform legislation, introduced under donor pressure, languished in Parliament only to be overtaken by the nationalization of all land in 1975 (Ellis 1976).

Table 4.4 A profile of the land tenure systems of imperial Ethiopia, c. 1970

	Land use and tenancy			Land ownership by holder		Yield/size	
	% Cultivated: rented (partly)	% Cultivated: <1 ha	% Tenant: total (partly)	Freehold (%absentee)	Chruch: various	Govt and other	Rank: Y/H
A. North							
Begemdir (Gondar)	na	70	15 (6)	rist	na	na	4/12
Gojam	na	54	20 (7)	rist	na	na	9/11
Tigray	na	78	25 (18)	rist	na	na	na
B. Central							
Shewa	55 (17)	47	67 (16)	54 (67)	14	32	5/8
Wollo	14 (25)	80	55 (9)	82 (40)	14	4	3/5
C. South							
Arsi	51 (11)	31	52 (7)	41 (27)	17	42	2/10
Bale	na	na	na	48 (12)	2	50	1/7
Gemu Gofa	46 (6)	94	47 (4)	17 (50)	5	78	12/1
Hararge	46 (15)	76	54 (5)	45 (48)	17	38	10/3
Illubabor	67 (17)	69	75 (2)	49 (42)	5	46	8/6
Keffa	67 (4)	58	62 (3)	44 (50)	3	53	6/4
Sidamo	35 (1)	91	39 (2)	43 (47)	3	54	7/2
Wellega	49 (5)	65	59 (5)	44 (28)	5	51	11/9

Sources: Ministry of Land Reform Administration, *Reports of Land Tenure Survey, 1967–1970*; Central Statistical Office, *National Sample Survey, 1963–1967*; Central Statistics Office, *Agricultural Sample Survey, 1979–1980* (for the Y/H data).

1. The proportion of full owner-operators ranged from 85% in Begemdir to 28% in Shewa. *na*=not available. *(partly)* part tenant

2. Ranking (Eritrea and Tigre are excluded): *Y*=crop yields (kg/ha—1 being the highest), and *H*=size of holdings (1 being the smallest)

4.3 The Jimma State: Landlordism, Slavery, and Free Trade

As the Shewan elite prepared to resume the flagbearer status of the Ethiopian state in the closing decades of the nineteenth century, the country's frontiers comprised a number of Cushitic and Nilotic groups most of which were organized around clan and sub-clan polities (Fernyhough 1986). Others boasted highly-centralized but small-scale kingdoms, Emirates, chiefdoms, and monarchies.

Pervasive patron-client relations and the institution of age-set classes defined the political economy of most Southern polities in the Rift Valley and the southeastern highlands as well as in the southwestern lowlands. While the peripheral acephalous societies remained stateless and thereby vulnerable to plunder and enslavement, the Omotic (Gonga) monarchies such as the Seka and the Keffa were centralized and despotic. Many of these kingdoms were tributaries of the Christian Gondarine state.

Aside from engaging in endless skirmishes amongst themselves, they contended with the post-Gondar state-builders of Shewa and Gojam as well as with each other over land and mutual enslavement (Abbink, 2014).

Given the abundance of land in the early history of many, but not by any means all subregions of the greater South, rulers depended on the extraction of labor services. Where labor was abundant, maximizing the share of the independently-produced economic surplus was the sole objective of the ruling class as was the case in the North. To underscore the power of economic necessity in shaping governance institutions, we will take a brief look at the paths of political development in this region.

The centralized mini-states of these regions were the Kefficho states (Konta, Kullo, Kucha, and Wollamo/Wolayta), the Gibe states (Limmu-Ennarya, Guma, Gomma, Gerra, and Jimma), and the Didessa states (Gudru, Legamara, and Leqa). Technologically, they were adept at Northern-derived plow agriculture. These were supplemented or dominated by hoe cultivation of enset and other tubers. The Kefficho, Wollamo, and Ennarya states were, in fact, semi-Christianized tributaries of Sarsa Dengel and other Gondarine emperors.

The better-organized southern polities fall in two categories: the successors of a number of Muslim emirates (Ifat, Bali, Afar, Harrari, Hadya, Bilen, Beni Amer, Beni Shangul, Guma, and Jimma). The other was the nominally Christian chiefdoms and kingdoms (Agew, Janjero, Gamo, Gurage, Wolayta, Kembata, Kunama, Nuer, Wellega, and Sidama). The outermost circle comprised a disparate and small segmentary groups along the borders of colonial Kenya and Anglo-Egyptian Sudan. The weakest borderland communities were mercilessly exploited or enslaved by everyone else (Donham and James 2002; Lewis 2001; Spaulding and Kapteijns 2002).

The most illustrious examples of non-Axumite state formation in Ethiopia are Keffa, Wollamo/Wollayta, Janjero/Yamma, Kembatta, and Jimma. These states, by being highly despotic and presiding on catlike small-scale societies, provide in interesting counterpoint to the Shewan model—perhaps as the exceptions to the rule.

In Keffa, all land was owned by the king. A hierarchy of nobles held fiefs conditional on military obligations (cavalry and infantry). Furthermore, high and low **lineage groups** coexisted; and tributary principalities were formed in conquered regions. Keffa was a unitary state with a high degree of class differentiation and a nominally absolutist and divine ruler who was dependent on direct economic extraction from land and trade.

The Oromo, the biggest ethnolinguistic group, is distinctive for several reasons. These attributes include their large population size (comprising a third of the Ethiopian population today), territorial reach (found in almost all provinces), dual historical role as expansionists and as victims of counter reactions, a penchant for renaming places and people they conquered, and adeptness in learning from host populations. As a culture group, they are also characterized by a diversity of lineage, polity, economic base, and a decisive interstitial role.

The ideal-type Oromo traditional political culture evinces the segmentary, highly mobile, martial, and egalitarian organization of agro-pastoralism (Lewis 2011; Legesse 1973; Hassen 1994). Family is more important than kinship. Relationships based on co-residence are highly valued for group action such as defense, endemic internecine wars, or invasion of neighboring communities.

As in many other traditional African societies, governance was both gerontocratic and largely merit-based. The pre-state rotational ***gadaa*** age-grade system of clan governance (aka **democracies of age**) lacked any office with executive power. It fed what some characterize as a war-culture of expansion and annihilation of vanquished communities through forced absorption (Prins 1953; Legesse 1973). As we will see below, some successful warriors, eventually subverted the loose confederacy of Oromo clans in manageable geographic confines as well as their pastoral communitarian governance system. In the Gibe region, Wellega, northern Shewa, and parts of Wollo, a warlord class of large landowners and overlords over rist-holders adopted class-based practices or were integrated into the Gondarine and Shewan states.

It could not have been otherwise since the economic basis of communitarian institutions no longer exists. This political metamorphosis of the Oromo was apparently triggered by the forcible fanning out of the watersheds of the Shebelle and Gennale rivers under intense pressure from equally expansionist and clan-based Somali agro-pastoralists (Trimingham 1965; Lewis 2003; Hassen 2017). During 1550–1850, the Oromo engineered a relentless invasion and migration northeast to Harrar, north and west to the greater Shewa and the greater Sidama zones. To a lesser extent, they also moved to the edge of regions populated by various Omotic and Nilotic groups in the Kenyan and Sudanese borders.

Their intense search for land, cattle, and slaves resulted in a wholesale dispossession of the most productive lands in the country as well as the forcible absorption of myriad conquered peoples. During the nineteenth century, those Oromo lineages adopted Islam or Christianity managed to found several powerful dynasties. The political houses of the Wollo, the Yeju, the Raya, and the Tulema vied for power in the Gondarine and Shewan courts. The Mecha also established their own mini-states by taking over or imitating the well-established Sidama and Kefficho monarchies in the Gibe region of southwestern Ethiopia (Lewis 2011; Hassen 1994).

The more notable of the Gibe kingdoms (Limmu-Ennarya, Gera, Goma, and Jimma) were small-scale monarchies imposed on settled agriculturalists and merchants. Subsequent to victory, the Oromo clan-warrior class (the *Abba Dula*) transmogrified into a ruling class of rich soldier-administrators (*Abba Qoro* and *Abba Ganda*) under the authority of absolutist kings. Their newly-minted nobility (*Sorresa*) controlled extensive family estates on a freehold basis on a scale unknown in contemporary Ethiopian society. These lands were tended by the dispossessed native peasantry as well as the disempowered former pastoralists of the same Oromo clans as tenants or as slaves.

As these regimes congealed, a class-differentiated subject population was inevitably created. Upward mobility was possible for the talented and the loyal from modest backgrounds through two distinct channels: the military route, and the merchant route. This was an innovation shared by the various Ethiopian Muslim principalities.

The best-documented state which provides an interesting contrast to the nineteenth-century Shewan statehood is the southwestern micro-state of Jimma. The Muslim emirate of Jimma, whose existence spanned 1800–1932, was one of the best known of the seven Oromo kingdoms in the highlands—five Muslim (Gera, Goma, Guma, Jimma, and Limu-Ennarya) and four indigenous (the two Leqa, Nole, and Hama). The Jimma dynasty coincided roughly with the consolidation of the Shewan dynasty under Sahle Selassie (See Box 4.2). It deserves a closer look.

Box 4.2 Two Contrasting Models of Governance: Sahle Selassie of Shewa and Abba Jiffar of Jimma

State formation in nineteenth-century Ethiopia followed two models: a Christian state and an Islamic state. The reason is obvious enough: the universalist ideology of Islam or Christianity is an effective mobilization tool that cuts across ethnic, regional, or other parochial identities. What is interesting here is the different strategies employed to build and consolidate states using the two universalist ideologies, but in radically different cultural settings.

Sahle Selassie of Shewa (r. 1813–1847), the father of Haile Melekot and the grandfather of Menelik II**,** was a Negus of Shewa, Ifat, Gurage. and Arsi (1813–1847) and the founder of a dynasty that led Ethiopia after the Scramble for Africa. Sahle Selassie put down a major rebellion in 1834–1835, handled a major famine with generosity, and had to deal with the fission in the Orthodox Church between the s*ost bet* doctrine of the North and *qibat* doctrine lead by the Debre Libanos of Shewa. He also undertook several administrative reforms in the shadow of the waning decades of the Gondarine state. He reformed the harsh edges of both the Fetha Negest and traditional practices of justice. He limited executions to extreme cases of treason, sacrilege and murder; introduced a fairer and reliable form of a new structure of taxation; and developed relationships with foreign power search especially of access to firearms. As the other provinces wallowed in the chaos of warlordism during the Era of the Princes (1770–1855), Sahle Selassie and his heirs built a would-be dynasty to eventually vie for the Imperial throne after 1875 (succeeding in 1889).

Abba Jiffar I of Jimma (r. 1800–1855) was the founder of the Muslim Oromo monarchist state of Jimma which traces its beginning to 1790 in Hirmata. Abba Jiffar was the son of Abba Magal. After abandoning the communal (*gadaa*) system of the pastoral Oromo upon defeating of Keffa and Illubabor, Abba Jiffar I consolidated and expanded political and military base his father had provided him into what came to be the Kingdom of Jimma. According to oral tradition, Abba Jiffar I, as the 4th *moti* (war leader), claimed the right to the extensive areas of the newly conquered lands for his family and loyal war chiefs. Abba Jiffar II, the 8th Moti of Jimma (r. 1878–1932), conquered a part of Janjero State. In 1884, he submitted to Emperor Menelik II and paid tribute from 1886 onwards, thus ensuring the autonomy of his kingdom with the title of Negus until his death.

A highly revealing contrast between the two Southern models of Ethiopian state formation may be summarized as follows:

1. The Christian Shewan state relied, for its fiscal base, on income from royal lands, a portion of the tribute Crown appointees collected from farmers, herders, and merchants. The Muslim Jimma state relied on the income

(continued)

from the gigantic landholding of Abba Jiffar and the long-distance trade it embraced, most notably from the slave trade. That is, the Shewan ideal was one of a landed peasanty while the Jimma ideal was big landlordism that had no precedent in Ethiopian history.
2. The Shewan state had to rely on indirect extraction and conscripted peasant militia for its big battles. The Jimma state was essentially a slave state which relied on a combination of large armies of slaves as well as requisitioned the Oromo and local peasanty to cultivate the vast estates of the war leaders.
3. The subversion of the clan-based gadaa system (following the conquest of vast non-Oromo lands into a free-trading but an oppressive state of Abba Jiffar I) stands in an ironically unfavorable contrast with a tributarist state of Sahle Selassie.

Jimma provides one possible template for what a scaled-up Oromo state might have looked like. For one, it managed to master four of the six building-blocks of a viable state: a common ideology in Islam, a lingua franca in Oromiffa, sufficient coercive power (to ensure law and order, and secure borders), and a broad-based fiscal base. Like the bigger Shewan state which eventually swallowed these southwestern kingdoms, Jimma Abba Jiffar lacked two other essential capabilities: provision of adequate basic public services (beyond enforcing land rights and protecting traders), and sufficient restraints on the state elite to observe the rule of law. In sum, Jimma was basically an efficiently despotic and monolingual Islamic state with little resemblance to the pre-state *gossa*-based Oromo polities.

In Jimma, an unprecedented landlordism was instituted—an innovation that was certainly un-Oromo also and un-Ethiopian by the standards of both GS and SS. The apex was occupied by the king (and his royal descent group) and a class of warlords (nobility: *abba lafa* or *abba biya*). The kingdom was rigidly centralized and controlled thousands of landless tenants and bonded laborers. Free market in land was the norm in a country where land was sellable but not a commodity. The king directly controlled the army through appointed but largely unpaid governors under the command of the *abba dula*. A unitary state was forged with an absolutist ruler who was, however, refreshingly dependent on land taxes and trade taxes. In contrast with Ze-Dengel and Tewodros II, Jimma Abba Jiffar I may rightly be given the ironically anti-*gadaa* epithet: "Land is free, but man is unfree." The inanimate object was luckier than the animate one.

A novelty of the Jimma monarchy was that land was privately owned and relatively freely capitalizable. The King, not claiming to own all land even, in theory, was simply the biggest landlord in the kingdom. He headed an independently-landed ruling class which included many economically but not militarily powerful families (Lewis 2011; Fernyhough 1986).

This landholding system affected the mode of monarchical governance in several important respects. It allowed for a rather modern distinction between state assets

and personal assets—something which took the Shewan state much longer to establish. High-ranking state offices were non-hereditary which gave the ruler the latitude to emphasize merit tempered by the need for loyalty. No official was allowed to live by direct taxation although many received outright land grants. Others were unpaid notables of independent means who derived non-pecuniary benefits from official titles.

Accordingly, the king retained and paid his own military rather than relying on the requisitionable militia of the regional governors. As in Shewa, appointed governors were rotated frequently to prevent the acquisition of an independent power base. Finally, revenue from the slave trade as well as slave-cultivated estates was of great importance which is unusual for an Ethiopian polity. Abba Jiffar II (r. 1878–1932) himself was reputed to have personally owned some 10,000 slaves which prompted Emperor Menelik II to call on him to manumit them.

Interestingly, the subversion of the communal ethos of a pre-state Oromo and the complete takeover of the well-established Sidama kingdoms by the Oromo warrior class created the presumption of a tabula rasa in land tenure, ideology, and political authority (Fernyhough 1986). The Jimma autocracy introduced to the region a rather modern system of big landlordism where land was treated as a commodity, and cultivation was done in the style of the Latin *minifundia* by a mixture of indentured labor (corvée and slaves) and tenant labor. Just as importantly, the concentration of power in the household of the king overcame the fetters of communal obligations while permitting some delineation of the public sphere and the private sphere.

Though smallness (less than half a million subjects) and land-lockedness were major constraints, the maintenance of law and order, and the protection of private property rights facilitated the emergence of a thriving economy. This remarkably efficient landlord-cum-slave system managed to expand its fiscal base by promoting organized production of cash crops, a thriving slave trade, and an extensive cottage industry.[8]

Economic logic ensured that the other attributes of Jimma to be similar to the Shewan model. An aggressive program of territorial expansion resulted in the confiscation of much land from weaker communities as well as constant mutual raiding among neighboring principalities. Frequent promotion, in the classic Ethiopian fashion, was also followed by the demotion of top non-hereditary officials was a favorite tactic for preventing the proliferation of competing power centers. Crown Councils had little power in both cases which explain the persistence of disruptive conflicts over succession.

[8] The contrasting Shewa-Jimma models of Ethiopian state formation provide a much-needed corrective for two strands of rather sterile debate on Ethiopian historiography (Donham and James 2002; Clapham 2002): the great history of a semitized Abyssinia (represented by Shewa) as against the anthropology of the Cushitic remainder (represented by Jimma). The first is stereotypically presented as a feudo-imperial state while the latter is presented as a *gadaa*-democratic state although this clan-based system did not even include all Oromo much less embracing universal equality that modern liberalism demands. Both regimes were quintessentially African, autocratic, and patrimonial. If anything, the Shewa state was more liberal culturally while the Jimma state was more liberal economically.

The transformation of some Oromo lineages into hierarchical, centralized, and coercive modes of state governance in the five monarchies of the upper Gibe (as well as the hybrid dynasties of central Wollo and Yeju) invite three notable observations. First, the warrior class ingeniously turned the communal-pastoralist Oromo culture into a political instrument of a class-based state building. Where the Oromo warrior class attained a politically dominant position, as in the small Gibe kingdoms, it insisted on a complete surrender of the identities of the conquered. The stratagems included inventing fictitious Oromo genealogies for the vanquished, vertical mobility based on merit, submission to Oromo religious and renaming practices, and a relatively liberal adoption of the kidnapped children of the defeated.

In some sense, Jimma Abba Jiffar showed an efficient but self-limiting way to create a nation out of disparate peoples.[9] Interestingly, in regions where the Oromo were politically subservient, they assimilated remarkably well (as in Harrar, Shewa, Wollo, and Gojam). In Wollo and Gojam, assimilation went even to the point of the newcomers (as was the case for the Manchu in China) eventually losing their language and vying effectively for the highest offices of the state by forming political powerhouses.

4.4 The Limits of Tributarism for Nation-State Formation

It should be clear by now that, in the mixed crop-animal complex of the highlands, a high degree of contestability of power (i. e., social mobility across class positions and status lines) pervaded the low-trust chain of surplus extraction. The multilayered network of personalized reciprocity throughout the hierarchy, down from the Emperor to the lowliest soldier, may be usefully called *tribute farming*. The tribute farmer, unlike the tax farmer, engages in the collection and sharing of tribute having been empowered by superiors with some political authority. Given its extractive bent, tribute farming inevitably engendered a conflict trap.

4.4.1 Land Institutions and Political Culture

While class positions were rigid, social mobility for individuals was significant and at times meritocratic. An ambitious and capable individual often occupied more than one class position at the same time or moved up a class status or two within the

[9] Mohammed Hassen (1994: 197) offers the following explanation for the inability of the fractious Oromo mini-states of the southwest to consolidate their stateness by building on a shared political culture: "In short, both Limmu-Ennarya and Jimma failed to unify the region into a single political unit… First, the rivalry among the Gibe rulers consumed their creative energy and diverted their attention from the common danger that was to ruin all of them… Secondly, the weakness of the defense system was reflected in the absence of firearms in the Gibe region and Wallaga."

structure of overlordship. Many upstarts with an invented royal pedigree even managed to turn their martial skills into an emperorship—Kassa of Quara (Tewodros II) and Kassa of Enderta (Yohannes IV) come to mind (Caulk 1978a; b; Crummey 1986; Wolde Aregay 1986). Furthermore, the resources that can be captured through arm's-length tributarism imposed sharp limits on the size of the ruling class or the emergence of a distinct class culture—the overlord was little more than a glorified peasant in both worldview and life style, at least until after World War II.

This reading of Ethiopian economic history and the history of the state throws a much-needed light on several of features of Ethiopian agrarian relations. Authority, including that of the emperor, was rarely hereditary. Resourceful upstarts with good martial and leadership skills had the incentive to form coalitions among disgruntled members of the nobility, the gentry, and even the peasantry to win high offices. That was why young princes were banished for life to glorified penal colonies, and the defiant outlaw out to redress injustice by a ruler is the stuff of legend in rural Ethiopia. These personalized contests came close to extinguishing the state during 1770–1855 and ended only with the establishment of a modern bureaucracy after 1930.

The multi-ethnic nobility was a politically and socially self-conscious aristocracy headed by the monarch. The governors of the large provinces and hereditary principalities enjoyed significant autonomy from the Crown to be able to enforce whimsical modes of governance. Membership in the ruling class was based on a combination of the pedigree of birth, merit (martial and administrative), loyalty to the overlord, and hereditary rights. Big-manism, deeply steeped in martial ethos, shaped the patron-client relationship throughout the chain of hierarchy, and each player in this choreography ritualistically 'cringed to superiors and condescended to inferiors.' Pervasive shirking and low trust among the elite, of course, had the effect of magnifying myopia which discouraged public investment in infrastructure, extension services, and education.

Low-level administrators and the ecclesiastical elite served as intermediaries between the producer and the non-productive classes by enforcing obedience, tribute payments, and militia obligations. Being a member of the yeomanry and yet advantaged by better financial and human capital, this stratum might have served as an agent of systemic change. The gentry could have used its limited but not inconsiderable political skills to organize peasant movements for reform (see Tareke 1991, for an overly heroic rendering of sporadic peasant-based insurgencies), or to invest its own resources in the production of wealth. It was, however, too politically dependent and heterogeneous to come to its own.

Peasants for their part colluded with challengers and pretenders in the hope of getting a break from the winner. Just as often, they followed an upstart overlord into less defended and less populated districts in search of land or tribute payers. The lesser ***Gobez Aleqa*** sought to build up their "reputational capital" as worthy local leaders by their martial skills, generosity, and astuteness in the low-intensity arms race. When all else failed, producers sought to increase their welfare by limiting output to subsistence levels, especially livestock wealth, which was most prone to be looted (Pankhurst 1966; Caulk 1978a, b; Tareke 1991).

The soldiery, along with the priesthood, was an important outlet for young peasants who understandably loathed the life of the lowly farmer. Soldiers historically attached themselves to regional strongmen or the imperial army and, being mostly non-salaried for a good half of the period under review, lived off herdsmen and cultivators. When social order broke down, unscrupulous governors resorted to looting with impunity even their own home districts, let alone more distant and better-endowed borderlands.

It was a sign of progress that the institution of a specialized soldier-gentry class (***Chewa***), was gradually supplanted by the imperial army and regional *neftegna* militia. It is, therefore, understandable that when the fortune of their overlord changed for the worse, the retinue displayed their rational opportunism by unceremoniously switching sides in favor of the victor (Caulk 1978a, b; Tegenu 2007). The highly personalized model of traditional leadership and followership was unstable indeed.

The Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church, as the fountainhead of education and the symbol of national unity, provided ideological justification for the existing order. In return, it benefited handsomely from royal patronage in the form of large endowments of *gult* land. The priesthood was predominantly of peasant stock. The upper echelon of the ecclesiastical elite, which comprised the leaderships of the autonomous monasteries and the highly decentralized parishes, showed little inclination for reformist activism when it came to economic life or civil rights. As the reformist Emperor Tewodros discovered in the 1860s, the Church was a bastion of conservatism when it comes to tinkering with the tributary system.

The merchant class, consisting mostly of politically marginalized Ethiopian Muslims and small colonies of expatriates (mainly Yemeni, Indian, Armenian and Greek), was engaged in the domestic long-distance trade or external trade. Long distance trade was highly valued and protected by fiscally constrained rulers since it enabled agricultural surpluses, and alluvial gold or forest products to be sold in distant markets or exported abroad to finance imports of arms and luxury goods. The low-productivity economy could not support sizable towns, much less big cities. As a result, most of the domestically produced handicrafts and tools, quite inferior when compared with those of Egypt, China or India, were supplied mostly by endogamous artisanal minorities (Gamst 1970; Pankhurst 2012). The material culture was hardly more distinguished than the political culture.

4.4.2 Impact on Economic Development

Ethiopia's tributary agrarian system, which long ago emerged out of its tribal cocoon managed to outlive its shelf life for too long. The inescapable conclusion is that agricultural underdevelopment in Ethiopia had to do with the uneasy coexistence of a landed but incompletely free peasantry and a powerful but fragmented overlord class deadlocked over the distribution of rural surplus. Demographic pressure is, in reality, endogenous to the process in that it tends to raise land productivity but lowers labor productivity (Abegaz 2005; McCann 1995).

James McCann (1987, 1995) rightly notes that the Ethiopian agrarian cycle opens as the population expanded into areas with a relatively abundant land. Here, residence-based and open-access institutions prevail. Demographic pressure manifested itself in such processes as migration to the highlands by pastoral people and the lowlands by the sedentary people. The non-irrigable river valleys enjoyed good land but an unhealthy climate and a higher variability of precipitation.

An overriding motivation of the *balager* was securing the subsistence needs of the family—a goal that was constantly undermined by predatory wars, pestilence, and weather-related crises (Pankhurst 1966). In scarce land regions, agricultural intensification in the form of biological and labor investment, multiple cropping, and reduced fallow periods were used to enhance output per acre. In labor scarce zones, expanding the use of animal traction and attracting wage labor or tenants were important. The economics of a subsistence tributary system, however, militated against significant capital deepening or the application of innovative technology.

In this environment, the peasantry displayed extraordinary resourcefulness by resisting dispossession of its customary landholdings, switching to more lucrative occupations (soldiery and priesthood), and expanding the area of cultivation, altering crop or livestock mix (in favor of sorghum, maize, and khat), or even foregoing above-subsistence production in the knowledge that what is not produced cannot be stolen. Too few found it rewarding to invest in human and physical capital in the absence of an incentive-compatible social contract (Easterly 2001).

Unable to build a strong united front, the tributor class was left to fight over increasingly meager scraps. Unable to turn its access to land into political autonomy, the landed peasantry became pauperized.

Smallholders under-invested in productive assets and over-invested in defensive assets relative to the optimal level because of high insecurity regarding both the *rate* of taxation (tribute) and its capricious *variability*. In the absence of credible protection by the State, the Ethiopian peasant remained woefully and willfully poor responding only to demographic pressure to restore subsistence requirements. This social class, in effect, resigned itself to an untenable life of "getting by"—a condition that is ironically idealized in the folk version of Church teachings. The dissipation of scarce resources on predation or resistance against pillage, therefore, undermined the foundations for high agricultural productivity. The political trap pushed the entire economy into a poverty trap.

The military tradition of this agrarian system can then be understood as a product of the interactions among the three sources of elite wealth: land whose scarcity rose steadily, labor whose scarcity fell steadily, and income overrights for the titled class whose value fluctuated withe the seesaw between the independent producer and the state-dependent appropriator. The hemmed state elites operated in this manner until the ascendancy of Shewa with its access to cash crop-based revenues and steady increase in urbanization.

Figure 4.3 illustrates a model of distributional contests between wealth appropriators and wealth producers. It captures the behavior of the two contending classes of a tributary agrarian economy.

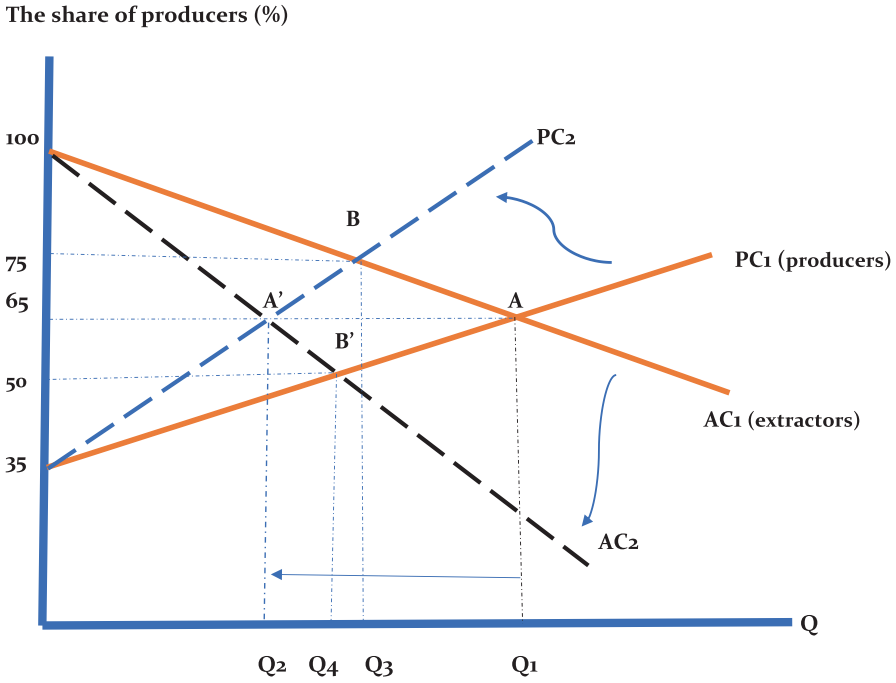

Fig. 4.3 Endogeneity of output shares and production level under tributarism. (*Sources and Notes:* Author). Effects of distributional struggles (from initial equilibrium, A). B': AC1 pivots to AC2 but PC1 remains unchanged (extractor share rises from 35% to 50%): output declines markedly to Q4 due to the disincentive of producers to maintain high production. B: PC1 pivots to PC2 but AC1 remains unchanged (producer share rises from 65% to 75%): output declines to Q3 due to the disincentive for extractors to maintain their violence-reducing public services to producers. A': PC1 pivots to PC2 and AC1 to AC2 (negative-sum extractive contests between appropriators and producers with initial shares restored in the ratio of 35%:65%): output declines markedly to Q2

What we call the *appropriator curve* is a negatively-sloped demand curve which indicates that the income share of the arms-length appropriator class is negatively related to the level of output (Q). The provision of public services by the titled ruling class (such as peace, enforcement of property rights, and public services) depends in large part on the share in total output to which public authorities are customarily or legally entitled.

What we call the *producer curve* is a positively-sloped supply curve which suggests that a higher share, by producers, that accrues to producers incentivizes them to be more productive. This means zero-sum distributional contests (downward shift in AC and upward shift in PC—shrinking pie) result in shrinking output. Similarly, positive-sum distributional contests (upward shift in A and downward shift in P—increasing pie) stimulate agricultural output.

What lessons do history and development theory provides for an escape from such a trap? Three possibilities come to mind (Abegaz 2004). The first escape route was for the peasantry to have collectively extricated itself from this socially-embedded tributary bondage by defeating the ruling class politically. Unlike the case of

European or Japanese feudalism which produced capitalism because of a successful alliance between specialists of violence and farmers and merchants, this option proved all but impossible in Ethiopia given the geographic and cultural diversity of the peasantry and its abject poverty.

The second avenue was for the class of overlords to reinvent themselves into a class of landlords through a decisive victory over the propertied peasantry and the monarch. By so doing, they might have created market-oriented estates worked by a servile labor force. Whether it takes the manorial form, the plantation form, or even that of the Asian hydraulic form in some regions, this path would have likely enhanced the generation of marketable surplus to underwrite an industrialization drive.[10] Again, the Ethiopian ruling class failed to overcome its internal disunity and incessant invasion from abroad to make this a viable escape route.

The third route was for a coalition of the urban classes and the peasantry, led by members of the intelligentsia, to mount a revolution. This path was indeed taken in 1974. The overlord class and the landlord class as well as the *ristegna* peasantry failed to put up any resistance against land expropriation by the new state elite. The widely held hope was that a low-tax/high-investment strategy would prevail to generate robust economic growth. The results, as we see in the next chapter, included complete political capture of the peasantry, continued agrarian stasis in the face of intense demographic pressure, and an overbearing state elite.

So, per our hypothesis, what prevented the full-fledged emergence of a modern political order with a robust national state and accountability in Shewan Ethiopia? As noted by Clapham (1969, 1988), there were two critical points at which post-WWII Ethiopian state consolidation was failing. The most obvious was the failure to integrate a geopolitically important but an economic drain that was Eritrea, where the resistance that had started in the early 1960s had 10 years later turned into a major insurgency. Despite a huge subsidy to Eritrea and Eritreans, the former province seceded in 1993 after a costly war. One can safely say, in fact, that the protracted secessionist wars centered in Eritrea and the much-neglected Ogaden did immeasurable damage to the Ethiopian state.

The second, less immediately threatening but with more damaging potential long-term consequence, was the failure to integrate much of southern and western Ethiopia. This was a region on which the country had become economically dependent, and which was subjected to a system of social, political and economic exploitation that eventually become unsustainable. Clapham should perhaps have added a third factor: the economic and political marginalization of the four historic Abyssinian provinces of Tigray, Gondar, Wollo, and Gojam (as well parts of northeast Shewa) whose neglected peasantry were doubly insulted by losing their *rist* rights in ancestral farmland after the 1975 land nationalization.

These explanations, by invoking proximate causes, still beg the question of why SS failed to complete the project of building a nationally-integrated and capable state. A promising place to look for the ultimate causes for the incompleteness of the nation-state building project of Shewa is the interface between land institutions and state institutions.

[10] I explore what it would take for Africa to mount a successful very-late industrialization drive in another volume (Abegaz 2018).

Basically, the Shewan *sireet-sir'at* nexus which favored a ruling class whose primary route to wealth accumulation was the acquisition of ever higher military ranks and loftier civilian titles. This system of overlordship had momentous implications for the political and economic order. State authority tended to be both over people for service and over land for tribute in the core provinces. However, it was over people in large parts of the highland periphery where the land/labor ratio was high.

As we will argue in the next chapter, the most telling sign of how far SS had deviated from the governance model set earlier by the Gondar is the way it fell. The old state elites which had the most to lose from the abolition of the monarchy, being entirely urban-based and dependent on the Emperor, could not develop an alternative political base.

The contestants for the capture of SS were not interested in crowning themselves; they instead wished to abolish it in favor of a republican form of government. The contestants, unlike the regional warlords of yesteryear, lacked an autonomous economic base to reward followers and to fund the requisite militia. They were instead products of the state itself—as beneficiaries of modern education and as public employees. This explanation has domestic and external dimensions.

Domestic Extractive Contests: The use of tributarism as a conceptual entry point bares the intimate linkages between property rights and productivity. Secure control over the production process (either by a peasantry or by a landlord class) provides a strong incentive for productivity-enhancing investment. Ethiopian patrimonialism clearly failed to meet this requirement of modernity.

Shewan tributary relations existed between the Emperor and the hierarchy of underlings (internal tributarism) as well as between the Emperor and various self-governing principalities in the borderlands (external tributarism). One objective of the Crown, which was accomplished, was to transform external tributarism into an internal one through territorial expansion and consolidation. The other, much harder challenge, was to transition from a tributary state to a tax state.

Royal absolutism as a description of practice is, therefore, largely inapt in this case for two reasons (Perham 1969). Firstly, because power was fragmented rather than concentrated. Incessant contests for the most lucrative titles and offices were the norm among state elites. Secondly, the system was also vulnerable to endemic contestations between the overlord aristocracy and the landed peasantry over economic appropriation (Tables 4.5 and 4.6).

As a part of Italian East Africa, Ethiopia momentary lost its sovereignty, a good portion of the small cadre of the educated was liquidated, good farmland was designated for Italian settlement, an urban-based military administration was consolidated, an alien ethnically- and racially-segregated administrations were introduced, and the incipient modern infrastructure was hastily expanded (Larebo 1994; Sbacchi 1985). Just as importantly, the titled and nationalist aristocracy was dispossessed of its land and positions. This, to a large extent, wiped the slate almost clean for the reinvention of the Ethiopian state under a post-Menelik Shewan dynasty.

Although the de facto British military administration of 1941–1944 had a big influence on government policy, the restored Emperor Haile Selassie I managed to

Table 4.5 Features of political order under three post-axumite tates

Institution	Basic Requirements	Tributary Gondarine state	Territorial Shewan state	Revolutionary National state
Modern state	• Capable • Beyond friends and family • (kinship + reciprocity) • Impersonal	• Weakly centralized • Civilizational, more than territorial • Crown = State	• Recentralization • Weak separation of crown and state • Modernization	• Hyper-centralization • Separation of church and state • Modernization
Rule of law	• Checked and balanced • Binding on all	• Church and KN authority • Defied when too binding	• KN-based constitution • Landed peasantry and gentry	• Marxist-Leninist ideology • Rule by law; noRule of law
Account-Ability	• Moral as well as procedural (electoral) • Responsive	• No parliament but crown council • Taxation w/ right to petition	• Weak parliament and constitution • Weak bureaucracy • Urban-rural split	• Constitutions and parliament • Absolutist elite • Development for legitimacy
All three	• Capitalism + representative • Benevolent + dictatorship	• Tributary + decentralized authoritarianism • Wars	• Territorial + bureaucratic autocracy • Peace (mostly)	• Statist • Authoritarian • Doctrinaire • Paternalistic

Sources and Notes: culled from various sources discussed in the text
KN=Kibre Negest

gain a free hand in centralizing state administration along neo-patrimonial lines (Perham 1969; Zewde 2001). A revised Constitution was introduced in 1955 with universal suffrage for a parliament enjoying highly limited powers. Primary, secondary, and tertiary schools were expanded or introduced for the first time, and the building of a professional military and modern infrastructure resumed with the help of coffee exports and foreign (mainly American) aid.

Despite the clamor by the intelligentsia that was emerging from these modern institutions, deeper reforms (land reform, free press, political parties, and genuine popular sovereignty) were resisted by the imperial autocracy. True to form, little attention was paid to orderly succession by the aristocracy, including preparing its ablest children to lead an inclusionary modern state.

State-building in the Age of Imperialism As one of the few remaining non-colonies, Ethiopia had to endure the disadvantages of lateness in the form of relentless assaults on its sovereignty and independence. During the infamous European Scramble for Africa, the British sought unequal treaties regarding water usage and boundary delimitation with their colonies of the Sudan, Kenya, and Somaliland. The French colonized Djibouti, the southern entrance to the Red Sea. The Italians controlled the entire coast of Eritrea and most of Somalia thereby completing European stranglehold over Ethiopia's access to the sea. Each of these powers sought to destabilize the Ethiopian state by supplying arms to challengers of the nationalist emperors, including restricting access to seaports in violation of treaties.

Table 4.6 Ethiopia: indicators of regime and authority characteristics, 1855–1973

Year	Polity 2 Score	Openness: chief exec recruitment	Constraint: chief exec recruitment	Competitiveness: of Participation
1855–1888	4	0	7	3
1889–1908	4	0	7	3
1909–1929	4	0	7	3
1930–1935	−5	0	1	2
1936–1941	−66	−66	−66	−66
1942–1973	−9	4	1	4

Sources and Notes: Center for Systemic Peace
POLITY IV PROJECT: Political Regime Characteristics and Transitions, 1800–2015. www.systemicpeace.org
The "Polity Score" captures this regime authority spectrum on a 21-pont scale ranging from −10 (hereditary monarchy) to +10 (consolidated democracy). The Polity scores can also be converted into regime categories: autocracies (−10 to −6), anocracies" (−5 to +5), and democracies (+6 to +10)
The Polity scheme consists of six component measures that record key qualities of executive recruitment, constraints on executive authority and political competition. It also records changes in the institutionalized qualities of governing authority
Polity 2: Scale ranges from +10 (strongly democratic) to! 10 (strongly autocratic), −66 = cases of foreign "interruption" are treated as "system missing"
Openness: 0 not applicable, 1 closed/hereditary, 4 open
Constraint: 1 unlimited authority, 7 subordination of executive to accountability groups
Competitiveness of participation: 1 repressed, 2 suppressed, 3 factional, 4 transitional, 5 competitive

The combination of splendid isolation for nearly half a millennium following the rise of the Ottomans produced technological stagnation and a deep-seated siege mentality. This was rudely exposed by the shocks of the two Italian invasions, the first (1896) ending with the colonization of the province of Eritrea and the second (1935) which provided opportunities for revamping the moribund order (Truilzi 1982; Sbacchi 1985; Larebo 1994). Furthermore, ceaseless Arab destabilization tied to control over Nile waters and the Red Sea undermined the delicate domestic balance between a multiplicity of tributors and tributaries.

The belated post-Adwa modernization efforts of Menelik, the appearance on the scene of a small cadre of educated Ethiopians, the disruptive but also constructive effects of the occupation by Italy and Britain, and the entry of the U.S. as a patron all contributed to the fierce urgency of a modernization drive (Perham 1969; Clapham 1969; Retta 2012). For the first time, tributes were converted into taxes and fees, the very idea of constitutional rule including modern civil and criminal codes was imaginable; professional civil and military services were established albeit under the tight control of a neo-patrimonial and autocratic emperor; post-secondary institutions and urban centers appeared on scene; and the country was slowly integrated into the world economy via trade and aid.

What emerged after 1942 was, therefore, a territorial and quasi-modern state with some Weberian trappings (a Constitution, professional army and civil service, and a system of taxation), a cohesive multiethnic Royal Court elite personally controlled by the Emperor, and marginalized traditional elites of the northern core and the newly incorporated southern provinces. The post-1955 order was a hybrid, neo-patrimonial with a rational-legal edifice dominated by rampant rent-seeking (the politics of the belly, aka *meblat*[11]) revolving around loyalty to the autocratic Emperor. Ordinary citizens in all parts of the empire, the religious institutions, and civic or professional societies were either captured or thoroughly marginalized as dependents.

Overall, SS managed to improve upon three of the building blocks of a modern state: a national lingua franca in Amharic, a legitimizing ideology, and quasi-monopoly over the instruments of large-scale violence. Shewa's genius for melding the legacies of Axum and Gondar with the new demography of the diverse cultures of the richer southern hinterland was key to its success as a trailblazer of a modern Ethiopian state.[12] It, however, failed to fulfill the other requirements: robust decentralization for sharing power and respecting regional identities, a capacity to provide basic public services to all, and effective restraints on power-holders in the form of the rule of law, separation of church and state, and avenues for popular participation in public affairs.

We conclude from this that the tributarism was perhaps a necessary starting point but ultimately insufficient to serve as a springboard for robust state building. The causal mechanism that explains the delayed transition from a civilizational state to a modern nation-state, and concomitantly from subsistence agriculture to industrialization, is to be found at the nexus between internal and external forces, and ultimately the buoyancy of the fiscal base.

The limited modernization eventually gave birth to an incongruous revolutionary state after 1974 which will be examined in the next chapter. This radical and extremely violent "experiment" in social engineering was implemented first under a nationalist military regime presiding on a socialist-war economy, and followed by

[11] Historically, the discouragement of productive uses of the extracted surplus was partially mitigated by the tendency to expend it in the locality (for militia, church-building, charity, lavish feasts, etc.) in which it was generated (Reid 2011). Ironically, this moral economy was thoroughly undermined to the detriment of subsistence producers with the emergence of large garrison towns and Addis Ababa under as preferred residences of the aristocracy and as centers for transforming tribute into cash or imported trinkets. Unfortunately for Marx's "potatoes in the sack," there were too few urban factories to absorb the surplus army of peasant labor.

[12] Henze (2000: 120–21) puts it thusly: "Shoa's dynamism may be attributable in part to its amalgam of ethnic groups with varying traditions. The Amhara of the more northerly regions—western Wollo, Gojjam, and Begemder—contributed much less creative energy to the process which enabled Ethiopia to triumph over its world-be colonizers during the final decades of the nineteenth century… [T]he Tigrayans mad a major contribution to the revival of Ethiopian political momentum during the last third of the nineteenth century… [T]he impetus toward moving boldly into the modern world was weaker in Tigray than in Shoa. The social conservatism of the Tigrayans left them trailing the Shoans."

an ethno-nationalist minority regime spearheading with great determination an avaricious crony capitalist economy.

Is a revolution what was needed to extricate Ethiopia from the trap of age-old tributarism? We show in the next chapter how this route did not turn out to be transformative enough—it solved some problems while creating new ones.

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Chapter 5
The Ethiopian Revolutionary State

> *This is a part of the world constantly in flux, in which patterns of state creation and de[l]cay form and reform, in response to the ever-changing relations between highland and lowland, Christianity and Islam, zones of settled governance and zones of statelessness. It would be foolish to assume that these tensions are being, or will ever be, resolved.*
>
> *Christopher Clapham (2017: 193)*

> *Local villagers have developed a perception that considers the state as all-powerful. Regarding social control, the state has weakened all competing forces, including the church, in effectively controlling the power infrastructure through complicated organizations that extend to the household level.*
>
> *Bekele et al. (2016: 19)*

This chapter explores how the twin forces of post-war globalization and the imperatives of modernization changed the terms of power play between Ethiopian state elites and non-state actors to produce radical institutional changes. The Revolutionary State (RS) upstaged the old order but failed in many important respects to devise enduring institution that resonate with societal norms and changing needs. One consequence of the changes in the material basis of the state is the hyper-centralization of the state and the other is the institutionalization of a mixed bag of inclusion and exclusion, both of which undermined many laudable gains in the project of nation-state building during 1855–1974 in exchange for largely symbolic victories.

Under the RS, the façade of constitutional rule was elaborately rationalized by a seductively populist Marxism informing a totalitarian ideology of the primacy of an incongruous class struggle in a non-industrial society. This has lately transmogrified into political ethnicity in arguably the most thoroughly post-tribal country in Sub-Saharan Africa. The RS is technocratically and coercively stronger than its monarchist but permissive predecessors, but much less meritocratic and accountable to citizens. The revolutionary state also made significant progress in delivering on the lofty promises of durable peace, and rapid and egalitarian economic growth.

