

# Tapestries: Interwoven voices of local and global identities

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Volume 5  
Issue 1 *Stories Untold: Subverted History,  
Selected Narratives and the Politics of Memory*

Article 3

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2016

## Imperial Ethiopia: Conquest and the Case of National Articulation

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### Keywords:

nation-state, state-building, nation-building, Charles Tilly, Karl Polanyi, cultural political economy, Ethiopia, culture

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### Recommended Citation

Tilahun, Hawi T. (2016) "Imperial Ethiopia: Conquest and the Case of National Articulation," *Tapestries: Interwoven voices of local and global identities*: Vol. 5 : Iss. 1 , Article 3.  
Available at: <https://digitalcommons.macalester.edu/tapestries/vol5/iss1/3>

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# Imperial Ethiopia: *Conquest and the Case of National Articulation*

By: Hawi Tilahun

## **Introduction**

Much of the literature on state-building draws inspiration from the American sociologist Charles Tilly's Bellicist perspective (Centeno 2002; Thies 2005). The bellicist account or the predatory theory speaks to the earlier European state-formation. In Tilly's renowned aphorism: "War made the state, and the state made war" (quoted in Taylor and Botea 2008: 27). Based on an extensive and comprehensive historical analysis of modern European states, the Bellicist perspective presents war as the primary and central stimulus to building a centralized state apparatus (Thies 2009: 625). The defining factor for state-building is the state's capacity to wage war and its ability to penetrate society to extract revenues and resources. More precisely, state building is a process by which states develop the capacity to control, extract and regulate society while commanding a level of legitimacy. The process of extraction is needed in order to build the capacity of the state and to develop its administrative institutions (Kisangani 2014: 2). In addition, the collection of revenues and the building of a centralized state infrastructure are assumed to also facilitate a national identity and "other informal and formal features of modern states" (Thies 2009: 625).

As part of this effort to consolidate their authority, "wielders of coercion" (Leander 2004: 4) become responsible for what Tilly and other bellicist scholars identify as war-making (eliminating or neutralizing external enemies), state-making (eliminating or neutralizing internal enemies), protection (securing allies internally) and extraction (securing the means to facilitate the above-mentioned processes through capital accumulation) (Tilly 1985: 181). These interrelated processes yield organizational features that constitute the modern characteristics of a centralized nation-

state. In view of Tilly's predatory theory, I argue that two factors precipitated the nation-state articulation process of Ethiopia: European imperialism in the Horn and Abyssinian conquest of the periphery. Further adding to the literature, I also draw attention to the cultural conditions and the social "storytelling" that underlines the political economy of state-consolidation. First, I will evaluate the bellicist account and the processes that are central in defining state-formation. Before assessing the relevance of Tilly's bellicist account, I will provide justification for my emphasis on the study of war and the field of cultural political economy in the second and third sections. These sections provide the conceptual tools to further highlight the relevance of the bellicist account to Ethiopia. My fourth section seeks to justify the study of war, relevant in the Bellicist account and particularly, in the state formation processes of Ethiopia. To evaluate these assertions, I locate the historical frontier of Ethiopia during the reign of Menelik II<sup>1</sup> (1889-1913). Followed by the discussion on the case study, I will conclude with important insights and further implications of this research.

### **Understanding the Bellicist Perspective**

The bellicist account, otherwise known as the predatory theory, documents early European state-formation. Based on an extensive historical analysis of modern European states, the bellicist perspective reinstates war as the central means of extraction, critical in building a centralized state apparatus (Thies 2009: 625). In other words, the predatory theory treats war as the primary vehicle for institutional development, in which the need to extract resources necessitates the establishment of centralized state institutions. The defining factor of state-building is the state's ability to penetrate society to capital. These assets are crucial in order to build the capacity of the state and to develop its administrative institutions (Kisangani 2014: 2). Tilly analogizes this process of Western European state-formation in the sixteenth and seventeenth century to an "organized

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<sup>1</sup>Menelik II is renowned as the founding father of modern Ethiopia (Crummey 2000: 215). He was the King of Shewa

crime” (Tilly 1985) involving three interrelated processes: war-making, extraction and capital accumulation (Tilly 1985: 172).

Tilly uses the analogy of criminal protection rackets to explain the dynamics of early-modern European state formation. Through the racketeering analogy, he demonstrates that state leaders, like criminal syndicates, create threats that only they can mitigate—for a price. The interdependent processes of war-making and state-making thereby function as “protection rackets” to secure power for the state-builders (Tilly 1985: 169). As the state sells security in exchange for revenues, it develops organized means for coercive extraction and protection. Many governments could be said to operate as racketeers since “the repressive and extractive activities of governments often constitute the largest current threats to the livelihoods of their own citizens” (Tilly 1985: 171). Though Tilly is drawing parallels between organized crime racketeering and state-building, rulers do not set out to run crime syndicates. Instead, they often produce danger while also providing a shield against it (Tilly 1985: 171).

As part of this effort to consolidate authority, “wielders of coercion” (Leander 2004: 4) become responsible for what Tilly and other bellicist scholars identify as war-making, state-making, protection and extraction (Tilly 1985: 181). These interrelated processes yield organizational features, which constitute the modern characteristics of a centralized nation-state. It is critical to note that power holders did not engage in the war-making, extraction and capital accumulation processes to construct the nation-state; instead, nation-states became the by-products of securing power and exercising authority in expanded territories through war-making.

War-making, which involves establishing a monopoly over the means of coercion to fight against outside intruders or enemies, calls for the establishment of a standing army and related mechanisms and organizations (Tilly 1985: 181). Waging war is a costly and requires great

investment of human and financial capital. In order to secure resources for war, European rulers had to locate and secure capital through outright conquest, selling assets or forcefully dispossessing those having command over capital (Tilly 1985: 172). What this produced in the long-term was organized systems that ensured “regular access to capitalists who could supply and arrange credit” and regular forms of taxation within a particular territory (Tilly 1985: 172). Through this process, state-builders built administrative capacity and state bureaucracies that allowed them to map their territories and gather needed information for capital accumulation (Robinson 2002: 512). European rulers often provided ways to protect inside supporters. Institutions such as courts and assemblies took shape in the processes of guaranteeing demanded protection by the ruled (Tilly 1985: 181). The more costly the war-making activity, all other variables equal, “the greater the organizational residue” (Tilly 1985: 181).

Competition over territory and capital provided by war-making led to the *unintended consequence* of the state or the development of state-apparatus (Leander 2004: 4). Before the French Revolution, Tilly notes that the use of local magnates as indirect rulers was key in ensuring protection and governance among European provinces. These magnates “collaborated with the government without becoming officials in any strong sense of the term, had some access to government backed force, and exercised wide discretion within their own territories” (Tilly 1985: 174). However, the state magnates also were potential enemies and possible allies of opposition in the region (Tilly 1985: 174). Thus, the use of indirect-rule decreased with two distinct strategies: (1) dispatching officials to local provinces and communities (2) Encouraging the build-up of subordinate police forces (Tilly 1985: 174). In the earlier European experience, supporters of the state, which carried out the protective and extractive processes for state consolidation, were generally “landlords, armed retainers of the monarch, and churchmen” (Tilly 1985: 181).

In addition to building the administrative capacity to secure power within a territory, the process of state-building entails eliminating or neutralizing enemies inside the territory. This took the form of establishing surveillance systems and bureaucratic forms of guaranteeing control within the territory (Tilly 1985: 181). Emphasizing the interaction between the processes of war-making and state-making, Sorenson writes, “Before the full consolidation of state power, would-be rulers always had to think in terms of two-front battles, against ‘domestic’ as well as against ‘international’ opponents” (Sorenson 2001: 346). Developing the administrative state apparatus was critical in protecting given territories from both outside intruders as well as inside enemies.

Tilly describes the protection that is provided by the wielders of coercion in the state-building process as a *double-edged protection*. Again, functioning as a racketeer, this means that state agents produce “both the danger and, at a price, the shield against [a threat]” (Tilly 1985: 171). Thus, governments can “commonly simulate, stimulate, or even fabricate threats of external war” and create protective mechanism to further counter opposition (Tilly 1985: 171). Protection in the Tillyan approach involves securing allies internally and providing protection for “domestic players that support their rule” (Kisangani and Pickering 2014: 2). Protection of allies also means repression of rivalries in the state (Taylor and Botea 2008: 29).

A state that is able to secure internal supporters and eliminate opposition strengthens its capacity to extract resources (Tilly 1985: 181). Extraction, the means by which the above three processes take place, manifests in fiscal policies and administrative capacities which allow agents of states to penetrate society to secure human and material capital (Tilly 1985: 181, Centeno 2003: 86). In the narrative of state-building in Europe, Tilly claims “mercantile capitalism and state-making reinforced each other” (Tilly 1985: 170). To facilitate the capital accumulation process, rulers of the state have to manage their relationship with the polity through concessions and negotiations:

“Extracting financial resources requires bargaining with those controlling these resources” (Leander 2004: 5). The process of extraction thereby yields notions of rights, citizenship, and legitimacy, which are critical in sustaining strong and stable state-society relations.