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The inevitable hyper-centralization of the state and the politicization of the economy have for sure changed the terms of the endemic contests within the deep state in rather pernicious ways. Class-based politics gave way to polarizing ethnic (or even religious identity) politics as an instrument of political mobilization.

The twin dreams of Ethiopian modernizers, a robust state and national integration, remain hobbled. From the perspective of state building, technocratic gains were accompanied by a steady loss of internal legitimacy to shore up the identification of the populace with the national state. State resiliency remains just enough to keep state failure at bay, but woefully untransformed to guarantee basic freedoms for all.

5.1 Anachronistic Statism and Atavistic Tribalism

The postwar world order under Pax Americana delivered many positive externalities for weak states. It oversaw a golden age of global economic growth; it facilitated the decolonization of Africa and Asia; it bestowed sovereignty on states many of which are probably otherwise non-viable; and the Cold War gave small states significant leverage in playing one bloc against the other to extract significant development or military aid.

Following the two oil shocks of the 1970s, however, the global political economy entered a new phase. It even elicited a thankfully short-lived hubris-laden talk of the 'end of history,' the 'new globalization,' and the 'end of **liberalism.**' These momentous developments included the dead hand of the moribund Soviet model of state socialism which collapsed under the weight of an ossified hyper-bureaucratism, and the technology revolution that was triggered by digitization and containerization. To this, we may add the fact that the world economy has become truly multipolar once again with the US-EU and China-Japan (along with the rest of East Asia) each claiming some 40 percent of the global gross output of some $100 trillion in purchasing-power-parity terms. While right-wing parties in the citadels of capitalism are looking for protection of the homeland from the evils of globalism they nurtured, tin pot dictators currently holding sway in much of Africa are devising ingenious ways to feign electoral mandates with the formidable bullet box serving as a failsafe backup against the ever-treasonous ballot box.

It is in this new global environment that we can understand the anachronistic embrace of state socialism by the Derg and the uncritical embrace of the much-hyped "national question" peddled by the infantile Ethiopian Student Movement (which engendered the likes of the TPLF, OLF, and EPLF). The latter, of course, had to grapple with the domestic discontents and the global realities of neoliberalism by resorting to anomalous dispensations such as ethnic **federalism** and a disguised Marxist party-state "governing" a market economy.

As we saw earlier, it took Ethiopia some 120 years to transition from a historic tributary-military state with a strong core population to a functioning fiscal-territorial state. By 1974, the country would boast a few integrative state-led institutions

(educational, military, civil service, and trade associations) but not national political parties or a dense set of professional associations to facilitate the political assimilation of its culturally diverse and urbanizing population. By 1980, though, the state had managed to monopolize power by methodically displacing all other political actors under the mantra of 'Ethiopia First.' By 2015, Ethiopian nationalism had to contend with strident voices peddling particularistic, me-too nationalisms.[1]

Paradoxically, this mix of a technocratically strong state and a progressively enfeebled political society has resulted in a dogged de-building of an integrated multicultural state by unwittingly facilitating the polarization of its polities along ethnic, religious, or regional lines. This duality of a strengthened technocratic leg and a weakened accountability leg of the political order is a characteristic feature of postcolonial rather than non-colonial state formations.

The question then is why Ethiopia, with the pedigree of a resilient civilizational state which has flirted with light versions of constitutional monarchy and state socialism, has found it so elusive to develop effective political and economic institutions that meld inclusiveness with capability. I insist on the point that the root cause is to be found in the continued absence of an independent economic base for ambitious elites who are condemned to trail-blaze a myopic political entrepreneurship by capturing the state by force or even by vote. The challenge for us then is to explain why Ethiopia has not succeeded in transforming its longstanding advantage of having an indigenous state to solidify its diverse polities into a cohesive citizenry that is loyal to the national state.

To begin to answer this question satisfactorily, we need to define the feasible pathways open to Ethiopian state builders. Using political entrepreneurship as a conceptual entry point (predatory or developmental), we scrutinize the achievements of the two revolutionary regimes in post-1974 Ethiopia—the nationalist military regime of 1974–91 and the ethnonationalist-militarist Tigrean regime during 1991–2015.[2]

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[1] Since my objective here is to identify notable continuities and significant changes in the history of Ethiopian state formation, I had to give a short shrift to two strands of literature on the revolutionary state. One strand analyzes the genesis and performance of the two post-1974 regimes by academics as well as members of various political groups which have been contending for state power. The second strand, properly dubbed Eritreanism, is intensely vitriolic and politically self-serving as evidenced by such fanciful claims as Ethiopia being a country only a century old or Ethiopia being 'invented' by the bogeyman of a "black-colonialist" Menelik II.

[2] The cut-off date of 2015 may seem entirely arbitrary for a still-ruling regime, albeit no longer confident or cohesive. This is so for three reasons: twenty-five years is a long enough record for assessment; the end of 2015 marked the culmination of a totalistic control of society by the deep state; and 2015 also marked the nation-wide uprisings against the self-styled Tigrean minority rule which is widely viewed as the beginning of the end of the second revolutionary government. The regime declared military rule by a command post in the Fall of 2016; its ruling coalition shows unmistakable signs of implosion; and it continues to roil under a legitimation crisis sapping its will to rule by naked force in the face of defiance by the youth across the country. Credible reports by human rights organizations and the reports of the U.S. and E.U. governments suggest that tens of thousands of political prisoners languish in the regime's many dungeons, and some hundred thousand youths have been rounded off from the streets and their homes in the so-called reeducation camps.

Rent-seeking, in its narrow meaning, refers to the allocation of productive resources for the cultivation of political leverage with the aim of redistributing wealth from other members of society through a multitude of legal and non-legal means. In an underdeveloped market economy such as Ethiopia, rent-seeking historically took the form of tribute-seeking by the titled class and its allies.

Lately, it has taken the form of unlocking the enormous wealth embedded in (nationalized) land values especially in the cities and selected rural regions (those rich in energy, farmland, or mineral resources). Economic rent is also created through exclusive licenses, politically-directed state loans, and non-competitive public contracts to allies (Bueno de Mesquita and Smith 2011). While a development-oriented elite may use some of this captured wealth for productive activities, generalized rent accumulation and redistribution by state-parties often undermine the emergence of a competitive political system and a productive economic system in the long run (Abegaz 2013; Kelsall 2013).

We will examine the theoretical and empirical basis for the following claim:

> *The morphing of classical tributarism into modern rent-seeking by the post-1974 Ethiopian state shows that a largely externally-funded buildup of an already overbearing state can be an effective mechanism for advancing the economic interests of the ruling elite and for using a developmentalist posture as a legitimation device in the absence of democratic accountability. The same mechanism, however, makes the capture of the state the biggest economic prize for other ambitious groups who do not hesitate to deploy divisive but effective primordial identities for political mobilization, including armed struggle. The paradox of the Ethiopia's post-Revolution political economy then is that endemic inter-elite extractive contests produce a state with the capacity for large-scale repression and high-modernist projects at the risk of a progressively constricting the support base of the ruling regime. The extractive and deeply insecure state elite, despite its populist rhetoric and a more diversified revenue base, must rationally rely on exclusionary patronage strategies for pleasing the smallest possible selectorate while violently preempting the emergence of a broad-based electorate that identifies with a democratizing Ethiopian state.*

One way to make sense of the resiliency-fragility dynamic of revolutionary statehood in such a low-income setting is to compare the interface between elites and non-elites. Four theoretical possibilities exist for the interactions between the two groups (elites and non-elites) and the modes of mobilization (class-based or identity-based) as illustrated in Table 5.1.

Mature and stable states tend to be populated by class-based organizations for both elite and non-elite alike—a circumstance that almost always presupposes full-fledged industrialization. Hopelessly fragile states, on the other hand, are found where elite and non-elite alike are fragmented along primordial or regional lines. This seems the norm in much of Africa and the Middle East.

Two interesting intermediate cases remain where contingencies can matter greatly for the emergence of stable political equilibria. Where elites are heterogeneous and disunited, but non-elites are united along class lines, there is a strong possibility for inclusive (or democratic) institutions to take root especially with the right leadership. This was the case in post-Apartheid South Africa or the post-independence U.S.A.

Table 5.1 Systemic stability and fragmentation of political communities

Elites Non-Elites	United (homogenous)	Divided (heterogeneous)
United (class-based organizations)	• Class-based organizations of elites and non-elites alike. • Collective bargains with mutually-binding commitments. **[A]:** *Stable and mature.*	• Non-elites organized but elites disorganized. • Patronage politics against state and economic elites. • Repression of capital. **[B]:** *Unstable but promising.*
Divided (identity-based organizations)	• Elites cohesive but non-elites disorganized. • Clientelistic politics with elite-enforced commitments. • Repression of labor. **[C]:** *Stable or unstable and unpromising.*	• Both elites and non-elites are disorganized. • Fragile political and economic institutions. **[D]:** *Unstable and unpromising.*

Sources and Notes: Fukuyama (2014), Collier (1999)
Dynamics:
1. *Transition from C to A:* Economic development (industrialization, urbanization, etc.) gives rise to class-based organizations and political parties. A capable state and rule of law develop to undergird viable democratic accountability
2. *Transition from B to A:* the state elites and the economic elites shift from reliance on factionalizing identity politics and labor repression to relying or coopting class-based organizations. If democratic accountability somehow comes well before the consolidation of the state and the rule of law, it generally takes the form of clientelistic (mass) politics and control of labor which paves the way for genuine democracy
3. *Transition from D to A via B or via C:* These paths are protracted and non-deterministic given the variety of ways power can evolve among the fundamental interest groups in society

The other possibility is the situation where elites are united by common interest and leadership, but non-elites are hopelessly divided. In this case, an inferior and unstable equilibrium would prevail that is bereft of both the rule of law and broad-based accountability. This seems to be the case for Ethiopia today.

Autocrats and dictators, being self-interested and rational, understand incentives and abide by certain rules. They must generously treat the few dozen powerful backers (called *essentials,* chosen from a much larger selectorate and an even larger but powerless electorate) to form a winning coalition (Bueno de Mesquita and Smith 2011). The Prince is then well advised to be mindful of certain realities: politics is about getting and holding onto political power; leaders should rely on as small a winning coalition as possible; if the winning coalition is small, but the real selectorate is large, then the essentials will always be at risk of being replaced and will support the ruler so that they can keep receiving their private payoffs; and when the winning coalition is small, the leader has no choice but to siphon off public and private resources to pay off his essential backers.

Transition to long-term stability and maturity may ironically come from successful economic development that is spearheaded by a developmental regime. The laws of cumulative causation and the law of unintended consequences may apply here. Such a regime, rationally seeking growth-based legitimacy and a bigger taxable base,

may very well sow the seeds of its own destruction. This reminds us of the attempted 'controlled modernization programs' which inadvertently facilitated the demise of such authoritarian monarchies as the Shah of Iran and Haile Selassie I of Ethiopia (Moore 1993).[3] With these tantalizing thoughts in our toolbox, let us scrutinize the Ethiopian RS more closely.

5.2 The Legacies of Shewa Inform a Revolution

Mindful of the new global context and using the conceptual framework of tributarism, we are now ready to offer a fresh look at the nature of the third variant of the Ethiopian state. A noted in Chap. 3, the Gondarine State, like its contemporary Afroasian peers, was tributary-military rather than fiscal-territorial. Such a state was neither bureaucratic nor absolutist. It was a rather decentralized entity relying on church-based legitimacy and occasional punitive expeditions to fend off threats to the state. Its successor, the Shewan State managed the remarkable feat of transforming the Gondarine tributary state into a territorial state by obtaining international recognition of its borders after doubling its size by World War I. Furthermore, it laid down a barely secure fiscal base strung together from disparate sources, in part by skillfully cultivated tentative economic links with the world economy.

Shewa was unusually positioned to accomplish unprecedented political centralization and territorialization (Tables 3.1 and 5.2). For one, Shewa developed an unusually multi-ethnic coalition of state elites which served as an unflinching flagbearer of a united Ethiopian state that spared the country from European colonialism. This state-class allied itself with a State-Church as it sought to lay down the foundations of Ethiopian nationalism. After World War II, the Shewan State managed to establish a professional civil service and army along with a modern civil code and penal code, recruited increasingly by merit rather than by loyalty alone or genealogy (Perham 1969; Clapham 1969).

Emperor Menelik II's defensive territorial acquisitions during 1875–1898, the self-serving claims of revisionists to the contrary, reunited the tributary polities of medieval Ethiopia. This was certainly in part a response to the internal competition of regional kings for new resources (most notably between Negus Tekle Haymanot of Gojam and Negus Menelik of Shewa, the supremacy of the latter

[3] Moore (1966) identifies three historical routes from agrarianism to the modern industrial world—two capitalist and one socialist. One pathway is a bourgeois-aristocracy alliance against a politically fragmented peasantry which explains the emergence of a capitalist-democratic order (as in the United Kingdom and France). A second pathway is a bourgeois-aristocracy alliance to capture the state and repress a peasantry that posed a political threat (as in Germany and Japan). The third route is a worker-peasant alliance, led by the urban intelligentsia, that repressed the fledgling bourgeoisie and the atavistic agrarian elite to create a totalitarian-commandist state (as in Russia and China).

Table 5.2 Features of political order under three Ethiopian States

Institution	Aspirations	Tributary Gondarine state	Territorial Shewan State	Revolutionary State
Modern State	• Capable • Beyond friends and family • (kinship + reciprocity) • Impersonal	• Weakly centralized • Civilizational, more than territorial • Crown = State	• Recentralization • Weak separation of crown and state • modernization	• Hyper-centralization • Separation of church and state • modernization
Rule of Law (Constitutionalism)	• Checked and balanced • Binding on all • Codified	• Church and FN authority • Defied when too binding	• FN-based constitution • Landed peasantry and gentry	• Leninist vanguardism • Rule by law
Accountability	• Procedural and substantive • Responsive to popular demands	• No parliament but Crown Council • Taxation w/ right to petition	• Weak parliament and constitution • Weak bureaucracy • Urban-rural split	• Constitutions and parliament • Absolutist elite • Development for legitimacy
All Three	• Illiberal or liberal democracy • Benevolent • Dictatorship	• Tributary & decentralized authoritarianism • Civil wars	• Territorial & bureaucratic autocracy • Peace and order	• Statist • Authoritarian • Doctrinaire • Paternalistic

Sources and Notes: Author from various sources
KN = Kibre Negest

having been settled at the battle of Embabo). Just as importantly, it was a response to aggressive European colonialist expansion in the Horn of Africa (Larebo 1994, 2016; Clapham 2017).

This southward expansion evidently had three consequences of much significance for subsequent linkage between ethnicity and power in Ethiopia. Firstly, the expansive state's leaders and followers were predominantly Amharic-speaking Shewans of Amara, Oromo, Gurage, or mixed genealogies. Secondly, power shifted from the northern Abyssinian power centers reflecting the economic interests of the new hegemonic state elite based in Addis Ababa. Thirdly, although pre-WWII Ethiopia was governed as a highly decentralized system of 42 historical provinces, it became progressively centralized afterward (Zewde 1994). As Clapham (1988) perceptively observes, the disempowerment of the regional aristocracy had two contradictory effects: the regime cut itself from its traditional base in the countryside as well as from wider political constituencies emerging in the modern sector.

This neo-patrimonial system inevitably gave rise to a new bureaucratic elite of officeholders who aspired to convert political empowerment into economic empowerment by deploying the fiscal and regulatory authority of the state. To ward off the dissimilation that eventually took the form of political ethnicity, a national

integration strategy based on equal citizenship and *awraga*-level self-administration was belatedly recognized. However, it lacked a strong enough constituency to support the implementing legislation.[4]

This paradox of success in building a capable state but failure in making it inclusionary and responsive to the demand for popular sovereignty cries out for an explanation. One credible clue is provided by the precarious balance among the myriad competing domestic forces which shaped the specific pathway of Ethiopian state formation.[5] Another pertains to the disadvantages of lateness in switching from state-building to nation-building in the age of hyper-globalization.

The state built by Menelik and Haile Selassie could not fully meet the central challenge of a modern Ethiopian political order: consolidating political authority by enhancing the state's bureaucratic capability and the government's autonomy from oligarchic interests. Haile Selassie eliminated the semi-autonomous regions by a developing top-down network of personal authority which uneasily co-existed with a bureaucratic façade of a constitutionally-bounded government (Ottaway 1987). The same can be said about the failed efforts of farsighted advisors to restore the federal arrangement with Eritrea. The 1960 attempted coup d'etat and the 1974 Revolution did expose the failure of neo-patrimonialism in facilitating a transition from a civilizational legitimacy for a state of subjects[6] to an accountability-based legitimacy for a state of free citizens.

Overall, the Shewan state had limited success in establishing an equitable and pro-growth land tenure system. Nor did its predilection for invoking royal privilege allowed for the creation of public space for independent civic and political activity to resolve social conflicts peacefully—the hallmark of modernity. This trajectory

[4] This idea of a division of labor among culturally-defined "peoples"of Ethiopia is applauded by Donald Levine (1974) and Messay Kebede (1999) in teleological formulae for the modernizing and consolidating Ethiopian nationhood. Levine's recipe dubiously but optimistically presumes that ethnolinguistic groups are cohesive political actors: Tigrean-Agew thesis, Oromo antithesis, and Amara synthesis. Messay, on the other hand, calls for reconciliation of the supposed Tigrean restorationist drive, Amara longing for a resurgence, and Oromo search for self-assertion. Why the presumed Tigrean restorationist sentiment and the Oromo search for full inclusion have transmogrified, in the eyes the respective ethnic politicians, into a dissimilation that is driven by an anti-Amara and anti-Ethiopian nationalism cannot be understood from these fanciful grand formulations.

[5] Christopher Clapham (2002: 53) sums it up well when he writes: "Not only was the record of imperial state consolidation from the reign of Tewodros onwards quite extraordinary in its own right; it also created patterns of development in the Horn that set it sharply apart from other regions of Africa… In particular, it acquired neither the institutional nor the political characteristics of colonial rule … The distinctive features of the Ethiopian state, including the land question, the national question, the relationship with Eritrea, and the possibility of a revolution of a kind unimaginable in other parts of Africa, all derive from this legacy."

[6] Richard Greenfield (1965) uses the label "empire state" (not clear if the empire-builders are not culturally alien or geographic neighbors) to describe the mix of a centralized and personalized state authority presiding over an ethnically heterogeneous population. This characterization, however, confuses with an incendiary effect the imperial Ethiopian expansion and consolidation of its cultural and historical periphery with a colonial expansion by an alien power. The "greater Ethiopia" perspective, in cultural terms, offered by Levine (2000) offers a better view of the many cultural commonalities of the peoples of the Horn which is key to understanding the continued attachment to the idea of Ethiopia by ordinary folks throughout the country.

created dualities between city and country, and between the Center controlled by a multiethnic ruling class and the two disgruntled Periphery—comprising the economically marginalized North and the politically marginalized South.

The Shewan dynasty was overthrown by the non-commissioned officers of its de facto praetorian guard in February 1974. The military regime was, in turn, replaced in 1991 by two Tigrigna-speaking liberation fronts: the Tigrean People's Liberation Front (TPLF) based in Tigray and the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) based in Eritrea. The former continues to rule Ethiopia while the latter declared an independent state of Eritrea in 1993.

The two versions of what I, perhaps inaptly, call the Revolutionary State (RS) have some commonalities and some differences. These regimes share the three characteristics of being revolutionary, authoritarian, and populist. What makes them 'revolutionary' in the Ethiopian context is the fact that they are republican and opted for radical economic and political reforms. They are 'populist' because they offered short-termist and grandiose popular solutions to complex structural problems. They are 'authoritarian' because they denied independent political and economic space for organized citizens on pain of state-sanctioned violence against any and all signs of opposition to the ruling clique. They, however, differ in other respects.

The **Garrison-Populist** regime (1974–1991) was militarist, centralist, and absolutist, but redeemably Ethiopian-nationalist. The **Ethnocentric-Capitalist** regime (1991–) is equally militarist, centralist, and absolutist, but also Tigrean-supremacist and viscerally anti-Ethiopian-nationalism. The socialistic rhetoric notwithstanding, it has self-servingly gone with the global grain to embrace capitalism—albeit a blatantly crony one.

We will now characterize the two regimes by identifying the significant continuities and radical breaks with the millennia-old monarchist tradition of the Christian Ethiopian state. Given the large extant literature on the subject, I must necessarily be highly selective based on salience to the themes of this book.

The two variants of RS, identified by the type of regime that captured the Ethiopian state, have broad similarities as well as notable differences. The Garrison-Populist RS was based in the urban centers and assumed power in a creeping coup d'état. It purported to mobilize the oppressed masses against all elites—nationalist as well as secessionist.

The Ethnocentric-Capitalist state was also a part of the urban Left, and its guerilla struggle matured in Tigray's Dedebit lowlands and the long-denuded highlands. Their provincialist mindset, born of the marginalization of one of the historic provinces, still flirts the option of secession for a greater or Abay Tigray or even a Tigray-Tigrign state with Eritrea. Ironically, the Tigrean elite was historically a partner with the Amaricized elite in dominating the Ethiopian state. Ironically, the pauperized rebelled for itself rather than for Ethiopia against the enriched Addis Ababa after a long-lasting pretense of "keeping up appearances."[7]

[7] Its Eritreanist rhetoric notwithstanding, the Tigray has little in common with a post-Menelikean South. Tigray instead is an integral part of the long-marginalized northern core (and the most autonomous at that), and its unbecoming representatives are feigning to be ethnically discriminated when it is clearly not the case.

The Garrison-Populist State upheld, at least formally, many of the icons of modern statehood: a national language, separation of the religion and state, a professional civilian and military bureaucracy, a belated constitution as a source of law, and equality before the law for all citizens. It also trailblazed the introduction of a republican government in Ethiopian history. RS introduced a paternalistic statism inspired by socialist ideas that embraced government ownership all land and major enterprises, a vanguard ruling party to advance the interests of the military rulers while aspiring to meet the basic needs of all, and indifference or even hostility to the politically unconnected business society and civil society.

The global context for RS has been one of collective recognition of almost all states as sovereign, universal declarations of human and civil rights (if not democracy) for all, deep economic globalization, decolonization moderated by neocolonialization, and varying forms of geopolitical competition between Right and Left as well as between East and West. This strident globalism is also tempered by localism taking the forms of bitter contests over state formation (perhaps state capture), the substitution of universalistic class solidarity by particularistic primordial solidarity, and impatient popular demand for accelerated economic development.