State-builders also have to provide a level of protection in order to secure legitimacy for the process of extraction. Miguel Angel Centeno speaks further to the state's extractive power. Borrowing the term from Michael Mann (1988), he notes that growth of state administration and centralization provides the state with *infrastructural power*: “the capacity to penetrate civil society and to implement logistically political decisions throughout the realm” (Centeno 2003: 86). This process of trade-off between rulers and the ruled also creates a body of civil servants who express their demands to the state and play a role in building the state infrastructure (Leander 2004: 5). The process of penetration often takes different forms: “Extraction, for instance, ranges from outright plunder to regular tribute to bureaucratized taxation” (Tilly 1985: 181). Successful processes of empire-building or state-building offer the opportunity to capture economies of scale. Although most significant in capturing new trade and finance endeavors, these economies of scale also affect industrial production. In the European experience, centralized state taxation also channeled peasant production into the international market, further augmenting “the opportunities for trade creation and economic specialization” (Tilly 1985: 179). Therefore, mechanisms of mercantile capitalism that encouraged capital accumulation or extraction were intimately linked with state consolidation (Tilly 1985: 170).

To summarize, the European experience shows a great lord engaging in effective war-making to become dominant in a given territory. War-making entails securing human and material capital. This leads to extractive means to secure resources needed to wage war. Securing successful extractive means of creating violence entailed “elimination, neutralization, or cooptation of the

great lord's local rivals" leading to the process of state-making (Tilly 1985: 183). State structures such as military organizations, war industries, and schools also become part of the war-making and state-building process. To sustain the state apparatus, agents of the state ally with different social classes, particularly the ruling class. The processes of war-making, state-making, protection and extraction converge to develop a centralized state apparatus.

### **Perceptions of Warfare**

Contemporary literature on war and state formation establishes that war and the preparation for war play critical roles in the development of coherent state institutions. As outlined above, this experience confirms the reality that European states were the products of war. In other words, the historiography of European states acknowledges warfare as a source of change and innovation. This is not the case in the African context: "Pre-colonial African warfare- indeed enormous swathes of non-European military history-has been categorized over the last two centuries as 'primitive' or 'tribal'" (Reid 2007:1). The vast majority of Eurocentric scholarship has treated African warfare as "tribal" scrimmages lacking modern techniques and weaponry to qualify as a "civilized" typology of warfare: "societies which fight 'primitive' wars are those which are held to be at an early stage of civilization, whose methods and technologies are crude, and whose aspirations and visions are limited by culture and environment" (Reid 2007: 2). The nineteenth-century literature emphasizes the endless yet meaningless nature of these primitive wars, fought by "traditional" and "backward" societies stuck in unquestioned customs and traditions (Reid 2007: 2). This was brought to a "blessed end" by the saving narrative of European imperialism (Markakis 2011: 2).

Such perceptions of pre-colonial African history reduce African civilizations to mere savagery; this also serves as a way of telling the African story that legitimizes colonization. As such,

African wars have been dismissed or regarded as “illegitimate” forms of warfare: “African war was seen as less the mother of invention than an ongoing process of wanton destruction” (Reid 2007: 232). In the post-decolonization era, the evaluation of African states holds the general assumption that African states are the sheer products of colonial constructs. Therefore, the Tillyan process of state-formation fails to be tested in the region since principal relationships that sustain the state are assumed non-existent on the continent. In other words, “Because state building in Europe is linked to the onset of modernity and technological progress, practically in warfare, Tilly’s insights have not been tested in Africa” (Markakis 2011: 2). Similar to the pre-colonial narrative on primitive African wars, this has led to a complete neglect of Africa from “scholarly literature on state creation and consolidation” (Herbst 2000: 20). Despite this general neglect, some studies have documented the role of warfare in the rise of pre-colonial states: the Hausa Fulani in West Africa, the Zulu in South Africa and the Mahdist state in the Sudan (Markakis 2011: 2). Similarly, the place of war in the building of the Ethiopian state has been confirmed through some scholarship (Markakis 2011, Zewde 1991). This paper seeks to apply Tilly’s assertions and the processes of European state formation to the Ethiopian case-study while also noting on the social and cultural landscapes that make national articulation a reality.

### **Articulation and Cultural Political Economy**

In order to understand state-building in Ethiopia, it is vital to situate our understanding of the extractive political economy as an articulated project that politically and culturally includes or excludes certain regions and actors. In the process of state-building, “wielders of coercion” seek to solidify the structures of the state through linking and delinking certain places from the process of capital accumulation. Evaluating these geopolitical spaces of inclusion and exclusion in the production process provides greater understanding into the ways states become politically and

socially consolidated. Furthermore, the state is a product of socio-historical processes and cultural landscapes that facilitate state-formation. Although Tilly provides insight into the place of war and the political economy of extraction in institutional building, the element of culture is left out of the discussion. In the field of political economy, Best & Paterson (2010: 2) note, the essential aspects of culture are generally dismissed: “Political economy, as conventionally understood...fails to fully explain its object because it abstracts political economy from its cultural constitution.” What has caused this abstraction is explored through the writings of Karl Polanyi. As Polanyi notes in his seminal work, *The Great Transformation*, the rise of the self-regulating market separated the sphere of economics from that of politics. Therefore, contemporary neoliberal economy, a derivative of early nineteenth century laissez-faire economics, “confronts the social, political and cultural realms as an autonomous and self-regulating entity” (Best & Paterson 2010: 2). In other words, the fields of economics and political economy tends to disarticulate culture from their own conceptual apparatus, subordinating socio-political processes to the decrees of a liberalized economy. Contrary to this idealized and disembodied project, Tsing rightly comments, “all economic forms are produced with the diverse materials of culture” (Tsing 2009, 158). My work, therefore, is attentive to the ways the imagining of the Ethiopian state occurs amidst articulated forms of the political economy, which are facilitated through social and cultural realities.

These social and cultural phenomenon are partly the products of the effort to institutionalize a free-market economy, what Polanyi constitutes as part of the liberal creed.<sup>2</sup> Polanyi documents the activities of the economy—as an extractive activity—on human life and nature. Recounting the consequences of free-market ideology on individuals, Polanyi notes the separation of labor from other human and social activities. This led to the annihilation of “all

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<sup>2</sup>The creed consists of a competitive labor market, the gold standard, and international free trade (Polanyi 1944: 141).

organic forms of existence and to replace them by a different type of organization, an atomistic and individualistic one” (Polanyi 1944: 171). In order for the economic world to function in accordance with the principles of the free market, traditional and social institutions had to be destroyed and native people forced to make a living through selling their labor (Polanyi 1944: 163). This system of extraction, the exploitive performance of the liberal economy, changed the existence of human life through transforming a way of being and operating through one’s organic social and cultural institutions.

Nature serves as another arena degraded by the performance of the economy. The commodification of nature allowed for the social and institutional manifestations of the free-market economy. Key to this institutional performance was the introduction of the real-estate market that was vital to the utopian society proposed by the liberal creed. Within this system, land and nature became subordinated to market mechanism (Polanyi 1944: 187). Echoing the very themes evident in the commodification of human life, the performance of the economy upon land and nature called for the destruction of the social and cultural systems of native peoples (Polanyi 1944: 188). Land and nature were further subordinated under the free market system through the commercialization of soil, the mass production of food and raw materials to serve the needs of the national, industrial economy and the opening up of international trade (Polanyi 1944: 189). Thus, the free-market performed its dehumanizing project, detaching and depoliticizing man’s existence and social institutions. These processes of commodification or incorporation into wider extractive mechanisms and markets and the cultural transformation that underlines these changes will further be evaluated in the state-formation processes of Ethiopia.

## European Imperialism in the Horn

During the 19th century, the area currently known as Ethiopia held a number of feudal nobilities, kingdoms and principalities (Hiwet 1975: 1). Following the end of the *Zemene Mesafint* (Era of Princes)<sup>3</sup>, the need for a centralized state apparatus, with greater functional and territorial reach, became apparent (Hiwet 1975: 1). The northern highlands of Ethiopia, consisting of the majority Amhara and Tigre ethnic groups, were known by European travelers as Abyssinia<sup>4</sup> as early as the sixteenth century. The ancient territory of the Abyssinian kingdom comprised the current provinces of Tigre, Begemder, Gojjam, and parts of Shoa and Wollo (Cohen & Weintraub 1975: 11). In the Southern<sup>5</sup> and southwestern regions of Ethiopia, a number of ethnic groups and Oromo kingdoms persisted with varying levels of political and social organization and evolution (Hiwet 1975:1). These 19th century political and social organizations ranged from “primitive communal societies to states with powerful kings and elaborate mechanisms for the exercise of authority” (Zewde 1991: 16). Today’s provinces of Wollega, Hararge, Gemu Gotta, Bale, Arussi, Illubabor, Kaffa, and Sidamo, as well as parts of Shoa and Wollo were incorporated into the larger Abyssinian kingdom, constituting what is today the boundaries of the Ethiopian state (Cohen & Weintraub 1975: 11). This internal consolidation and expansion took place in parallel with European expansion in the region.