The Ethiopian version of RS initially took the form of a military dictatorship in a civilian garb. It had to preside over inherited but intensified civil wars, heightened attempts by Arab states to destabilize it, and intensified hostility by the West that eventually led to a switch of alliance from the West to the USSR.

Hyper-centralization compounded took a major toll at home. The traditional conveyor belt between the state and its subjects, such as the Church and local leaders, were systematically eliminated in favor of the cadre of the ruling parties. The seemingly invisible hand of the distant Emperor was replaced by the not so invisible grabbing hand of soldiers and guerilla fighters who aspired to extend the tentacles of the centralized state from a distant capital city to the rural hamlet or the urban neighborhood (*kebele*). For peaceful protesters, there is nowhere to hide anymore short of disappearing in the many dungeons.

Since the new state elites lacked an independent economic base, the compulsion to transform political power into economic power was a matter of political survival. Capturing the political kingdom provided a sure path to inheriting the economic kingdom. The logic of political accumulation remained salient despite the façade of modernization and the monopoly of land ownership by the revolutionary state. The self-styled revolutionaries, much like their monarchist predecessors, opted to engage in extractive rather than in productive contests.

Smallholder production is no longer the primary source of politically-driven wealth accumulation. After 1975, with land nationalization, state elites left the subsistence peasantry to its own devices and chose instead to rent-seek by diversifying into much richer sources of state-mediated revenue—appropriating valuable urban and selected rural real estate, expanding parastatals, making an effective case for foreign aid to underwrite basic needs, boosting cash-crop and service exports (especially the cash cow that is Ethiopian Airlines and tourism), capturing the income from resident international organizations located in Addis Ababa, and capturing the growing remittances which currently stands at $4 billion annually. Aid flows and remittances each has now surpassed export proceeds (Abegaz 2015b).

In the absence of the rule of law and a modicum of constitutional order, the revolutionary-populist elites defined accountability in terms only of ensuring security and basic needs. Both the Derg junta and the TPLF (Tigrean People's Liberation Front) tribal politicians paternalistically deployed the heavy hands of the state to expand pro-poor investment in basic education, basic health, food security, wider access to clean water and electricity, and improved road and rail connectivity. The TPLF has been particularly adept at mobilizing foreign development aid to fund its pro-poor policies. To maximize foreign exchange earnings, the EPRDF state has also invested in high-modernist projects in power generation and cash crop estates (especially sugar) and facilitated party companies and FDI as well as remittance inflows.

5.3 The Garrison-Populist Regime

The removal by the military of a senile Emperor and a rootless aristocracy, which almost entirely depended on his patrimony, exploded into a civil war after 1975. One battle line for state power was drawn between the Marxist-Leninist Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party (EPRP) and the Derg and its allies (mainly the All-Ethiopia Socialist Movement, Meison). In 1977–78, over 10,000 idealistic youth were recklessly sacrificed in the ensuring political struggles between the agents of the so-called red terror and white terror (Clapham 1988; Zewde 2014).

The urban-based scramble for the reigns of the state was compounded by the legacy of secessionist and internecine wars, especially in Eritrea and the Ogaden. The moribund monarchy, despite its heroic achievements in rebuilding the post-1942 state, systematically preempted the emergence of a capable, Ethiopian-nationalist leadership to put the country on an irreversible path of inclusive modernization.

The project of defending and consolidating a centralized state was intensified by the Derg but with some notable differences from the approach refined by the SS. First, the Derg tried to mask its totalitarian predisposition by creating an outwardly decentralized administrative system of 30 regions delimited quite reasonably by broad cultural similarities, local history, and the imperatives of development (Wubneh 2017). Since self-administration ultimately should mean power-sharing, regional autonomy under an authoritarian-hierarchical regime became little more than what is called manipulative decentralization.

Secondly, the Derg eliminated, rather than coopted, the intermediate socio-political strata located between Haile Selassie's state and what remained of the diverse customary governance systems. Nonstate leaders were disempowered by the loss of authority that is not tied to officeholding and the delegitimizing public-enemy labels of "feudal" or even "bourgeois." This amorphous class, an important traditional conveyor belt between the State and ordinary subjects, historically included persons and groups with independent economic bases (businesspersons and the gentry), respected elders (religious leaders and respected heads of notable local families), and educated reformers (Perham 1969; Zewde 2001). With the ten-

tacles of the militarized state now stretched out unmediated to the micro level of the neighborhood (*kebele* and *got*), the dream of popular sovereignty in a republican state soon dissipated. This template, as we will see below, was applied with a vengeance by the regime that came next.

Third, since legitimacy depended on taming large-scale violence and the promotion of development, the regime needed to mobilize various constituencies through the media of captive "mass" organizations (peasant associations, urban-dwellers' associations, women's organizations, youth organizations, labor unions, and the like) as convenient disguises for its coercive rule (Clapham 1988; Ottaway 1987). Despite its populist coloring, this unprecedented degree of state intrusion into private lives reinforced Ethiopia's (Highlander, to be correct) tradition of opportunist contestation of, and deference to, authority (Levine 2000; Vaughan 2003, 2011).

Lacking disciplined party structures, at least initially, the military regime had to rely on a mobilized "lumpen proletariat" in the urban areas to do its bidding of gangster violence that left a lasting scar on the society. Political engagement became the fifth rail (*korenti*) of politics. The Derg also instituted draconian methods of cowing down the professional civil service. This was enforced by Stalinist cadres and military commissars, supported by like-minded civilian radicals (especially Meison) who perhaps unwittingly provided ideological and organizational scaffolding for the capture of mass organizations including peasant militia (Kebede 2011).[8]

Unable to map out an alternative blueprint of governance, it took the Derg a decade to consolidate unchallengeable authority. It hyper-politicized the urban *kebele* and the peasant associations and hijacked independent trade unions and urban-based mass organizations. It belatedly, under pressure from Gorbachev, formed a vanguard party in 1987—the Workers Party of Ethiopia (WPE). These efforts allowed the military regime to deeply penetrate society, mobilize human and material resources for the war economy, implement land nationalization along with cooperativization, mount an impressive mass literacy campaigns, initiate villagization programs, and raise a huge peasant militia against several secessionist forces and urban competitors for power.

By the end of the 1980s, a hyper-centralized state was in place with Ethiopian nationalism as its legitimizing banner. The constitution and the reluctantly organized a state-party were aimed primarily at appeasing state employees and urbanites. Loyalty, more than competence, was the principal criterion of recruitment. Democratic centralism was adopted precisely because it was consonant with a

[8] Messay Kebede (2011) suggests that the Ethiopian Left failed to fully implement its public professed goals of bringing equality and prosperity to all citizens because its utopianism was inherently conflictual with equally compelling hunger for exclusionary powerholding—thereby putting Marxist-cum-nationalist ideology in the service ultimately regressive projects. This, of course, means that understanding the underlying structures of power is more important than the ideological justifications of the contenders for state power since any politico-economic order can be credibly justified by fuzzily presented ideologies, including Marxism. The language of the dictatorship of one class over another is malleable enough to be easily transmuted to the rightness of liquidating other enemies of "the oppressed people," whether the presumed oppressors belong to other ethnic groups, religions, or regions.

highly centralized (and personalized) authority of the big man under the guise of collective leadership.[9] Collective leadership gave way to the rise of an autocrat in Mengistu Haile Mariam after 1978—a pattern that was very much in evidence in Teferi Mekonnen the regent after 1920, and in Meles Zenawi after 2001.

Land reform was arguably the most lasting legacy of the Revolution in that it uprooted the tributary economic foundation of political power for the monarchy while robbing the civilian Left of its most potent cause for political mobilization. One damaging consequence of the land reform program seems to have eluded even the most astute of observers. Nationalization, as noted earlier, dispossessed the smallholder *ristegna* of the North and the Center, which comprised about two-thirds of the farming population. There was, as noted earlier, no landlord class except a few members of the royal family who amassed large estates cultivated by smallholders. The disempowering impact of this well-meaning but regressive move, including the disarming of the peasantry thus leaving it defenseless against abuse by cadres, did not become evident until after cooperativization and villagization were introduced beginning in 1978.

The sharecropper peasants of the central and southern provinces certainly did not appreciate the straightjacket nature of the new usufruct right until the state resumed to siphon off economic surplus, albeit using bureaucratic methods. In the end, everyone became a tenant of a capricious landlord-state (Abegaz 2004).

To its credit, and aside from ending the ossified monarchy, the Derg instituted many pro-poor policies which made it quite popular among a substantial sector of the variously aggrieved population. These measures included an award-winning campaign to reduce illiteracy, a substantial expansion of schools and clinics, the provision of water and electricity to forgotten rural settlements, the expansion of rural roads and telecom services, and the haphazard villagization of many scattered homesteads purportedly to facilitate the provision of public services but also to enhance state control of the peasantry. This is but the quintessential tradeoff offered by authoritarian-populist regimes offer between freedom and prosperity.

The combination of domestic attacks on the military regime by various radical groups and external invasion by an emboldened Somalia provided the right opportunity to tap into the seemingly bottomless well of Ethiopian patriotism and to liquidate political competitors within and without the ruling military clique. After 1978, the age-old authoritarian political and organizational culture produced a depraved strongman in the person of Mengistu Haile Mariam. The enduring political culture of intolerance and dogmatism also produced the mutual destruction of the two main leftist parties, EPRP, and Meison. This paved the way for the rise of the equally authoritarian trinity of ethno-nationalist "liberation fronts" in EPLF, TPLF, and OLF (Zewde 2014).

[9] Clapham (1990: 65) also notes that the absence of political parties "is often ascribed by Ethiopians to cultural traits, and especially the pronounced lack of interpersonal trust, and the difficulty of organizing any cooperative institution in a hierarchically structured society." This sweeping statement, though containing a grain of truth, begs the question: which large-scale society is not hierarchically structured, including mature democracies?

The regime intensified its anti-secessionist war on the TPLF, OLF, and EPLF deploying the largest army in Sub-Saharan Africa which was supplied with sophisticated Soviet arms. The sudden collapse of the USSR and the mismanagement of the economy were predictably the key reasons for the Derg's downfall. The alienation within its ranks, as evidenced by the decimation of senior officers of the military following an attempted coup d'etat, active destabilization by Western powers, and rejection by every sector of society of its sadistic brutality were also contributing factors for the ignominious downfall in May 1991. Centralized authority under socialism was, ominously for Ethiopia, also embraced in a pernicious form by the liberation movements based in Eritrea and Tigray—two provinces with a deeply pauperized peasantry long accustomed to searching for sustainable livelihoods by outmigration or joining the soldiery (Berhe 2009; Greenfield 1965; Young 2006).

5.4 The Ethnocentric-Capitalist Regime

The alienation of the so-called Abyssinian North, typified but certainly not represented by the Tigrean highlands of Eritrea and Tigray alone, the false consciousness of the Amara in confusing cultural hegemony with economic and political power, and the temptation of political Islam to deploy petrodollars to advance the cause of Arab regional hegemony all conspired to occupy the vacuum left by the defunct military-nationalist regime. The structural failure of tributarism also exposed the country to suffer yet another political experiment in an un-creative destruction of its pedigreed legacies.

The ethnocentric-capitalist state, which emerged in full form during 1995–2005, started to look like a spent force 10 years later. The first half of the period, 1991–2012, was bookended by major wars. The civil war, spearheaded for decades by the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) and the Tigrean People's Liberation Front (TPLF), intensified in 1989–1991. It culminated in the displacement of the *Derg* by a TPLF-led coalition of ethnic-based political organizations under the name of Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF).

During the honeymoon period of 1991–94, the EPRDF presided over a half-hearted post-conflict and post-socialist political settlement. The national army was unceremoniously disbanded, and the top echelon of the civil service was dismissed. However, other *Derg* state institutions were preserved—most notably, the state bureaucracy's answerability to party commissars, nationalized land, the commanding heights of the economy, and the party-state control apparatus down to the neighborhood level. The top echelon of the professional civil service was purged under cover of civil-service reform funded by the civil service restructuring programs of the willfully ignorant World Bank and other international financial institutions.

Prices were progressively decontrolled, and privatization of state enterprises (largely for the benefit of political allies) was undertaken. To the delight of donors and citizens alike, independent civic organizations (including a relatively free press) and opposition parties were permitted during this honeymoon period. The national army and security

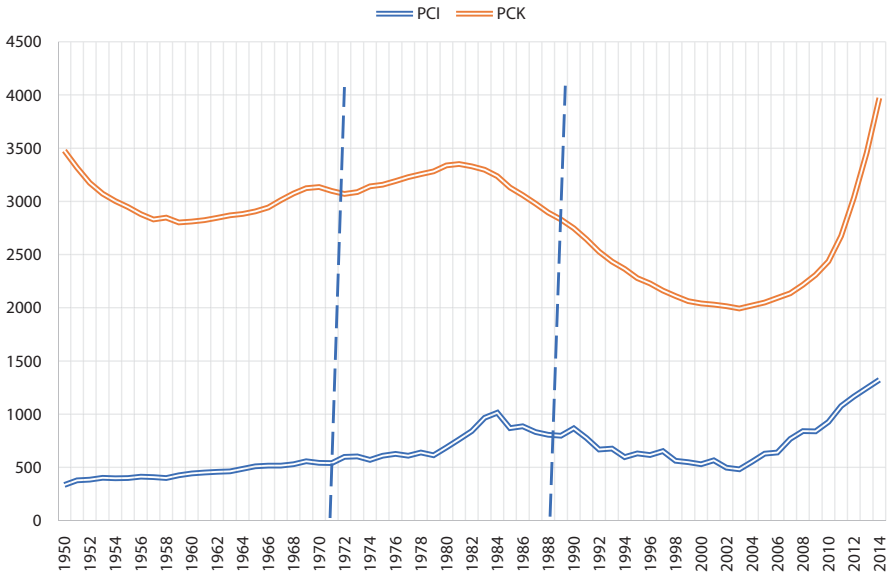

Fig. 5.1 Ethiopia: income and fixed capital per head, 1950–2014. *PCI* per capita income, in constant PPP dollars, *PCK* per capita capital stock, in constant PPP dollars. (*Sources and Notes:* Penn World Tables 9.0)

services were ominously replaced by an army whose officer class is unprecedently over-represented by TPLF members which are unprecedented in Ethiopian military history (see Gebrehiwot, 2017, for a contrarian but jaundiced view).

The nature of the EPRDF administration had become clearer after these formative years when the transition from a liberation front to a founding hegemonic party was half-completed. Unfortunately, Eritrea's secession in 1993 without the necessary divorce agreements in place (such as border demarcation, arrangements for economic exchange, and access to the sea by a now landlocked Ethiopia), triggered two rounds of war in 1998–2000. Embarrassed donors responded by temporarily reducing or suspending aid which, by diverting budgetary resources to the war effort, induced a recession until 2002 (Abegaz 2015a). A remarkable public investment-driven growth uptick took place thereafter (Figs. 5.1 and 5.2).

The TPLF opted to preserve and perfect nearly all the control networks of the Derg. These include state ownership of all land, peasant associations and the urban *kebele*, the commissar system of control of the civilian bureaucracy, democratic centralism within the coalition, and the establishment a surveillance and security state (Legesse 2014, 2017).

Inspired by a selective reading of practices in China, the one-party security state today exercises full control of the population down to urban housing clusters and rural hamlets. The latest version of the state surveillance system, known as "one-for-five," assigns one spy for every five adults in the country—in households, schools, the government bureaucracy, or businesses (de Freytas-Tamura 2017).

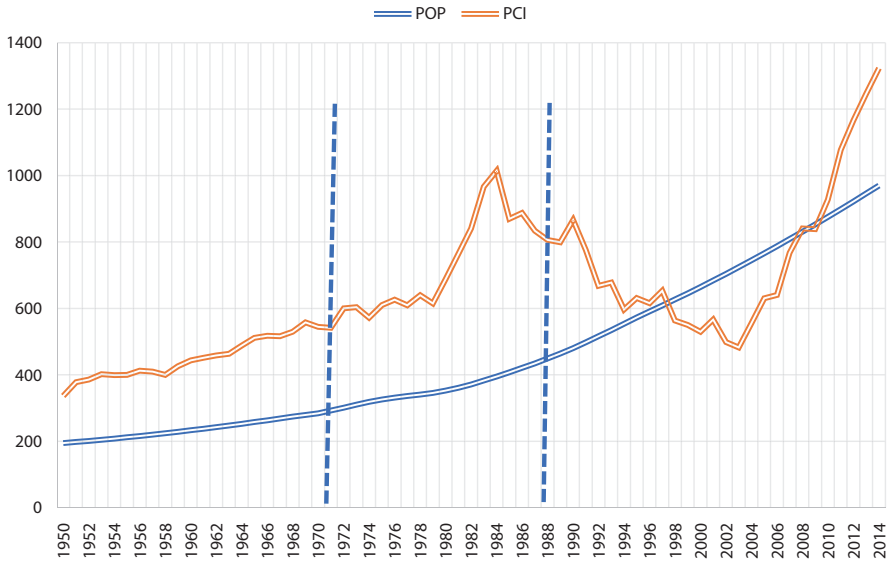

Fig. 5.2 Ethiopia: population and income per head, 1950–2014 *PCI* per capita income, in constant PPP dollars, *POP* total population (in 100,000 to facilitate the graphing; 1000 means 100 million). (*Sources and Notes:* Penn World Tables 9.0)

On the ashes of the Shewan state, the military bureaucracy created a pathological set of political institutions with three distinct pillars. The first of these rested on the restoration of an 'imagined' Tigrean superiority that is erroneously based on the myth of an Axumite civilization that was ahistorically credited to the contemporary residents of the region.[10] This reminds one about many an Ethiopian emperor of low birth conveniently claiming descent from King Solomon to shore up their exclusive claim to the throne.

The second pillar promotes a polarizing political ethnicity which is unraveling the bonds that were painstakingly developed over the centuries among the culturally diverse communities that call Ethiopia home. This stratagem of minority rule by Tigreans is brilliant and yet delusional. While Tigray today has the second largest industrial base in the country after Shewa, this is purely a product of the untenable political monopoly that has blatantly been channeling state, Party (EFFORT and METEC), and foreign investments to its ethnic homeland. As the experience of an independent Eritrea starkly confirms, an, even more, poorly-endowed Tigray has little chance of economic viability if and when it is cutoff from the Ethiopian hinterland.

The third pillar, an extreme version of what was employed by previous regimes, is the institutionalization of a kakistocracy—a government of the least competent and the most unscrupulous. That is, loyalty to the ruling clique trumps merit and a commitment to honorable principles of public service. Again, this is in keeping with the cynical tradition of RS.

[10] Although the highlands of today's' Tigray and Eritrea were seats of the now-defunct Axumite state, there is much evidence to substantiate the case for the Agew and the Kunama as the pioneers of this remarkable world civilization. The Agew themselves assimilated various cultural groups in northwest Ethiopia before being absorbed by the Amhara after the thirteenth century.

As an innovation, the TPLF/EPRDF re-baptized the unitary state with a de facto mongrel best described as 'unitary federalism.' This system of centralized federalism substituted political ethnicity (unity in diversity) for the longstanding aspiration Ethiopian nationalists to forge an Ethiopian civic nationalism (diversity in unity).

A post-transition constitution, which came into effect in 1995, restructured the administrative system based on current settlement patterns of ethnolinguistic groups, strangely named "ethnic federalism," in a country with little history of political ethnicity or self-governing and, therefore, federalizable political units with a history of proven viability. The Stalinist constitution, despite the generous incorporation of citizen rights copied from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, enigmatically recognizes the conveniently fuzzy categories of "nations, nationalities, and peoples" rather than Ethiopian free citizens as the founders of the new state. Such politically-motivated ambiguities also pervade the Constitution concerning the owners of sovereignty and citizenship between the federal government and the regional states (Selassie 2003). Citizenship is sometimes singular (Ethiopian) and sometimes dual (*killil* and Ethiopian); and regional states and economically indispensable cities (Addis Ababa and Dire Dawa) are sometimes regional and other times sovereign.[11]

While the year 1995 witnessed the introduction of a radically new constitution, the year 2005 ended the illusion about meaningful power-sharing, much less power transfer, as a result of reasonably free and fair elections. Though one can hardly tell from reading the country strategy documents issued by donors, Ethiopia today boasts a hyper-ethnicized government led by a sole ruling party propounding, as its name denotes, 'revolutionary-democratic developmentalism.' Decoded, this means the vanguard Party knows what is good for the hapless masses. Some have dubbed this an African version of 'developmental neo-patrimonialism,' that is, a system of personalized rule that is committed to shared economic growth. It is, of course, in TPLF's organizational interest to promote broad-based growth by centrally mobilizing economic rent (including aid which is unearned income) and to opt for independence for greater Tigray should the status quo become untenable (Abegaz 2015a; Zenawi 2012; Vaughan and Gebremichael 2011).

The Federal Constitution of 1995 established a four-tier system of government consisting of 66 zones (later deemphasized), 6 special *woreda*, 550 *woreda*, and two special municipalities (Addis Ababa and Dire Dawa). The last two are cash cows or providers of net fiscal transfers to other regional states, and they are used as bargaining chips among ethnic politicians. *Woreda*-based decentralization fell far short of being a genuine devolution of power.

The use of local languages in local administration and native administrators were highly appreciated. However, four weaknesses stood out: failure to capture the resourcefulness, resilience and adaptability of localities; failure to transcend narrow regime interests in favor of larger community interests (one useful piece of evidence

[11] This linking particular nationalities to territorial entities created incentives for the agents (titled affiliates) to disregard the commands of the principal (the TPLF) whenever the central oversight mechanisms declined along with the rewards of compliance. The alphabet soup of liberation fronts and movements are beginning to metastasize which was the case in the dying days of top-down communist federations in the USSR and Yugoslavia.

being a high proportion of development resources were devoted to maintaining regional and zonal bureaucratic superstructures); failure to provide tailored and flexible public service; and failure to recognize the private sector as a legitimate, if not the primary, economic actor.

The late Meles Zenawi, an articulate and shrewd politician who was apparently the glue that held the EPRDF coalition, apparently held a number of strong beliefs about the roots of Ethiopia's underdevelopment and the role of aid. One is the notion that Ethiopia's development failure is ultimately traceable to the systematic exclusion of most ethnic groups from power, especially by the Amara political elite, which made it imperative to institute ethnic self-determination as the surest way to preserve national unity. Another is the self-serving idea that a benevolent dictatorship and a governed market economy of the type presumed to be practiced in northeast Asia constitute the right model for African development. Finally, aid should be welcomed only if it is aligned with the government's development strategy and should come largely in the form of general (direct) budget support (Zenawi 2012).

As we will see below, Melesism is akin to Putinism in its conception of both federalism and a market economy—minus, of course, the hyper-nationalism in a post-industrial society that is the hallmark of the Russian autocracy. It bears noting here also that while Ethiopia is a multiethnic society with a long history of contests over land, it has no discernible tradition of exclusionary monarchies at the national level; and linguistic groups have no history of constituting themselves into territorially defined ethnic-states.

It is quite telling in this regard that the Ethiopian Constitution (GOE 1995), which establishes a **parliamentary system**, begins with the rather illiberal preamble that privileges the ethnicity of birth over the country of birth. It opens with the phrase 'We, the nation, nationalities, and peoples of Ethiopia' thus granting group rights, even sovereignty to ill-defined groups rather than to free individual Ethiopian citizens (Article 8). Federal units are defined largely based on mother tongue and current patterns of territorial settlement as determined by fiat by the TPLF and its allies as victors (Article 47).[12] This rather odd dispensation has had many

[12] The 1995 Constitution divides the country territorially into 9 federal units (called regional states) based on the patterns of spatial settlement of predominant linguistic groups (Tigray, Amhara, Oromo, Afar, Somali), some of which are a willy-nilly amalgamation of many ethnic groups (SNNP, Benishangul-Gumuz, Harari, and Gambella), and two economically important federal cities (Addis Ababa and Dire Dawa). The ruling party kept its 'liberation front'title purporting to represent Tigreans—about 6% of the population. Just as bafflingly, it imitates the defunct Soviet Constitution by granting the right to secession for any ethnic-based regional state (Article 39.4). Other notable features include no independent constitutional court (Article 62 and 83), incorporation of the full gamut of universally declared rights (Articles 14–38), and state ownership of all land (Article 40.3).

Based on census data, Ethiopia is a country of ethnic and religious minorities: two linguistic groups of equal size (Amhara and Oromo) account for two-thirds of the population; and the religious distribution is just as interesting—Ethiopian Orthodox (45%), Sunni Muslim (35%) and Protestant (20%). Interestingly, Ethiopian Muslims are also culturally diverse: half are Oromo, and one-sixth each are Amara or Somali. According to Posner (2004), Ethiopia is surprisingly among the moderately ethnically fractionalized countries among other African countries of its size (such as Nigeria, DRC, South Africa, Tanzania, and Kenya). Some two-thirds of the ethnolinguistic groups resided largely in four former provinces: Gamo-Goffa, Keffa, Sidamo, and Illubabor.

consequences which remain quite unsettling for the postcolonial African states who wish not to open Pandora's Box of the sacrosanct colonial borders. Although it does provide a measure of local self-rule, ethnocentric decentralization tends to be administrative rather than devolutionary and often replicates corrupt national-level practices at the local level. And, of course, ethnic patterns of voting will be a reality for a long while even without ethnic-based administrative units until urbanization makes the place of birth irrelevant to economic opportunity.

Another hallmark of power relations instituted by the regime is the melding of statism with political ethnicity as a foundational principle. The new constitutional order has reinforced the structural fragility of the national state by emphasizing the supremacy of primordial group rights and introducing two competing lines of authority—party and state, much less a nation-state.

Just as importantly, TPLF's decentralization has created a hybrid system that is partly technocratic (conditional revenue sharing with little local participation) in the highlands and partly patrimonial (sharing of resources coming from the center to maintain local political alliances) in the more communal lowlands. This form of political ethnicity has also introduced, much like the cases of Malaysia and Apartheid South Africa, the pernicious notion of 'dual citizenship' whereby the presumed sons of the soil are first-class citizens. This undermines inter-group trust which is necessary for a robust multiethnic state.

In a nutshell, this top-down model of federalism has four distinctive features. Autonomous status is thrust upon ethnically delimited regional states to be run by the new class of invested ethnic politicians. Each subnational group is intended to be dominant in one, and only one, regional state regardless of population size. There is a mismatch between the top-down territorial assignment of a homeland for each ethnic group and the reality of high geographic mobility and inter-ethnic marriage. Finally, the hegemony of a single party reduces the power of federal units while also providing the glue to hold them together in the absence of viable democratic institutions (Abegaz 2015a; Selassie 2003).

The proof of the pudding, as they say, is in the eating. Instead of fostering the much-touted inter-communal peace, the mode of 'governance by accentuating inter-group conflict' has turned out to be recklessly violence-prone. Gross human rights violations, which underlie Ethiopia's consistently dismal international rankings, are the stuff of numerous credible reports, including those by Amnesty International (AI 2017) and Human Rights Watch (2017). Here are some illustrative manifestations of the 'managed conflict' mode of governance that has prevailed in the country since 1991:

- The Amara (more appropriately, native Amharic speakers) have been especially targeted by the regime for collective punishment. Forty-two highly respected professors were summarily fired from Addis Ababa University in 1993 by their presumed ethnicity; over 22,000 ethnic Amhara were expelled in 2012 from the Guraferda district of the SNNP Regional State. Over 10,000 ethnic Amhara residents were also summarily expelled in 2013 from Benishangul-Gumuz Regional State. More disturbingly, some three-quarters of a Tigreans have been settled in the historically Gondar districts of Wolqait, Tsegede, and Humera after the violent expulsion of native residents. The federal government, by all indications, has connived with these odious acts of ethnic cleansing.

- Intercommunal conflicts have become commonplace in the country—most notably the intra-ethnic conflict (such as those between the Guji and Boran Oromo) and inter-ethnic conflicts such as those between the Annuak and the Nuer, between the Somali and the Oromo, and the Issa and the Afar.
- Professional trade associations, especially the many independent-minded leaders of the Ethiopian Teachers Association and the Confederation of Ethiopian Trade Unions, were subjected to arrests and assassinations. The organizational integrity of both civic and religious organizations has also been compromised through myriad interventions, including infiltration of the leadership by party agents, and delisting of resistant organizations, and their replacement by pro-government ones.
- Many small tribal communities in the borderlands, especially in the Omo Valley, the Awash Valley and Gambella, have all been dispossessed of their ancestral lands and banished to makeshift communities on marginal lands to pave the way for major hydroelectric projects or for mega sugar estates, rice paddies, and flower farms owned by party companies, politically-connected individuals, or foreign investors.
- Draconian media and charities laws were enacted recently which are designed to undermine their funding bases or to ensnare critics under politically-motivated charges of terrorism. The 2009 Charities and Societies Proclamation, among other things, restricts CSOs and NGOs (over 4000 in number) that receive more than 10% of their financing from foreign sources from engaging in human rights advocacy.
- The first genuinely clean multiparty parliamentary elections of 2005, which resulted in significant gains for a coalition of opposition parties (called Kinijit), were violently nullified. The regime reacted to peaceful protests against the rigged parliamentary elections by killing 193 protestors, injuring 800, imprisoning the entire leadership of Kinijit, and arresting some 20,000 demonstrators. EPRDF then proceeded to expand its membership (this being the primary access to educational and employment opportunities in the public sector), and to emasculate other coalitions of parties. The stage-managed elections enabled the ruling party to win an embarrassing 99% of the parliamentary seats in 2010 and 2015.

Sarah Vaughan (2003; 2011) and Bahru Zewde (2014) provide many insights into the political logic of the Left's heroic attempts to reconcile class-based mobilization and ethnic-based mobilization. Concerning class, the student leaders of the amorphously Marxist Ethiopian Student Movement (ESM), and the pan-Ethiopian political groups which emerged from it came to discover that the inapt feudal-serf analytical lens could not possibly capture the sentiments of the diverse peasantry. This was in no small part a reflection of the lack of a textured understanding of class in a non-industrial Ethiopian society and the myriad ways in which other dimensions of identity (religion, gender, region, ethnicity, and the like) shaped political consciousness at the street level.[13]

[13] A revealingly funny anecdote has it that an officer of the Derg was giving a speech at a political rally urging villagers to vanquish their "class enemies." There is no good word for social class in Amharic. The word, *medeb*, is used but it generally refers to rank or a raised mud seat/bed. When a farmer asked the officer what his class was, he confidently but with apparent innocence replied that he was a lieutenant in the army!

With respect to ethnicity, the "liberation" movements had to grapple with the two mutually incompatible features of political ethnicity. One is the notion that there are internalized fixed markers by which people can self-identity and be reliably classified by outsiders. The other is that political ethnicity sits on a quicksand—an identity malleable and transient enough to be instrumentally manipulated by a self-serving ethnocratic elite willing to concoct an imagined history of a gloriously cohesive but oppressed kin (Collier 2009).

The party-state's political world is one of monopartysm, state developmentalism, ethnic-based administrative order, privileged group rights over individual rights, intolerance of an independent press or civil society organizations, selection criteria for state bureaucracy that favor loyalty over merit, and a regimented market economy dominated by politically-linked state, party, and private enterprises. It also prefers organizational parallelism whereby a party-based network of commissars trumps the formal decision-making power of the professional civilian and military-security services. This means, among other things, that the directions of the economy are decided solely at the Prime Minister's Office (Zenawi 2012).

Several arguments have been advanced to explain why the TPLF, with its dogmatic cocktail of Marx, rent-seeking, and developmentalism and hailing from one of the historic centers of the Ethiopian nationalism,[14] sought to reconstitute a state that has already moved away from atavistic primordial politics into artificially conjured quasi-sovereign territorial, ethnic units. One argument is that the TPLF stands for the enshrining of Tigrean supremacy albeit in a republican garb, along the lines of the Era of the Warring Princes of 1770–1855 that was ironically launched by Mikael Sehul of Tigray.

Another interpretation is that, in a predominantly rural society where modern classes are underdeveloped, ethnicity and religion provide the emotional pull that is necessary for the success of Front-led mobilization of aggrieved populations. The glaring inability of pan-ethnic political organizations, Marxist or liberal, to gain deep traction substantiates this structural problem. The politically enterprising sons of the soil whose economic empowerment lies in the political world found it effective to deploy identity politics to secure the capture of the regional state or, preferably, the national. This clearly captures the ambitious of a section of Oromo politicians today.

Finally, as demonstrated by the policies of the Italian and British occupation governments during 1935–45, Ethiopian nationalists continue to be viewed by the big powers as less pliant clients than upstart ethnic politicians. Recalcitrant nationalists tend to be externally destabilized by the big powers of the West as amply demonstrated by the political histories of Africa, Latin America, and the Middle East.

[14] This realist-politics led Bahru Zewde (2014: 275) to wonder: "It has remained one of the ironies of history that the uncompromising championing of the principle of self-determination (up to and including secession) has come from a group originating from the historical core of the Ethiopian polity." How much the shift of the power center from Gondar to Shewa has contributed to alienation from the modern Shewan state by the residents of the Eritrean and the Tigrean plateau remains ill-understood.

The solution offered for the incompleteness of the project of national-state building was driven by the diagnosis, often self-serving, of this failure. If, as the Derg did, the national question is understood as one of cultural oppression of some nationalities, then regional self-administration is what is called for. If, on the other hand, the national question is conceptualized as one of irreconcilable ethnic oppression, then orderly secession becomes the right solution.

As Vaughan (2003) rightly observes, the implementation of ethnic federalism revealed both support and misgivings by the intended beneficiaries. In regions outside the heartland of Ethiopian nationalism, self-administration was widely viewed as a gift which brought access to educational and judicial systems now administered in their own languages, employment opportunities in local state agencies, better representation at the regional and federal levels, and more budgetary allocations to previously marginalized communities. On the other hand, the TPLF/EPRDF paid insufficient attention to the subtleties of local conventions, including the nature and boundaries of group solidarity, the legitimacy accorded to traditional elites relative to modern elites, differing attitudes toward the status accorded to mother tongue relative to Amharic, and the nature of inter-group competition.

Just as importantly, the regime underestimated the emboldening effects on ethnic politicians to challenge the commissar system, at the local level and the federal level, that enforces the TPLF's claim of liberating its co-ethnics who are now entitled to extraordinary rewards. Hence, the growing demand for ethnic fiefdoms within the large regional states or for exercising Article 39 of the Constitution which theoretically grants the right to secede from the top-down federation.

As noted above, the mantle of legitimacy for the TPLF/EPRDF state, especially following the rise of Meles Zenawi as the strongman after the intra-TPLF split of 2001, was the anti-liberal ideology of the deep state. In theory, such a regime is revolutionary because it purports to enjoy a mass base of support and claims to speak for the rural poor (Vaughan 2011; Vestal 2013; Lefort 2015). It is democratic because it professes a commitment to inclusiveness of the oppressed. It is a Party-State since there is no practical distinction between the sole ruling party and the State.

Just as importantly, the regime aspires to be developmental because it seeks to bring about the material prosperity of the people both as an expression of its populist ideology and as an instrument of legitimation by its economic achievement (UNDP 2012; Zenawi 2012). This is a two-fold claim. One pertains to the desire to boost state capacity in terms of organizations (development banks, party companies, state companies, and appropriate development strategies) and centralized control and allocation of economic rent (Kelsall 2013). The other has to do with the desire to treat the fledgling and the politically unaffiliated private sector as a junior partner in development rather than as a leader or an equal partner (Abegaz 2013; Vaughan and Gebremichael 2011).

There is, in fact, a four-way stranglehold on the modern economy. One grabbing hand is the state-enterprise sector which dominates air, power, telecom, banking, transportation, and some subsectors of manufacturing. A second is the ruling-party's business conglomerates, with an estimated 3 billion USD in paid-up capital (not to mention billions of unserviced loans from the state banks) and disguised under the

legal fiction of private endowments, which are engaged in a wide variety of industrial, agricultural and service industries. The third is the politically-connected, and nominally foreign-invested, business empire of Midroc Ethiopia which also has extensive investments in agriculture, industry, and services. This may be undone by the recent arrest, ensnared by the Saudi Arabian anti-corruption campaign, of Sheikh Mohammed al-Amoudi.

The fourth is the Metals and Engineering Corporation (METEC), the TPLF's military-controlled conglomerate engaged in the production of both military and civilian engineering products. Established by the Derg and given expanded authority in 2010, METEC was recently called on by the Parliament to account failure in managing no-bid construction contracts involving multi-billion state projects (Fantahun 2017). The enfeebled native private sector and the growing foreign direct investors have yet to constitute a credible countervailing force in the growing urban economy.

The commonly-cited agents of economic transformation in developing economies are a developmental regime, a nucleus of an entrepreneurial business class, and a large enough initial investible surplus (from resource rent, development aid, or trade margins). A *Developmental State* is essentially a state with effective politico-economic institutions that can render the transformative vision of a *developmental regime* politically feasible and economically desirable. The developmental regime, as a particular political settlement among party, military, bureaucratic and business interests, can be usefully grouped into one of two distinct classes: a partnership between a hegemonic ruling elite and a coalition of powerful non-state political and economic elites or a benevolent dictatorship which may still harbor paternalistic hostility toward an independent business class (Box 5.1).

Marketists developmentals come in two flavors. The first variant is the quasi-democratic corporate coalition for growth such as India after 1990, Thailand, Indonesia, or Malaysia. Other examples are the party-led and a market-friendly partnership with the private sector as was the case with pre-1980 S. Korea or Taiwan. The second variant is what we call vanguardist regime which is hostile to the politically uncaptured business class and prefers, for example, national mobilization for growth by diktat. Examples include post-socialist China and Vietnam as well as the authoritarian-populist regimes of Ethiopia and Rwanda (Abegaz 2013, 2018).

Continuing in the fine tradition of socialistic regimes which instinctively seek performance-based legitimacy, the revolutionary regimes of the post-1974 period have brought significant improvements in living standards. At the same time, indicators of accountable governance have hardly budged (Table 5.3).

The TPLF/EPRDF, in contradistinction to the dominant current in Ethiopian political history, viscerally stands against Ethiopian nationalism. As noted earlier, it is a quintessentially Tigrean revanchist, deeply statist, and vanguardist. It believes in struggle credentials, military power, absolutism in treating open opposition as automatically treasonous, and thinks of the previous regimes in pathological terms (Clapham 2017; Vaughan 2011).

By obliterating the distinction between party and state (and between the public and the private), it practices a system of hierarchical dual political authority:

Box 5.1 The Developmental State

A *Developmental State* (DS) is a neo-patrimonial state with effective politico-economic institutions that can render the transformative vision of a *developmental regime* (DR) politically feasible and economically desirable. This working definition implicitly assumes that "developmentalism" is a characteristic feature of a regime rather than of a state. The two are in sync only when a DR succeeds in embedding and infusing developmentalism throughout the state apparatus.

A functioning DS has the following attributes: (1) a regime which seeks popular legitimacy out of enlightened self-interest, i.e., has the *political will* to be pro-growth and pro-poor; (2) a regime which enjoys sufficient *autonomy* from the contending groups especially within business society to be able to effectively monitor and enforce the terms of the reciprocal bargain; (3) a *capable* state machinery with a monopoly over violence to ensure peace and stability, a bureaucracy with the capacity to enforce the rule of by law, if not the rule of law; and a politically insulated technocracy that can implement the regime's program; (4) a politico-economic settlement of *partnership* between hegemonic ruling elite and a coalition of powerful non-state political and economic elites or, alternatively, a *benevolent dictatorship* with some hostility toward an independent business class and an ability for self-restraint to render the enforcement of the bargain credible; and (5) an insecure regime with a narrow political base which has captured a state with an *existential angst* thereby making a regimented development drive a do-or-die proposition.

The first two attributes pertain to hegemony whereby a far-sighted DR seeks to minimize the exercise of violence by socializing the population into the populist ideology of developmentalism. Attributes 2, 3 and 4, on the other hand, speak to the issue of capability—political and technocratic. An effective DR is one that can enforce the primacy of state authority over other competing sources of authority. The failure of attribute 5 inevitably leads to a growth-standing and unbridled rent-seeking in the form of institutionalized cronyism and nepotism.

What is not clear is the bigger context within which developmentalism can be sustained. While the role of a rich social capital (especially social trust) is important, it is not the case that culturally diverse societies are at a great disadvantage. Existential external threats to the state may incentivize elites to be pro-growth and concede some political rights. What is clear, however, is that public investment suffers diminishing returns and must concede leadership to the private sector.

Table 5.3 Ethiopia: indicators of regime and authority characteristics, 1974–2016

Year	Polity 2 Score	Openness: Chief exec recruitment	Constraint: Chief exec recruitment	Competitiveness: of Participation
1974	−77	−77	−77	−77
1975–1983	−7	4	3	1
1984–1990	−8	4	2	1
1991	−77	−77	−77	−77
1992–2004	1	4	3	3
2005–2016	−3	4	3	3

Sources and Notes: Center for Systemic Peace. POLITY IV PROJECT: Political Regime Characteristics and Transitions, 1800–2015. www.systemicpeace.org
The "Polity Score" captures this regime authority spectrum on a 21-pont scale ranging from −10 (hereditary monarchy) to +10 (consolidated democracy). The Polity scores can also be converted into regime categories as follows: autocracies (−10 to −6), anocracies" (−5 to +5), and democracies (+6 to +10)
The Polity scheme consists of six component measures that record key qualities of executive recruitment, constraints on executive authority and political competition. It also records changes in the institutionalized qualities of governing authority
Polity 2: Scale ranges from +10 (strongly democratic) to! 10 (strongly autocratic), −66 = cases of foreign "interruption" are treated as "system missing"
Openness: 0 = not applicable, 1 = closed/hereditary, 4 = open
Constraint:1 = unlimited authority, 7 = subordination of the executive to accountability groups
Competitiveness of Participation: 1 = repressed, 2 = suppressed, 3 = factional, 4 = transitional,5 = competitive

Table 5.4 Ethiopia: Population History and Life Expectancy, 1950–2017

Year	Total population	% Female	Growth rate	World rank	Life expectancy
2017	104,344,901	50.09	2.38	12	na
2015	99,390,750	50.09	2.45	13	65.0
2010	87,561,814	50.10	2.59	14	61.6
2005	76,608,431	50.11	2.74	15	56.2
2000	66,443,603	50.14	2.89	16	51.9
1995	57,237,225	50.14	3.16	21	49.3
1990	48,057,094	50.13	3.53	23	47.1
1985	40,775,997	50.22	3.19	23	44.6
1980	35,239,974	50.22	2.39	26	43.7
1975	32,568,539	50.21	1.75	26	44.0
1970	28,414,999	50.24	2.88	26	42.9
1965	25,013,551	50.27	2.48	25	41.3
1960	22,151,217	50.29	2.32	25	38.4
1955	19,947,265	50.33	1.99	25	na
1950	18,128,034	50.36	1.85	25	na

Sources and Notes: Population: http://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/ethiopia-population/, Life Expectancy: https://data.worldbank.org/country/Ethiopia
The pre-1995 figures include Eritrea

Party bodies duplicate government counterparts much like the defunct Soviet state, and the internal directives of the Party have primacy over the rules and regulations of the government.[15]

In addition to rigging the political system under the veneer of a modern constitutional order, the regime has instituted an internal passport system that mandates classification of all citizens by ethnicity (shown on their identity cards as in Apartheid South Africa) who are entitled to full privileges only in their Party-designated homelands. Predictably, this separate-but-equal governance model by ethnic fiefdoms has also made pastoral areas even more prone to endemic conflict pertaining to electoral campaigns, huge land grabs for commercial plantations, budgetary allocations, and competition for water sources and pastures (Lefort 2015).

All said, the replacement of the official ideology of Ethiopian nationalism by ethnonationalism has had contradictory effects on the project of building a nation-state: it has provided expanded space for marginalized groups to assert themselves culturally and politically while emboldening some ethnic politicians to seek their own independent states. It has thereby constitutionalized ethnic (rather than citizen) sovereignty with a Stalinist theoretical right to secession, albeit after jumping through many onerous hoops. Furthermore, diasporization has created a cosmopolitan population that is altering the terms of political engagement with its new ideas and financial resources (Levine 2011).

As a result of domestic and global developments, the revenue base of RS2 has three pillars. They share of government revenue in national income has risen while the tax-to-GDP ration (at 13%) remains among the lowest in Africa; the source of the revenue is more diversified today (income, sales, export of services, export of diversified basket of goods); and the size and the share of foreign-derived income (official aid, remittances, and FDI) have increased markedly. In fact, the $12 billion in inward flows of foreign exchange in 2015 comprised in equal thirds by aid, remittances, FDI plus exports. Another twist is that RS2 is also distinctive in the significance of institutionalized corruption with as much as 3 billion dollars of outflows in the form of illicit trade alone (World Bank 2017, Table 1).

The country's produced and non-reproducible stock of wealth underpins national income and well-being. When measured comprehensively, national wealth includes produced capital, natural capital, human capital, and net foreign assets. Produced capital includes physical capital and urban land, measured at market prices. Natural capital (comprising energy, minerals, agricultural land, and forests) is measured as the discounted sum of the value of the rents generated over the lifetime of the asset. Human capital (comprising education, skills, and health status) is calculated as the discounted value of earnings over a person's lifetime. Finally, net foreign assets are

[15] Pausewang, Tronvoll and Aalen (2002: 230–231) put the matter this way: "During the ten years of EPRDF rule, it has become apparent that the government has established and reinforced a two-track structure at all administrative levels. It has built up a formal structure of democratic institutions to keep in line with the promises it made to the Ethiopian people and the demands and expectations of Western donors… But below the surface, it has built a party structure that keeps tight control at all levels and makes sure that no one can use these democratic institutions effectively to challenge its power."

Table 5.5 Wealth per capita in Ethiopia and comparator countries, 2014 (in US$)

Countries	Total wealth	Produced capital	Natural capital	Human capital	Net foreign assets
ETHIOPIA	$13,125	1,347	5,284	6,723	–229
Egypt	$38,470	5,605	11,229	22,591	–955
India	$18,211	5,161	4,739	8,755	–474
Kenya	$19,412	3,356	6,771	9,556	–271
SSA	$25,562	4,017	9,225	12,680	–360

Source: Lange et al. (2018, Appendix B). *SSA* Sub-Saharan Africa

the sum of a country's external assets and liabilities. Global GDP at market prices was around 75 trillion; global wealth was 1,143 trillion U.S. dollars (Lange, et al. 2018, Table ES.1). This means the average world wealth per capita of $168,580 is over 10 times that of Ethiopia.

Long-term growth of per capita income is driven by population growth and efficient management of the demographic dividend and the country's portfolio of assets. Table 5.4 reports trends in population growth in Ethiopia while Table 5.5 shows wealth per capita. Compared to the high-income countries (70%), Ethiopia's human capital accounts for half of its wealth per head. While natural capital accounts for two-thirds of wealth in low-income countries, Ethiopia's share is only 40 percent. Since the fiscal base cannot depend on natural resource rents, the country has no choice but to manage its renewable agricultural capital well and build up its human capital. The bottom line, once again, is that competition for scarce resources among regional elites goes a long way toward explaining the enormous challenge faced by ambitious Ethiopian state builders throughout its history.

5.5 The Paradox of State-Building and Nation-Debuilding Under RS

The 400-year-old project of building an effective political order (under the Gondarine, Shewan, and Revolutionary banners) has yet to be fully realized. The fusion of political power with economic power by two narrowly-based ruling groups under RS is indeed unprecedented. While the record on the observance of the rule of law and popular accountability seems to have deteriorated, the record on the state-building component is mixed with gains on technocratic capability and losses in legitimacy.

The historical evidence suggests that success in state building is a necessary but not sufficient condition for an effective nation-building. This is because nation-building requires a judicious exercise of soft power by which culturally diverse citizens are assimilated progressively with little threat to their multiple situational identities—ethnicity, class, region, national, or religion.

The Ethiopian case, as should be clear by now, has many enigmatic dimensions. It is a rather culturally diverse society but not nearly as diverse as most African countries

(of medium or large population sizes) to bear the risks of excessive fractionalization—just two ethnic groups account for two-thirds of the population and adding two others raises the share to 80 percent. It is a large country but one with a low level of income inequality—thanks to a radical land reform program and little mining endowment to reinforce the equalizing effects of labor-intensive industrialization. And most importantly, its widely-shared political culture has provided the resiliency need for the state in the face of frequent and disquieting regime changes.

So, how do we then explain the Ethiopian paradox? The Ethiopian puzzle is not a clear-cut case of a resounding success in state building and a partial success in nation-building. It is rather one of great beginnings and great unfinishings, especially on the latter front.

After 1900, the trajectories of state formation and nation formation became sharpened. For the conservative state elites of Gondar and Shewa, viability entailed concentric circles of authority. The emperors had first and foremost to consolidate control over the core provinces from Massawa to Lake Zeway by forging close alliances with a network of provincial lords as well as appointed governors. To expand the tributary base, including access to the sea, the emperors had to prevail over the fractious and ever-rebellious chiefdoms and sheikdoms.

A notable critical juncture for modernization drive came in the form of two major wars with imperial Italy (in 1895 and 1935) which induced a serious defensive move to establish a central government with the trappings of a modern bureaucracy and a market economy. The failure of the second Shewan state to undertake industrialization and progressive accommodation of the new political forces emerging from limited modernization, especially after the wakeup call of the 1960 attempted coup d'etat by the Neway brothers. This event qualifies as a second critical juncture. The failed coup d'etat eventually emboldened the educated youth to engage civically thereby paving the way for the emergence of two revolutionary regimes since 1975—a nationalist military regime presiding over a socialist war economy, and an ethno-nationalist regime presiding on a fractious crony capitalist economy. The transition between the two revolutionary regimes constitutes the third critical juncture in a century.

In the final analysis, at the risk of sounding to economic-determinist, the cumulation of meager tributes, the binding constraint on Ethiopian state formation is the glaring absence of a state elite with an independent economic base. As I underscored in the previous two chapters, Ethiopian state building has long been entrapped by the logic of overlord state elites impelled to rely on office-holding to extract economic surplus from small producers in a manner that enfeebles both economic growth and central political authority. This practice intensified in different forms even after the replacement of the monarchy in 1974 by two successive revolutionary-authoritarian regimes.

I have offered here one plausible explanation for the failure of the Ethiopian states (Christian as well as Muslim) to nurture modern bureaucracies and salaried armies, and to enforce the requisite restraints on the power of the sovereign (through autonomous Crown Councils, Constitutions, and power centers). While economic rent from the large estates owned by the members of the royal family, the nobility, and the provincial governors were certainly important, the primary source of income for the military aristocracy was tribute (usufructuary rights over state lands or overrights to taxes and tribute granted by the state or its agents) which was inextricably linked to office-holding. In other words, accumulation of wealth was dependent on

the quantity and quality of land and labor under one's crown-sanctioned jurisdiction (as the benefices of office) rather than on the size one's family estate (landlordism).

In this subsistence-oriented non-urban society, the degree of access to international trade made a critical difference to the balance of power among contending power-holders since trade was the primary mechanism for converting extracted domestic economic surplus into imported arms and status goods. The insular and contest-prone domestic economy was bereft of cities, industry, plantations, mines, or native-controlled interregional commerce.

My approach to resolving the paradox contributes to the extant literature in three important areas. First, it provides a meta-analysis of the thickly descriptive literature on Ethiopian economic history by using a coherent theoretical framework for thinking about the dynamics of transition from a civilizational state to a modern nation-state. Second, it highlights the non-feudal *rist-gult* land institution of Ethiopia as the cornerstone of the political power. Third, it recasts the forces that shaped the evolution of the Ethiopian state in a comparative framework with similarly-situated Afroasian empires.

Traditional Ethiopian political culture, at least in the highlands, is basically illiberal since it embraces versions of all but political rights. Political socialization takes place primarily at the level of the state-linked institutions. What it lacks, therefore, is an effective restraint on powerholders through such devices as a practically honorable constitutional order and civic values about the universality of human rights and civil liberties.

The major factor for the persistence of an unstable anocracy, is, in the final analysis, the persistence of mass poverty in almost all regions. Ethiopia remains one of the world's poorest countries with a per capita income that is only 40% of the average for Subsaharan Africa. Despite an agricultural growth-driven reduction in poverty, the intensity of poverty is national in scope, albeit with intra-regional and inter-*woreda* disparities. As shown in Fig. 5.3, parts of Oromia and Southern Nations, and most of Amhara show the greatest proportion of *woreda* in which the income share of bottom 40 percent of households is higher than the national average (World Bank 2017).

While great attention has been given by the state elites of the past 50 years to meeting basic needs, the Ethiopian state remains extractive and intolerant of public space for organizations not connected to it. The urban-based captive state, with a substantial coercive power to advance the interests of a tiny state elite, has been unable to fully legitimize itself by accommodating the diverse economic and cultural interests of its dismally poor and politically hapless citizenry.

The ethnic-federalist model of state-building in a country without a history of ethnic-based sub-states is fraying fast with the tale-tale signs of nation de-building and failing to ensure that the administratively created federal units do not replicate the excesses of unitary centralism under the Derg (Gerring et al. 2004). In the canonical cases of federalism from below such as the former USSR and Yugoslavia, disintegration has readily produced viable successors since the Russian and Serbian constituent polities had pre-existed the federal union with recoupable territorial identities.

Ethiopia, on the other hand, has a political tradition of church- or mosque-mediated state formations, not ethnic-based statehood. There was no "Tigrean,"

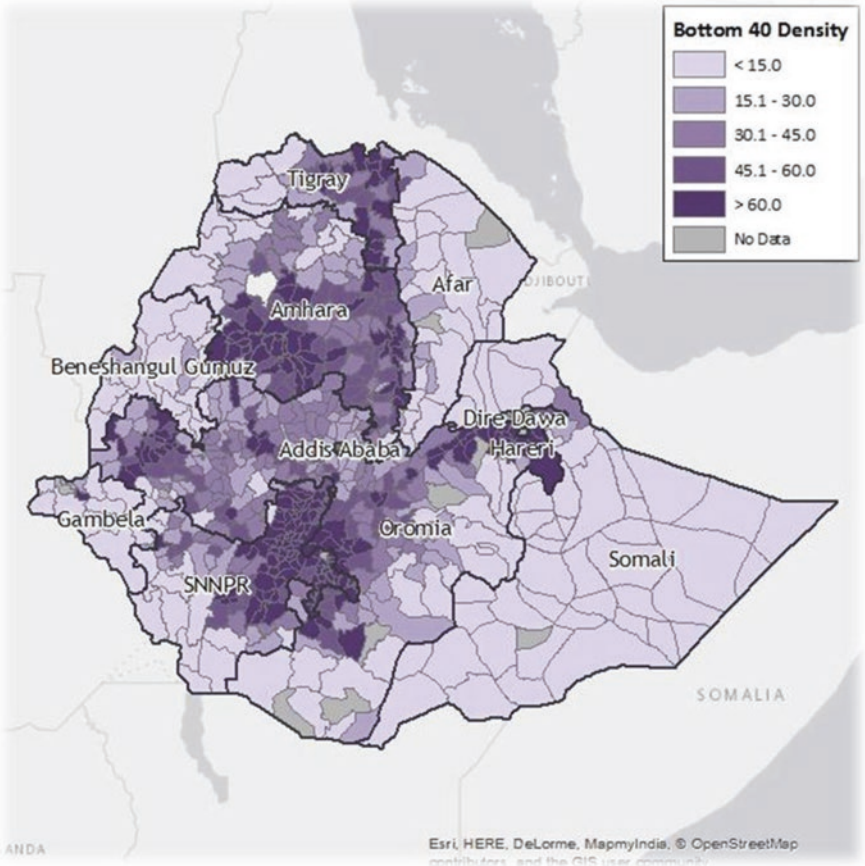

Fig. 5.3 Equality-in-poverty: density of the bottom 40% of the income distribution. (*Source*: World Bank (2017: 13))

"Amara," or "Oromo" state to fall back on to avoid a wrenching process of ethnic cleansing by competing elites on the basis of ever-changing population settlement patterns. If we take the three largest demographic groups, it is clear that Tigrean nationalism is regionalist, Oromo nationalism must contend with a weak basis in an identifiably unified polity to undergird it, and the post-tribal Amara ethnicity remains too wedded to Ethiopian nationalism to assume an invidious primordial form (Vaughan 2003; Vestal 2013; Kebede 1999; Levine 2000).[16] This does not mean that things do not change over time (Fig. 5.4).

[16] Clapham (1988: 26) may have been too hard in prematurely declaring that a common secular nationalism was aspirational when he says: "It is a multiethnic nation riven by conflicts not only with those who deny the basis of Ethiopian nationalism but even with many of those who accept it." But, this has become increasingly true in the three decades since he offered this assessment.

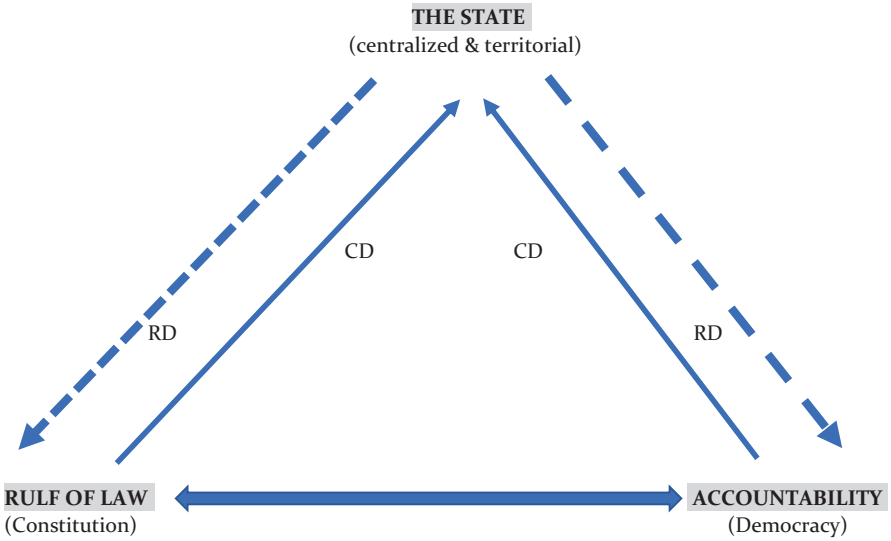

Fig. 5.4 Two contrasting conceptions of Ethiopian political order. → direction of political restraint, *CD* constitutional democracy (capable state + Bill of Rights + substantive democracy), *RD* revolutionary democracy (capable state + rule by law under a vanguard party + procedural democracy). (*Sources and Notes*: Author)

Historically, the political divide took place between the oval-shaped Christian highlands and the predominantly Muslim lowlands of the Rift Valley in the east and the Sudanese borderlands in the west (Markakis 2011). The Christian state had a core population with a lingua franca of Amharic and other five important languages for national integration—Oromiffa, English, Tigrigna, Somaligna, and Sidamigna.

The modern Ethiopian state has proved strong enough to mount a respectable development drive with a modicum of efficiency, but too weak to permit space for the necessary economic emulation as well as competition among the organized interests in society. The ideal of state capitalism is governance based on a cadre of benevolent planners rather than by democratically elected politicians.[17] The two cohorts of revolutionary elites have failed to outgrow their youthful infatuation with statism and populist Marxism to mask their kleptocratic rule.

It is worth remembering that the exercise of state power is about two things which are conflated by the sanitized good-governance rhetoric of the World Bank and other international actors (World Bank 2017). It is fundamentally and struc-

[17] Micklethwait and Woodridge (2014: 262) rightly note that democracy is neither a universal value nor an automatic byproduct of development: "Western countries almost invariably introduced the mass franchise only after they had already introduced sophisticated political regimes with powerful legal systems and entrenched constitutional rights—and they did so in cultures that cherished notions of individual rights."

turally about the extent of institutionalized power sharing among the fundamental interests in society in a manner that is considered legitimate by the society itself. Asymmetry of power expresses itself in exclusion, state capture, and a mix of cronyism and clientelism. Bad governance, of course, undermines the effectiveness of both the public sector and the private sector and undermines state capability. It also erodes a regime's legitimacy thereby inducing large excluded groups to resist openly and violently (Cederman et al. 2012). The emergent Amara and Oromo resistance, having overcome fear itself, is a case in point.

All said, after 2015, several features of the post-1974 RS have become evident. One is the failure of socialism, as an ideology of a unitary state resonates with the masses in a non-industrial society. The second is the failure of ethnic federalism as a strategy for minority rule or as a strategy for building a nation-state with self-governing local communities. It instead proved politically polarizing and destabilizing. The third is the twinning of state-debuilding and the decoupling of the vanguard party from the state.

These processes have been taking place simultaneously and have yet to play themselves out fully. Even the most pan-ethnic primate city of Addis Ababa is not spared from protection racket given its highly-valued assets (Box 5.2).

This tension is, however, compounded by the bidirectional causality between the interpretation of the lived experience of ethnic status and the calculative collective action directed toward competition for power in a society of scarce resources. These tensions and fissures are longstanding contributors to state fragility of Ethiopia (Table 5.6). The latest fragility index puts the Ethiopian state only slightly above the failed state of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and certainly as far as one can be from Denmark.

In conclusion, the Ethiopian revolutionary state managed to build up considerable technocratic capacity under a developmental mantra and financed largely by externally-sourced funds rather than domestic resources. But, the country remains in a straightjacket long in the making: state-mediated 'politics of the belly' and political ethnicity's polarity can hardly be tamed by sham elections and grandiose development projects alone.

Broad-based and sustainable citizen engagement is the only way to restrain powerholders to mind the interests the collective while supporting the emergence of a capable Ethiopian state has remained an elusive dream. A citizen-based institutional design and engagement is the way to fuse the twin needs of state capability and state accountability both of which are essential foundations for a modern political and economic order. But how it can be done remains entirely unclear, but it is much more fruitful to debate the future with knowledge of the past but focused primarily on the better prospects for arriving at a win-win outcome.

Box 5.2 Addis Ababa: The Big Prize

The vicinity of Addis Ababa was at the southern tip of the medieval Ethiopian state. Pre-1500 church ruins, the significance presence of Sidama-speaking people in the Shewan highlands, and the mass movement of the Oromo people into the fertile region beginning in the mid-1500s all suggest that the Addis Ababa region served as a confluence of northern and southern Ethiopians. The city itself was founded in 1886 as the capital of the Shewa kingdom and 1989 as the capital of all of Ethiopia.

Today, it has a population of 4–5 within the city (and 6 million in the metropolitan region), slightly over half of whom are native Amharic speakers, and about one-fifth of are Oromiffa speakers, and another one-fifth Guragigna speakers. Well over three-quarters of the population follow the Christian faith.

Addis Ababa, much like Nairobi or Abidjan, is a primate city as well as an administrative national capital. It is also an international city fast becoming the air hub of the African Continent. It has the second highest concentration of international organizations and foreign embassies in Africa after Nairobi. The headquarters of the UN Economic Commission for Africa, the African Union, and more than 120 international missions and embassies call the city home.

Aside from its political significance, the Addis Ababa metro is the economic engine of the country. Along with Ethiopian Airlines, the international organizations and foreign embassies are among the major sources of foreign exchange. In a country where the public sector dominates the formal economy, Addis Ababa is the beneficiary of the presence of federal government institutions.

Addis Ababa and its vicinity are also the industrial and commercial hub of the country with all the major roads and railroads radiating from it. It is well-connected by rail or highways with the modern seaports of Djibouti city and Berbera in Somaliland both of which are within a 500–600 mile radius. Finally, it is the seat of the country's flagship university and the better part of the country's human capital.

What all this real-estate boom and aid- and a politically-financed boost to demand means is that political groups seeking to capture state revenue and land rent in the most expensive real estate market in the country salivate to control it. Since the 2005 elections, the contest over it has intensified and will continue to be so. The need for an integrated economic plan, undergirded by a clear legal status for the surrounding municipalities, for the greater Addis Ababa region will also remain compelling. The natural constituency for it comprises the business community and the working class both of which suffer classic coordination failures and over-dependence on the public sector.

Table 5.6 Indexes of state fragility, effectiveness, and legitimacy

Index	Ethiopia	DRC (world's worst)	Denmark (world's best)
Fragility index	19	24	0
Effectiveness score	9	13	0
Legitimacy score	10	11	0
Armed conflict indicator	War	War	None
Regime type	Autocracy	Democracy	Democracy

Sources and Notes: Marshall and Elzinga (2017), Table 2
State Fragility Index = Effectiveness Score + Legitimacy Score (25 points possible)
Effectiveness Score = Security Effectiveness + Political Effectiveness + Economic Effectiveness + Social Effectiveness (13 points possible)
Legitimacy Score = Security Legitimacy + Political Legitimacy + Economic Legitimacy + Social Legitimacy (12 points possible)

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Part III
A Modern African Political Order

Chapter 6
Implications for Reforming the Postcolonial State

> *Aside from multidisciplinarity, the study of the state must be historical. For better or for worse, it is the European state system which has been superimposed on the rest of the world. The differences in historical environment and the divergent trajectories not only shed light on the problems confronting the newly independent states of the last half-century but possibly point the way to remedies which might start to address the dire effects of state failure.*
>
> *Hendrik Spruyt (2011: 588)*

This chapter distills the central lessons from the positive analysis for the normative task of rebuilding a postcolonial state—one that is capable, legitimate, bound by the rule of law, and subject to accountability mechanisms which resonate with enduring African core values. There is much to preserve from the colonial and postcolonial legacies, but there is also much room for new ideas and institutions. One lesson is the need to ensure secure property (especially land) rights to families and corporate groups. Another is decentralized self-governance either in a unitary form or a federal form. A third is the anchoring of state revenues, the types of taxes collected from citizens as well as resource rent from the domestic economy, to cement the nexus between public financing and government accountability to citizens.

The principle of no representation without taxation seems to apply universally. The institutionalization of organically internal restraints on powerholders and reliable support for legitimate wealth-creating activities will go a long toward ensuring both political freedom and economic freedom for all Africans.

I argued above that absolutism is unhelpful as a framework for understanding Ethiopian underdevelopment. There were incessant contests for offices by the overlord class as well as between the overlord class and the landed peasantry. In other words, the Crown was often too weak to provide security of property and public goods in the service of growth but strong enough to claim tribute by enforcing the rights of the state through episodic punitive measures to give credibility to implied threats emanating from the Court.

B. Abegaz, *A Tributary Model of State Formation*,
Advances in African Economic, Social and Political Development,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-75780-3_6

Table 6.1 Trajectories of nation-building and state-building in diverse societies

Nation-building / *State-building*	Top (center)	Bottom (periphery)
Top-down (center)	TT: Centralized unitary	TB: Decentralized federal
	SB to NB	***NB to SB***
	France, Spain, South Africa, Ethiopia (pre-1974)	Germany, India, Canada, USA
Bottom-up (periphery)	BT: Centralized federal	BB: Decentralized unitary or confederation
	NB/SB *(de-building)*	***NB to SB***
	Ethiopia, post-1994; postsocialist Russia	UK, Belgium, Switzerland

Sources and Notes: Author
SB=state building, *NB*=nation building

The tributary perspective sheds much-needed light on why Ethiopia and other precolonial African societies became highly prone to political fragmentation, state fragility, economic stagnation, and victimization to external empire builders. To put it bluntly, Ethiopian peasants remained poor not because they were over-exploited, but ironically because *they were not exploited enough* by a class commerce-minded feudal lords of entrepreneurial landlords. Being landed alone may be necessary but not sufficient for freedom from want and tyranny. It had its price; so, of course, is being landless. History is full of cruel ironies, indeed.

Global trends in governance during 1800–2016 show that autocracies started out strong, declined until the end of the nineteenth century before rising precipitously during 1940–1980, and followed by a precipitous decline since then. Democratic experiments became palpable in the age of industrialization (post-1870), experienced substantial gains since 1950, and have plateaued after 1980 (Marshall and Elzinga-Marshall 2017).

A typology of the interactions between the trajectories of nation formation and state formation is provided in Table 6.1 which puts together the various strands of thought on the subject. It suggests that, when nation-building and state-building are both top-down, a centralized unitary state is often the result. Where the opposite is the case, a decentralized unitary state or a loose federation is likely to result. In the intermediate case of a combination of a bottom-up nation building and a top-down state, a federalist settlement is a likely outcome. Where nation-building is top-down, a faux federalism can hardly be distinguished in practice from centralized **unitarism**.

These lessons of history and the theory of political order in general, and the trajectories of state formation in particular, suggest strongly that political settlements that accommodate the interests of all major groups in African society are likely to produce viable coalitions for shared prosperity and shared political governance. These conditions exist when there are sufficiently empowered elites representing the various domestic sectional interests—the economic classes (sedentary agriculturalists, pastoralists, mercantile, or industrial), the religions (Christian, Muslim, or

Indigenous), and the major ethnic groups. The balancing of enlightened parochial interests and the deterrence that comes from credible resistance to the abuse of power are likely to produce a stable equilibrium which will give the project of nation-state building a fighting chance.

In the age of high globalization, external factors are likely to be important, too. Neocolonial relations, military as well as development aid, have impinged on the resolution of legitimate domestic political contentions in favor of client regimes (World Bank 2017). On the other hand, progressive international norms such as universal human and civil rights and the responsibility to protect groups abused by despotic governments can aid the democratization process especially if impunity is restrained sufficiently by international law.

6.1 The Postcolonial African State

Given the diversity of the agro-ecological, demographic, and historical experiences of African countries, one should always be careful to avoid overgeneralizations. In this regard, Samir Amin (1972) provides a useful sorting of the regions of this variegated continent during the colonial period. He suggests three macro agro-climatic and minerals zones of Africa south of the Sahara. The *Africa of the colonial trade economy* covered coastal western Africa (warm semi-arid and tropical savanna) and its hinterlands where smallholder agricultural surplus was taxed heavily by both the colonial and the postcolonial state. The Africa *of the concession-owning companies,* especially in the Congo River Basin (equatorial and monsoon), was one where brutal means of primitive accumulation were deployed by unusually avaricious colonial companies to extract forest products and minerals, continue to nurse fragile states with an unbelievable level of violence. The *Africa of the labor reserves* spanned eastern and southern Africa (tropical and sub-tropical savanna) where extensive land dispossession and forced labor were employed to benefit the otherwise unprofitable plantations and mines, is still grappling with the twin fission or race and political ethnicity.

By extension, we can add two more distinctive regions. *North (Maghrib) Africa,* with Mediterranean-coastal and Arabized Berber populations dominated alternately by Asian and European empires, has done well economically and the demand for broad-based political representation is making slow progress toward inclusion (Tunisia, Algeria, and perhaps Morocco) producing simmering popular resistance (Egypt) or outright state failure (Libya). *The Remainder,* an array of historical exceptions such as Ethiopia, Somalia, Madagascar, and Mauritius, are too diverse for easy generalization.

So, aside from the mode of organization of production dictated by agro-climatic conditions and the labor intensity of mines and forest products, there is the thorny issue of the politicization of primordial identities such as ethnicity or religion since class cleavages are weak. Primordial identities may be the only way agrarian populations can initially enter electoral politics. The cultural and instrumental dimensions

of ethnicity are known to operate jointly are also malleable (see Bates 2006, for a review). Until classes are sufficiently developed to provide a firm basis for pan-ethnic mobilization, ethnicism and provincialism are likely to be tapped and reframed situationally by rational politicians who are intent on nurturing neopatrimonial or clientelist politics.

There are indeed notable features of the post-1960 African state which are driven partly by the global environment and partly by domestic forces born of geography and colonial legacy. Firstly, the international state system does not automatically confer internal legitimacy to neither the state nor a particular regime. While external legitimacy does weaken the direct link between intra-state war and state formation, it has also had the unintended effect of fueling intra-state civil strife.

Secondly, the substantial reduction of the risks of external wars also made for the extraverted postcolonial state. That is, the neocolonial state is unhealthily less embedded in its domestic economy and polities than in its clientelist relations with powerful states—in the context of the Cold War and, now, the War on Terror. The taxation-representation linkage thereby weakened, and insecure regimes became extraverted or sought to exploit resource rents where feasible.

Thirdly, the premature introduction of the territorialist model of statehood without a corresponding economic base has meant that non-territorial tributarism had to be reconciled with hard national boundaries (Herbst, 2000). One result has been the proliferation of parasitic regimes with stupendously myopic mindsets. Rentier states may have bypassed the fiscal base problem (tradeoff between taxation and representation), but they often fall back on narrow patrimonialism or clientelism when elections became the international norm. In the end, they delegitimize themselves in the eyes of citizens (Englebert, 2000).

Fourthly, the territorial demarcations, being willy-nilly products of colonialism, ended up fragmenting polities and nations across state boundaries. More importantly, they are widely viewed by African regimes as sacrosanct if only to stem destabilizing secessionism. The dilemma has also preempted opportunities to adjust borders or to transcend them altogether—albeit in the context of regional economic integration, federations, or confederations. Whenever a state becomes fragile, shadow states led by warlords tend to proliferate to fuel civil strife and wars of secession. The ongoing tragedies of central Africa and the Horn of Africa are cases in point.

The project of state elites to seek legitimacy, through aggressive assimilation and national-territorial rather than kin-based citizenship, turned out to be a daunting challenge even in promising countries such as Kenya, Cote d'Ivoire, and Ethiopia. The rule of law was declared in the form of constitutionalism but was honored in its breach. Stability trumped justice.

This may very well be why the accountability leg of a modern political order proved the most elusive to attain. By 1970, half of independent Africa had a military government; and despite a renaissance of democratic elections in the two decades since 1990, Africa is fast reverting to its old habits. Since the preconditions for the rooting of democratic institutions is systematically undermined by self-serving rulers, creative ways of building-in restraints on powerholders will have to be devised.

6.2 Institutionalizing Restraints on Powerholders

The receding memories of the lived experience of colonization and the fad of electoral politics have exposed the fissions among Africa's still ethnocentric polities. The promising but glass-house economies of Cote d'Ivoire, Egypt, Zimbabwe, and Kenya have fallen into political polarization along ethnic or military-civilian lines. Ethnic minorities have established authoritarian-populist regimes which have obliterated the distinction between state and party in Ethiopia, Uganda, Zimbabwe, Eritrea, and Rwanda. Kleptocrats have taken over in Angola, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, the DRC, and both Sudans. Political empowerment of the Black majority in South Africa is coexisting uneasily with enormous concentration of economic power in the hands of the white minority in South Africa. Precarious balancing of politics characterizes Tanzania, Senegal, Ghana, Zambia, and perhaps Nigeria.

An alarming number of African states have devised a stratagem that stems chaos but also enshrines ethnic dictatorship. Societies most prone to this dispensation have tended to be those with acute inter-communal competition and group animosities where factionalism renders inter-elite national coalitions rather fragile. This is magnified wherever easy-to-loot resources exist.

What is interesting is that, even in mining-poor countries (Ethiopia, Rwanda, and Uganda), the traditional modes of creating nation-states through cooptation and assimilation are too slow or infeasible in the eyes of myopic ruling elites. A better, albeit short-termist, strategy is to use a combination of tactics. One is to constantly and situationally foment conflict among subordinate groups along ethnic cleavages, or regional and religious faultlines. Demonizing targeted competitors and meting out collective punishment is a strategy for solidifying power by a minority.

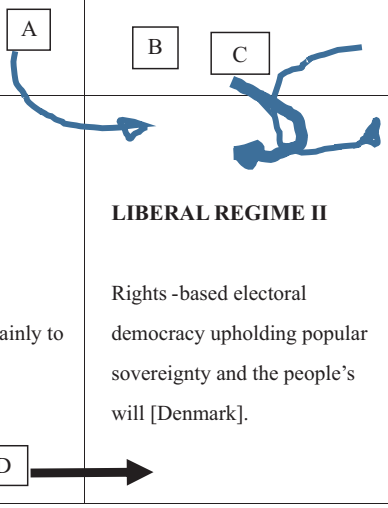
This system of ruling "by managed conflict" may concede to junior partners of the ruling coalition some power in direct proportion to their violence potential (NWW 2012; Horowitz 1985). It also privileges loyalty over merit in the recruitment of cadres and relies on its sectional favoritism in the form of nepotism and regional favoritism. All these strategies are designed to prevent the emergence of a grand oppositional coalition of territorialized ethnies which, even under normal circumstances, is difficult in a diverse society. Civil strife has the habit of getting out of control sooner than later. The cautionary tales come from the millions of lives lost in the Soviet Collectivization Drive, the Chinese Cultural Revolution, and the Rwandan Genocide.

Encouragingly, some African constitutions insist that political parties have a 'national character' to stem polarizing ethnocentrism or another form of sectionalism. The transition to a liberal democratic order has to honor individual freedom, including consociationalist arrangements among corporate groups to ensure a stabilizing power-sharing arrangement. The latter has, however, proved to be more prone to fragility even in the developed countries (such as Belgium or Spain) let alone in the emerging ones (such as Nigeria, Lebanon, or Yugoslavia).

In a nutshell, one can reasonably argue that three distinct possibilities exist for building a capable and accountable African state that can embrace the core

Table 6.2 The roads to Denmark

Democracy / *Constitutionalism*	Procedural	Substantive
Rule of Law	**ILLIBERAL REGIME I** Clientelist authority that malevolently fails to deliver popular results [Mexico].	**ILLIBERAL REGIME II** Clientelist authority that benevolently delivers popular results [South Korea].
Bill of Rights	**LIBERAL REGIME I** Rights -based electoral democracy catering mainly to an oligarchy [India].	**LIBERAL REGIME II** Rights -based electoral democracy upholding popular sovereignty and the people's will [Denmark].



Sources and Notes: Author
Path A = The Mexican road to Denmark, *Path B* = The long Korean road to Denmark, *Path C* = The short Korean road to Denmark, *Path D* = The Indian road to Denmark

institutions of a political order that is worthy of the twenty-first century. The domestic-led option accentuates the task of eradicating mass poverty and nurturing a middle class that can fight for civil liberties. The second option is for progressive Africans, and friends of Africa, to invoke prevailing international political norms of universal rights to agitate in favor of accountable political and economic institutions in Africa. In doing so, popular expectations about the realm of the possible are raised, and the seeds of enduring accountability mechanisms are firmly planted.

This leaves us with the third possibility of securing authoritarian regimes which self-interestedly move toward progressive inclusion that is rationalized as state nationalism. Some regimes are indeed predisposed to investing a good portion of the vast economic rent they have accumulated to become the so-called 'neopatrimonial developmentals' (Kelsall 2013; Handley 2008; Whitfield et al. 2015).

With respect to the evolution of the other two legs of the modern political order, democracy, and constitutionalism, we identify in Table 6.2 four pathways whose end-state is a liberal-democratic order (exemplified by a hyper-democratic Denmark).

If a country starts out from a position of an illiberal regime practicing regular elections and delivering paternalistically popular economic and social results (South Korea), then it can traverse two alternative roads to Denmark.

One path is the short one of directly committing to a Bill of Rights while focusing on meeting popular demand (path C). The other is the indirect road of regressing in public-service delivery but progressing toward a constitutional order. If, on the other hand, a country practices procedural democracy while serving the interests of an oligarchy (Mexico), it can get to Denmark by committing itself to fundamental rights and delivering popular results (path A). Finally, an electoral democracy with a strong rights-based tradition (India) finds it easiest to join Denmark by empowering poor voters rather than just the powerful coalition of business, farming, and bureaucratic interests (path D).

Restraints on powerholders can in exceptional circumstances come from judicious interventions by enlightened foreign patrons deeply interested in enforcing respect for universal rights that are enshrined in various United Nations treaties (Rodrik 2012). Unfortunately, multilateral organizations tend to be captured by the big powers who fall back in the habit of myopically defining their geopolitical, political interests. This often entails giving a blank check to pro-growth client regimes, however repressive they may be to their hapless citizens.

The aid-reform literature also suggests that, even when donors insist on weak forms of governance reforms (such as those aimed at reducing non-institutionalized corruption), political conditionalities can be costlessly ignored by self-preserving regimes (World Bank 1997; 2017). New donors and investors such as China and India are too business-minded to care about human rights in Africa (Dreher et al. 2017).

It is a well-known fact that high economic inequality makes voters in emerging democracies vote in favor of politicians with extreme policies. Deep-seated extractive institutions make politics attractive to, or biased in favor of, strongmen. This preempts the emergence of an effective party system that can produce socially desirable alternatives.

The implications for development and aid policy are clear enough. One cannot simply impose, as multilateral development organizations have done for decades, the institutions of an open-access order where the political and economic conditions for their viability do not yet exist (NWW 2012). Channeling aid money through exclusionary political institutions and trying to fix micro-markets technocratically is often illusory in terms of sustainability. As Acemoglu and Robinson (2012: 450) rightly note:

> The institutional structure that creates market failures will also prevent implementation of interventions to improve incentives at the micro level. Attempting to engineer prosperity without confronting the root cause of the problems—extractive institutions and the politics that keeps them in place—is unlikely to bear fruit.

But more realistically, the reins of political restraint on officeholders must come from within—from the application of the principle of the sovereignty of free citizens over their government. This is because human and political rights are properly vested in citizens who must muster the ability and the willpower to defend them. In this respect, the practice of civic activism is generally associated with the emergence

of the middle class. There is some evidence that a lower middle-class is emerging in Africa (AfDB 2011). However, civic space and civic courage can exist only after effective coordination mechanisms are cultivated. The intergovernmental mode of development aid delivery, therefore, needs to be supplemented by direct financial support to the fledgling private sector and to the non-partisan rights-based civic organizations.

6.3 Re-imagining the Post-Revolutionary Ethiopian State

The paradox of the post-1974 Ethiopian Revolutionary state is encapsulated by three puzzles. First, significant improvements in the indexes of social and economic welfare are associated with an increase in large-scale violence—much of it state sponsored. Second, the rise in income for most was accompanied by declining satisfaction by the beneficiaries. Third, the rise in the technocratic competence and discipline of the central state were not coupled with the strengthening of Ethiopian nationalism that undergirds loyalty to the state. The simple, but certainly not simplistic, explanation is that the narrowly-based elites, by accentuating horizontal inequality and undermining national integration, eventually lost the legitimacy to rule. The ensuing societal polarization, suspicion, and eventual popular defiance undermined the social contract and increasingly rendered unsustainable the public-investment-driven and ruling-party-controlled program of economic growth (Mattes and Teka 2016; Abegaz 2015). This paradox was very much in evidence with the Arab Spring (Lanchovichina 2018).

If the shelf life of RS has expired, then what might be expected to replace it? We will provide here only the broadest outline of prescriptive ideas for reforming Ethiopian governance institutions. The central concerns include who has ownership rights to land, whether organizing polities around primordial identies is inclusionary enough to facilitate nation-state building, and how to design self-governance institutions. Institutional design, in turn, must respect what free citizens want which we presume include a technocratically capable government to deliver basic public services, state administrations that are accountable to citizens as taxpayers and voters, and the rule of law based on respect for internationally recognized economic, political, and social freedoms.

Trust-building measures and power-sharing arrangements are clearly “dirty compromises” by the standards of mature political systems. This is because the task is one of salvaging a legitimate state from the hands of hijackers and creating space for the emergence of state-of-the-art rules and clean institutions which usually entails complexity. Complexity (perfection) is, however, the enemy of the simple (the good), especially for low-income societies.

In extremely poor pre-industrial societies like Ethiopia, political actors are inevitably organized around ethnicity, religion, or region which renders them too parochial to anchor political parties that are organized around policy platforms. Elections, even when free and fair, can easily degenerate into polarizing exercises as political

parties led by urban members of the intelligentsia with shallow ties to their constituencies easily fall victim to factionalism.

Two illustrative instances in Ethiopian political history underscore the tradeoff between selection and election. In the making of the 1930 imperial Constitution, the "progressive faction" led by Bejirond Tekle Hawariat argued for a European-type legislative lower house and direct popular elections for the representatives. The "reactionary faction" led by the powerful Ras Kassa argued for an advisory legislature and direct selection of representatives by the agents of the Crown. While the first won the case for a quasi-constitutional monarchy, the latter won the day for an enfeebled first experience at a Parliamentary rule, some 250 after the Glorious Revolution in England (Retta, 2012; Zewde, 2014). The direct elections under the revised 1955 Constitution, with a more empowered legislature, were hardly a quantum jump in political development precisely because the societal preconditions for meaningful electoral politics still did not exist.

The instructive lesson for us comes from the impressive argument made by Ras Kassa which underscored the fact that (a) the nobility led all the wars to defend the sovereignty of Ethiopia and deeply cares about the welfare of society, and (b) the poor and illiterate citizenry lacks a basic understanding of representative government or political values that undergird a modern constitutional order. Judicious selections may very well pave the way to meaningful elections the distant future. In any case, the rich multicultural heritage is an asset to build on—not to reinvent the state but to progressively perfect it in Ethiopian terms (Gedamu 2011).

This reality was amply confirmed by the fleeting decade of multiparty politics during 1995–2005. Despite the rush of opposition parties to formulate paper-perfect "liberal" party constitutions and electoral platforms, partly because it was globally fashionable to do so, they all fell prey to successive episodes of big-man factionalism or found voters more susceptible to identity politics or even vote selling than to issue-oriented campaigns.

Clear thinking about vision and strategy about a post-dictatorship transition then assumes great significance. Ayittey (2012) astutely underscores the importance of a creative destruction of the repressive security state which has managed to put a chokehold on the machinery of politics and the economy, if not civic society. He specifically identifies a recapture of the state institutions by a broad-based coalition of fundamental interests in society and economy, without which an irreversible movement away from totalitarianism is impossible. These institutions include the civil service, the judiciary, the media, the military and security apparatuses, the academic institutions, the constitution, and the commanding heights of the economy.

When crisis-induced auspicious political conditions for pluralism somehow emerge, a post-EPRDF Ethiopia will then have to undergo a trifecta of transitions. The first is *political*—a transition from a strange mix of universalist-populist authoritarianism and an atavistic ethnocracy to some sort of a pluralist system of equal and free citizenship. The second is *economic*—an Ethiopia-tailored transition from non-industrial destitution to robust industrialization with an affordable social safety net for all. The third is *strategic*—a transition from a state-party-led development to a mutually constraining and empowering partnership between a growth-friendly state elite and the private business class.

What can we learn from high development theory to guide us in identifying sensible reforms for Ethiopia's predicaments? The following near-axioms encapsulate some of the lessons from theory and successful country studies.

First, successful developers tend to be stable, open, market-driven, well-governed, and high investors. These ingredients are interlinked and can be met in more than one way depending on the initial circumstances of a latecomer. Second, authoritarian methods can be growth-friendly, but only in the early stage of development where people and resources can be reallocated heavy-handedly from the less productive segments of the economy to the more productive sectors with significant efficiency gains (Tesfaye 2017). Third, appropriate institutions are initially products of bite-size incremental reforms made possible by the prospects of a revolution.

Fourth, a popular uprising that favors radical change tends to occur when economic conditions start to get better as the duality of rising capability and rising expectations (the tunnel effect) embolden long-disempowered citizens to demand substantial gains. Fifth, primordial methods of political and economic mobilization are inherently self-defeating in the long run because they limit the size of coalitions, undermine inter-communal trust, and ossify oppressive governance. Finally, the most effective way to attract large foreign investment is to treat the national business community and the Diaspora with as much respect, if not more, as foreigners.

How do we then move away from zero-sum political contests to a world of win-win outcomes which are informed by a shared vision of freedom and prosperity for all? Six guiding principles come to mind for institutional design to help shape the debate on the post-EPRDF state.

Principle 1: Single Ethiopian Citizenship The flirtation with ethnic federalism has constitutionalized the pernicious notion of 'dual citizenship' in multiple sovereignties within the state. Each Ethiopian becomes first and foremost a citizen of the assigned 'ethnic homeland' in which some are labeled natives while others automatically become migrants, and secondarily a citizen of the national state with theoretically constitutionally guaranteed rights to live in peace and freedom anywhere in the country. This bifurcated and system of conflicting citizen sovereignty and group sovereignty has encouraged politically-motivated "othering" in favor of co-ethnics which inevitably invites a long-lasting contagion of reprisals. Multiple citizenships are a reckless recipe for state de-building by effectively disenfranchising millions of citizens in regional governments rather than a secure foundation for a system based on nondiscriminatory rights for all (Selassie, 2015). This is why citizenship must be indivisible and national. The absurdity of it is that all three postwar Ethiopian constitutions prohibited dual citizenship with foreign states.

Principle 2: Amharic as the National Language It is a sad commentary that one has to make the point that Amharic, with some three-quarters of the population speaking it as a primary or secondary language, serves as the common (official and working) language at the national, regional, and local levels. This is a precondition for a common national citizenship and national economic integration. Other languages, such

as Oromiffa and English, should also be accorded a national status while many others (Somaligna, Tigrigna, Sidamigna, Guragna, and Affarigna) should have a prominent place in the relevant regions.

Principle 3: Restoration of Private Land Ownership Secure property rights, properly delineated (state, private, or collective), are among the foundations of a dynamic modern economy. Control over urban land has been riddled with political corruption and systematic redistribution of rising land values from hapless urban residents to political allies (Legesse 2017). Farmers and pastoralists with use rights have been dispossessed of their ancestral lands for long-term leases to the political-connected or to foreign investors (Bekele et al. 2016). A securely propertied citizenry is in a better position to resist authoritarianism than one that is overly dependent on the discretion of the state (Abegaz 2015b).

Principle 4: Territorialization of State Administration Ethiopia, as we have seen, has a long history of regional administration. Some historic regions (such Tigray, Wag, Wolqait, Lasta, Hadya, Adal, and Amhara) can trace their polities to at least the beginning of the second millennium. This level of de facto decentrationalization by a tributary political system was as much a product of the difficulties of centralizing state administration as it was a product of a recognition of the value of self-rule. Just as importantly, these polities were not exclusionary—residence rather than ethnicity or religion was the primary source of political identification. Accountable administration can, therefore, be built around old provinces and districts as well as new ones defined by the wishes of residents.

Principle 5: An Appropriate Form of Local Self-Government Ethiopia needs a simple but effective mechanism for the division of political authority between the Center and the Regions that are tailored to the changing needs of a rapidly developing and diverse society. This task has a broad reach and entails designing an appropriate mode of decentralization (unitary or federal), voting system (proportional or majoritarian), and separation of powers (presidential, parliamentarian, or a semi-presidential one involving a directly-elected president and a parliamentary-elected prime minister) (Engedayehu 2017).

Principle 6: Enhancing the Technocratic Capabilities of the State Unlike the case of some over-developed states where 'starving the beast' may have resonance, the African state actually faces a balancing act involving twin challenges. It needs to be bigger and better to enforce citizen rights and to provide key public services in areas where it has a comparative advantage over the private sector. It also needs to face limits to ensure its accountability to the broadest cross-section of interests in a diverse and rapidly-changing society. Over-emphasizing one challenge (i.e., accountability) may undermine the gains made on the other front (i.e., capability).

Principles 4 and 5 are often ill-understood in Ethiopian political discourse. Many falsely assume that federalism is the only system that would ensure decentralized

self-governance. This naïve notion is belied by the experiences of the USSR or Russia, and Ethiopia itself under the TPLF/EPRDF. Others confuse the de facto decentralized territorial administrative units of pre-revolutionary Ethiopia with viable 'federal units.' With the exception of a handful historical principalities (Tigray, Wolqait, Wag, Yeju, Harrar, Jimma, and Gojam), Ethiopia does not have a history of internally cohesive and self-governing subnational states. There is no national template for a coming-together federation which explains why the top-down federation imposed by diktat on artificially-created 'regional states' fast degenerated into a de facto centralized unitarism in a federal garb.

This does not, of course, mean that any form of unitarism is good for the country. The hyper-centralization that was established in 1955 and intensified after 1975 certainly failed to provide adequate political space for local self-government. A sweet spot between unitary centralization and federal fragmentation must, therefore, be devised.

The vast literature on the administrative organization of modern states shows that most national states in the world are unitary, but they also display enormous variations in the degree of centralization of authority over legislation, public finance, and democratic accountability. Unitary states generally insist on uniformity of the organization of government, a single citizenship, and the territorial integrity and the sovereignty of the national state.

If we array unitary states and federal states in terms of the degree of centralization, we find that Ethiopians face at least four distinct choices in terms of administrative framework: centralized-unitary (the Derg model), decentralized-unitary (the Chinese model), centralized-federal (the EPRDF model), and decentralized federal (the U.S. model). The pure cases (the first and the last) are rarities in practice with the first preferred by nation-state builders and the last by mature political systems in search of robust local (territorial) self-government.

6.4 The Virtues of Decentralization

The binary choice between federal and unitary should, therefore, give way to one between decentralized-unitary and decentralized-federal. The operative feature is "decentralization." So, which is better for a demographically diverse and economically underdeveloped country with a long history of a resilient national state?

The clear winner, in my judgment, is the *decentralized unitary system* which will strengthen the nation-state's technocratic capability while cementing citizen loyalty by allowing for a robust local self-government. Federation works best in more developed and homogenous societies where decentralization does not threaten a strong-enough central state to guarantee the freedom of equal citizenship for all. As the economy industrializes and urbanization breaks down parochial identities, a geographically mobile population will find the distinction between the two alternatives increasingly unimportant. But at the current stage, the choice matters greatly.

The bulk of the literature focuses on three types of decentralization: political decentralization (degree of subnational authority), administrative decentralization (deconcentration or delegation, as opposed to full devolution), and fiscal decentralization (degree of control over the sources of recurrent and capital expenditures). Scholars agree that decentralization has been very successful in some countries but has had very poor results in others.

Triesman (2002, 2007) provides a useful conceptualization of the bewildering dimensions of the elusive notion of decentralization that encompasses the tiers of government (vertical decentralization), and the key attributes of three tiers (national, state or provincial, and local). The latter include decision-making authority (political), appointment authority (who hires and fires), elections, fiscal resources (distribution of taxing and spending power), and government personnel (distribution among tiers).

Decentralization is not a uniform process. A country may be decentralized in one or more dimensions but not all three. Central governments may be willing to decentralize to some degree but hesitant to give up significant authority. In many African countries, for example, central governments have devolved fiscal and administrative powers but still retained significant control over subnational politicians.

It is not surprising that decentralization (political, fiscal, and administrative) has become an important aspiration for reformers wishing to make a decisive break from hyper-centralized unitary systems to improve government accountability. Decentralization is currently in vogue across the world in the hope that the process can improve government efficiency.

To revisit the debate on the forms of government appropriate for various typologies of African countries, it would, therefore, be useful to make a distinction between the chosen government system (say, federal or unitary) and the degree of centralization or devolution of decision-making authority. This is because, as noted earlier, there are two classes of federal systems, one decentralized (the norm) and the other subversively centralized. There are also two flavors of unitary systems, centralized (the norm) and decentralized.

In a centralized unitary governmental system (such as France), the central government theoretically has the authority to make all the decisions that matter while in a decentralized federal system (such as Canada or the USA) all but the powers pertaining to international affairs and national defense are delegated to local governments or provinces. The former can be administratively decentralized with the center ceding revocable authority to largely self-governing provincial and local governments (as in the case of China, Sweden, and the United Kingdom). The latter may also be de facto centralized (as in the cases of Russia, Yugoslavia, and India) if the federal units are not strong enough to resist the usurpation of constitutionally-guaranteed powers by the federal government.

Federal multi-level governance arrangements clearly allow for the emergence of diverse institutions and fiscal practices while unitary arrangements tend to accentuate unity and uniformity. This explains why forgers of a nation out of fractionalized peoples favor the unitary form of government. After examining the theoretical and

the empirical support for federalism versus unitarism, Gerring et al. (2004) conclude that a centralized constitutional system with sovereignty monopolized by a national government is superior to one in which national and subnational governments meaningfully share power.

Two strong findings emerge from the existing cross-country studies. For one, unitary systems tend to out-perform federal systems on just about every dimension of government performance, public participation, and citizen well-being that is considered. Second, governmental effectiveness, political stability, political participation, and social welfare, are also more effective or efficient in a unitary system than in federal systems. Federal systems instead provide for broader participation at some cost in terms of economic or administrative efficiency.

The academic community also disagrees on the relationship between decentralization and economic growth. Some authors find a positive relationship while others find a negative relationship. Why a robust relationship remains elusive is unclear, but country context and initial conditions matter greatly.

So, which is better for a culturally diverse Sub-Saharan Africa—federalism or unitarism? We cannot explore the full answer here, but there are some pointers worth noting.

The two-by-two typology outlined above yields two hybrid models that Africans can choose from. The choice is between a centralized federal arrangement (EPRDF's Ethiopia or Russia, both with constitutional guarantees that are not fully honored in practice) or a decentralized unitary arrangement (the Polish model with a constitution or the U.K. model without). The remaining two choices are either inferior (a hyper-centralized unitary such as Ethiopia under the Derg) or unattainable for a long while (such as the federalism-from-below of the USA or Germany).

The degree of geographic and demographic diversity matters greatly. Whichever administrative model is adopted, it cannot be exclusionary by being anchored in religion, ethnicity, or region. It should be built around free citizenship with the geographic delimitation reflecting historical ties, the physical limits of current transport connectivity, and resident preferences.

Ethiopia can certainly draw inspiration from self-governing units (*gizat*, *kifle-hager,* or *astedader*) with strong regional identities that cut across ethnicity and often religion (Mehretu 2012; Wubneh 2017). These can be improved upon, say, by granting major municipalities (especially, Addis Ababa and Harrar-DireDawa) self-government status, expanding the number to some 20 economically viable units of 4–6 million people, and allowing referenda to determine regional borders.[1]

One more issue worth contemplating is the design of an appropriate electoral system. Elections have proved destabilizing in African societies where pan-ethnic and pan-regional democratic norms that undergird viable institutional practices

[1] For Ethiopia, at least, one line of thinking is that some 550–600 ethnically diverse electoral districts, giving rise to some 20 regional states (*kifle-hagerat*). The basic political unit, the *woreda* (county) on average will have 175,000–225,000 people (of the 105 million Ethiopians in 2017). A typical *woreda* is big enough to manage its hospitals and schools (up to secondary schools) and small enough to be within half a day on a mule-back or a few hours by bus for citizens who need to reach administrative centers or big markets

remain weak. In such an environment, electoral competition becomes divisive as competitors without the support of issue-driven political parties and independent supervisory bodies are impelled to mobilize constituents along parochial lines. It may, therefore, be prudent to consider a mix of proportional representation for regional parliaments and a majoritarian one for national parliaments to ensure that electoral minorities are not chronically locked out politically (Guinier 1994). It would also be useful to ensure that such a system honors the balance (separation) of power by adopting a **presidential system** which encourages candidates to reach out to a national constituency.

6.5 Concluding Thoughts

State formation and state building have assumed different forms in different parts of the world and at different times within the same sub-region. As generalizations go, we can say that European states and colonial states were shaped largely by external forces of competition and wars of occupation and settlement. On the other hand, the formation of civilizational states in Afroasia was shaped more by internal than by external factors.

If one dares take the liberty to stake out a discernible macroscopic view, one can easily discern a political cycle of sorts in medieval Ethiopian political history. While the transition from the Zagwe (Agew) State to the Solomonic (Amara) State during the period that spanned circa 950-1550 AD was remarkably tranquil, subsequent periods of dynastic transition that involved a protracted transition period. The transition between the closed political orders of Solomonic State and the Gondarine State, which absorbed the consequential insertion of Islam and the Oromo into the Christian hinterlands, took about 100 years (roughly, 1530-1630). These encounters gave birth to a more diverse, demographically as well as religiously, Ethiopian society.

The transition between the closed political orders under the Gondarine State and the Shewa State, which accomplished a remarkable degree of assimilation of the non-Abyssinian peoples of the central highlands, also took a little over 100 years (roughly, 1770-1900). What we have been witnessing since about 1974, then, is an incomplete third transition to either a hegemonic Oromo-led ethnocentric state or a democratic pan-Ethiopian state anchored in equal citizenship.

Ethiopia may appear *sui generis* in its 400 years of an earnest search for a viable nation-state. This long journey entailed wrenching as well as victorious periods of consolidation (1600–1670), fragmentation (1770–1855), restoration (1855–1890), foreign penetration (1890–1955 for Eritrea and 1935–41 for the rest of the country), consolidation and revival (1945–1974), and a revolution of sorts (1975–2015). Once again, the tale-tale signs of a brave new world are evident from recent nation-wide popular uprisings against an authoritarian and exclusionary rule which may have ominous endings that evoke the tragedy or Rwanda or Syria. The interplay of the external and the internal, and the predilection of state elites to encase the imported (the gold) in a domestic garb (the wax) seems to have suffered severe diminishing returns (Levine 2014).

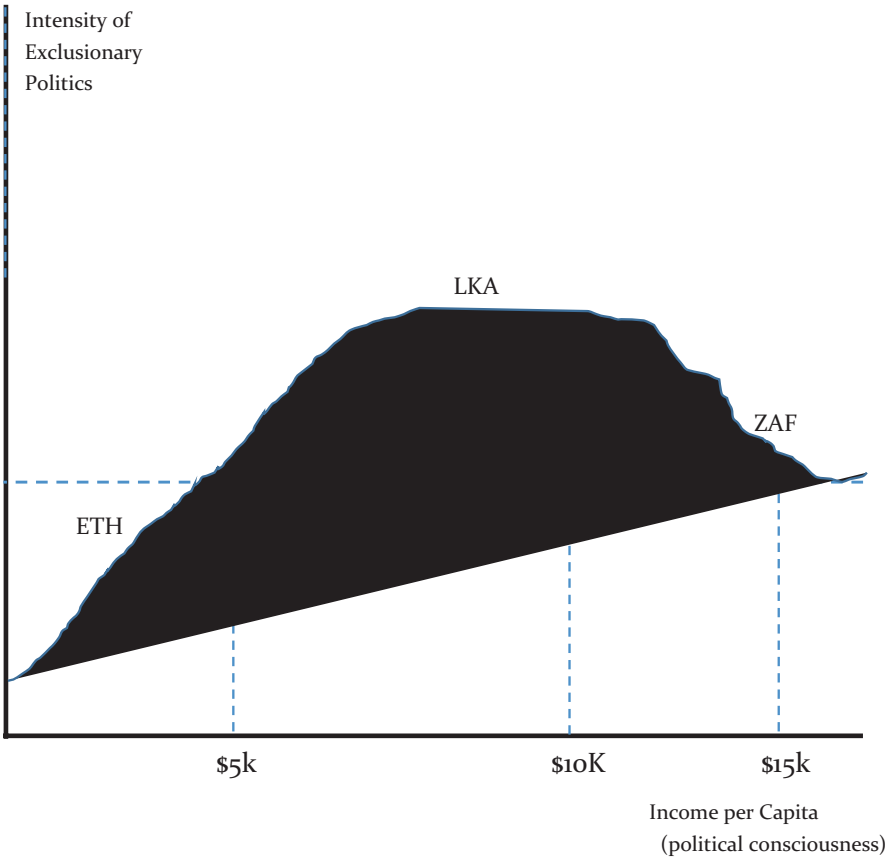


Fig. 6.1 Exclusionary identity and political consciousness. ETH = Ethiopia, LKA = Sri Lanka, ZAF = South Africa. (*Sources and notes:* Author)

Where the fractious conflicts continued at low-intensity levels, the postcolonial African state remained weak while higher-intensity civil wars resulted in millions of deaths and massive destruction of wealth—as in the Congo basin. Even promising countries such as Zimbabwe, Kenya, and Cote d'Ivoire became glasshouse states. Counterexamples, such as Botswana, Mauritius, South Africa, Tanzania, and Senegal, do exist but a modern political order uncomfortably remains shallow.

It may very well be the case that things will get worse before they get better. Based on anecdotal evidence (see Fig. 6.1), one can reasonably hypothesize that as the level of education and income rises, knowledge about history and the prospects for equality seems to intensify the feeling of aggrievement of marginalized groups and rising expectations about expedient redress. Middle-income countries tend to be most prone to this wrenching political turmoil fed by a self-serving reading history and unrealistic expectations about empowerment. As society gets richer and politically mature, historical perspective become balanced, and expectations become

realistic. This presupposes that the dangerous hump is somehow crossed with the state intact—Syria, Iraq, and Yugoslavia provide sobering examples of this middle-income political trap.

If mutually destructive politics is the Achilles Heel of African industrialization, then institutional innovations will have to be found. The imperatives of statecraft are such that enduring political institutions must be built to implement sensible development policies and to build-in post-election accountability.

We conclude by identifying two areas of research, at least as they apply to Ethiopia. There is a great need to understand the value of protracted cultural assimilation (through trade, migration, and exposure to state-enforced order) in explaining the befuddling resiliency of Ethiopian national identity in the face of the ebbs and flows of state control of society. In other words, why have not things fallen apart? Another area of inquiry pertains to the role of an accelerating urbanization and industrialization in laying down the foundations of transformation into a robustly democratic and prosperous nation-state.

Globalization and ICT technologies are bound to accelerate the process by which exclusivist political identities give way to a national and even a cosmopolitan one. How latecomers can benefit from the fusion of the political and the economic as well the tight interlocking of the domestic and the foreign deserves a deeper exploration than has been attempted here.

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Glossary

Absolutism	the political doctrine and practice of unlimited, centralized authority (or sovereignty) that is vested in a monarch or a dictator. The absolutist ruler is not subject or does not face an effective check of accountability by any other agency—judicial, legislative, religious, economic, or electoral.
Capitalism	an economic (and political) ideology that promotes private ownership of the means of production along with market-based competition.
Chewa	(called *Gindebel* in Shewa) regiment of imperial soldiers quartered in garrisons in the provinces which later became synonymous with gult-granted gentry or *balabat* (as opposed to *Balege* or civilian commoner)
Chifra	usually refers to the armed entourage of regional kings and governors.
Chisegna	one who cultivates land or raises livestock that belong to others by paying a fixed rent or keeping a share of the net output (as in share-cropping).
Civilizational State	a state of great historical pedigree with doubly-hierarchical relations—an internal one between titled appropriators and burdened producers in the core provinces, and an external one between a hegemonic monarchy with suzerainty over dependent tributary states in its periphery.
Clientelism	the practice of buying votes in electoral democracies using public resources before and after elections.
Closed-access Order	a society which solves the problem of violence by politically creating and allocating economic rent which arises from arrangements such as government contracts, land rights, monopolies on business activities, and entry into restricted job markets.

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Court the emperor and his courtiers, protected by royal troops and served by retainers, who make important decisions and dispense justice in the absence of separate government institutions to do so.

Critical Juncture a window of opportunity, much shorter than a normal period, that entails contingent decision-making by elites in a world of great uncertainty and unpredictability.

Critical Period a period of inexorable atrophy of the old order and a progressive build-up which often gives way to a radically new, but not necessary superior, order.

Debr a large and well-endowed church, as opposed to *Gedam* (an endowed monastery).

Democracies of age in many low-scale societies, age is an important factor in distributing political power or participation. In some African societies, political power was traditionally held by elders (gerontocracy). In democracies of age, however, individuals participate in the system with authority varying with age.

Democracy a system of government which relies on free and fair elections for choosing leaders by citizens enjoying full sovereignty, including protection of universally-recognized rights (human, civil, and political) under an impartially applied rule of law.

Empire-State a core state with a loose control over a far-flung empire over highly diverse but culturally-related populations which is different from a colonial state with little or no cultural bond with the vast majority of the people in its colonies.

Ethnicity a specific primordial group which is made up of people who identify themselves as belonging to the group based on markers such as a common language, heritage, or religion.

Federalism a system of government with a constitutionally-defined division of power between the central government and the federal units which devolves significant authority to self-governing states.

Feudalism the reciprocal legal and military obligations between the monarch and the lords who monopolize ownership of land and local administration. Serfs who work the land in exchange for subsistence plots and protection, and intermediaries such as vassals and the clergy provide protection and spiritual guidance.

Gadaa a variant of the age-set-based self-governance system of many agro-pastoralist African societies, including the Oromo clans (*gossa*), whereby various age groups (say, every 8 years) are assigned specific social and military functions.

Gebbar a subject who is obligated to pay tribute or tax to an ultimate authority (an institution such as the state) for the right to land or other productive assets. In modern parlance, a *gebbar* is a taxpayer. In Oromo polities, the *Gebbaro* are conquered and dispossessed tenants working for their new masters.

Gobez Aleqa first among equals who provides leadership to a community by being highly competent (especially in martial skills) and meritorious in judgment.

Headman the senior political authority (usually a big man) in many African villages.

Hydraulic Despotism The system of centralized economic control over labor that is tied to state-managed waterworks for large-scale and labor-intensive irrigation.

Kleptocracy a government of thieves engaged in rent seeking with guile.

Liberalism a political philosophy that upholds the rights and responsibilities of individual citizens in the world of politics, and a minimally regulated market economy.

Lineage groups descent groups comprised of people who share a common ancestry. Lineage groups of various rankings play an important role in the governing of many traditional small-scale polities.

Malthusian Stagnation (Trap) the phenomenon whereby improvements in living standards automatically induces population growth thereby restoring the customary subsistence wellbeing.

Mehal Sefari court troops, usually recruited young from distant provinces and raised near the palace, and often located in the center of battle formations or encampments. The leaders of the Mehal Sefari are widely credited for ensuring the continuity of the state in times of succession crises since their interests are tied more to the Crown than to any given occupant.

Mekwanint commoners with top-level (usually military) appointments by the Emperor (as military leaders, governors, ministers, or senior judges) without royal birth.

Mesafint hereditary royalty from the Church-recognized political houses who produce most emperors and kings.

Oligarchy direct or indirect control of key government decisions by a small group of well-organized economic elite.

Open-access Order a society that solves the problem of violence by granting individuals or groups access to economic and political markets via legitimate rules of competition. In such modern orders, all citizens have the right to form contractual organizations which enable sustained wealth creation as well as undergird an active civil society and political society since the state has mustered the revenue base to enforce a monopoly on violence.

Overlordism claims to revenue or tribute from landed producers based on service by a titled class of intermediaries serving a sovereign or the state.

Parliamentary system a system of government in which the parliament (legislature), and not the president or the monarch, is the most powerful political institution. Alternatively, a **Presidential system:** a government in which the most powerful political position is that of the president.

Patrimonialism a system of transactional political governance whereby the rulers share the largess that comes with officeholding to supporters, usually kin. Neopatrimonialism modifies this system in state societies with a quasi-bureaucratic system that collects revenues and serves as a conduit for dispensing entitlements to the core constituencies of the state elite.

Peasant an independent landowning class of producers supplying a part of their output to the market, and subject to extra-economic relations with the agents of the state.

Peasantization the process of transforming free communal or indentured cultivators into independent peasants. Proletarianization of peasants under wage labor in commercial farms, mines, and factories under capitalism is the last stage of this transformation.

Political culture norms concerning the exercise of political authority, expressed in practices and institutions, which provide political legitimacy.

Rent (Economic) extra-normal returns to an asset created as a result of manipulation by the politically well-connected.

Ristegna Rist is land perpetually owned by members of an extended family who can trace their lineage to a founding father or mother, and can fulfill the tribute obligations imposed on the land. Ristegna is one is thus entitled to rist land.

Sovereignty the right and the ability to exert unquestioned political authority over a given territory or a given people. In a democratic society, internal sovereignty resides in the citizens.

State formation the process of centralization of political authority which is often unconscious and subject to contradictory contestations among power groups. **State building**, on the other hand, is purposeful and ordered.

Sultanate A form of Islamic government with a sultan [aka emir] as a political and military leader (usually with allegiance to the caliph). A **caliphate** is an Islamic polity with the caliph enjoying political, military and legal authority but limited religious authority. The authority to interpret the *sharia* laws base in the Quran and the Sunnah belongs to the learned Islamic scholars or theologians known as the *imamah* (Shi'a) or the *ulama* (Sunni). An **imamate**, therefore, is the office of the imam who is both a political leader and the highest religious authority.

Transhumance (Pastoralism) a seasonal movement of people with their livestock between fixed summer and winter pastures within the lowlands, or between valleys and higher pastures.

Tribute An informal and variable payment (comprising rent, taxes, fees and extra-economic obligations such as corvee, militia service, and gifts) made by producers or low-level officials to higher authority. **Tributarism** preceded formal and fixed tax and fee payments to an organization such as a state bureaucracy or a religious establishment. Tribute is often paid in kind, takes a multitude of additively variable forms, a portion may be kept by agents of highest authority, and variable depending on the power balance between the payer and the receiver.

Unitarism a centralized or a decentralized structure of the state administration that does not recognize the intrinsic political autonomy of its regional administrative units. Like top-down federalism, these units are creations of the central state.

Waqf privately-endowed charitable institutions in Islamic societies.

Zematch Rist-owners in the older Ethiopian provinces who were subject to periodic citizen-militia levies in exchange for affirmation of landownership rights, and often enjoyed exemption from tributes or taxes. The Zematch had to mobilize with own weapons and provisions under the command of the *gult-aleqa, abegaz*, or *melkegna*.

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