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<sup>3</sup>The era of princes, during the 18th and early 19th centuries, indicated a time of disintegration and a lack of central authority among the ancient, Christian polity of Abyssinia (c.1769-1855). Reunification of these disintegrated political units would later become a reality under the rulership of emperors Tewodros, Yohannes and Menelik II (Reid 2007: 11).

<sup>4</sup>The term Abyssinia comes from the name of a tribe—“Habashat”—that inhabited the Ethiopian region during the pre-Christian era (Zewde 1991: 1).

<sup>5</sup>The south or southern peoples not only denotes a geographical location; it also refers to states and people groups who were peripheralized or excluded from the “imperial politics of Gondar” (Zewde 1991:16).

Imperial contention for raw materials and resources began in earnest in the Horn with the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 (Markakis 2011: 94). In the late 19th century, *laissez-faire* capitalism of the industrial revolution underwent a transformation to *monopoly capitalism* by which trade was controlled or concentrated in the hands of few individuals (Hiwet 1975: 2). This new phase of capitalism involved rapid accumulation, centralization and internationalization of capital, destruction of the “petty manufacturer,” and the rise of the stock exchange through the increase in the activities of companies, cartels and trusts (Hiwet 1975: 2). This period of capitalist globalization marked the “big thinking” and performative nature of the free-market economy—of moving from “small scale petty commerce of imagined “tradition” to large-scale manufacturing” (Tsing 2009: 154). The greater need for cheap, raw materials and agricultural produce, which called for a “bigness of production,” drove the scramble for colonies by European powers (Hiwet 1975: 2; Tsing 2009: 154).

The beginning of the twentieth century witnessed European imperialism and the international capitalist economy at the door of Ethiopia’s frontiers (Crummey 2000: 226). This new era marks the critical moment of European intervention for territorial and economic gains that will transform the political economy and state-consolidation processes of the Ethiopian state-in-the-making. Although European interests in the region were multifaceted<sup>6</sup>, the main driver of European scramble in the region was economic (Zewde 1991: 24). African markets were sought after to deal with the excessive production of industrial goods as the result of the industrial revolution in Europe (Zewde 1991: 24). In particular, Britain, France and Italy were all determined to seize raw goods and materials from the Horn (Markakis 2011: 94).

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<sup>6</sup>Colonialist also had a civilizing mission to aid Africans embark on the path of “progress” and “modernity.”  
Tapestries | Spring 2016

European powers facilitated this process of extraction through the introduction of certain type of state structure. They introduced centralized, state infrastructures in their colonies and relied on taxation and commerce to generate revenue (Crummey 2000: 227). To the west, the British controlled the Sudan, to the south, Kenya; and, to the northeast, Somaliland (Crummey 2000: 226). Although the control of the headwaters was the principal driver of British colonial policy in the region (i.e. Lake Victoria and Uganda), the British also pursued trade along the Baro from the Ethiopian port of Gambela (Crummey 2000: 226). This changed the political economy of the region, leading to parts of western and southwestern Ethiopia to become highly commercialized; due to such changes, the province of Wallaga, in particular, rose in economic importance (Crummey 2000: 227). This part of Ethiopia, a fertile ground for the supply of highly demanded international products (i.e. coffee), would prove essential in filling the coffers of the central state treasury under the emperor's control. Through their skilled diplomacy, the French influenced the court of Menelik II: winning a concession to build a railroad linking the city of Addis Ababa to Djibouti (Crummey 2000: 226-227). Starting in 1917 and following the next five decades, the railroad served as Ethiopia's main source of commercial trade and influence (Crummey 2000: 228). As Polanyi rightly notes, the commercialization of soil to meet international demands for trade facilitate internal articulation, as shown through the Ethiopian state-in-the-making.<sup>7</sup>

Although the three imperial powers had competing objectives for colonization, they were open to the possibility of joint action, as evidenced by the Tripartite Agreement<sup>8</sup> signed by the three colonial powers (Crummey 2000: 226-227). Britain's interest in the Nile Basin and France's

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<sup>7</sup>The Impact of the railroad in later periods is further documented through the writings of Keller (1988) and Markakis (2011).

<sup>8</sup>Summary of principal provisions (Marcus *Life and Times*, pp. 204-12); see also Shiferaw Bekele, "Some Notes on the Genesis and Interpretation of the Tripartite Treaty," *Journal of Ethiopian Studies* 18 (1985): 63-79.

desire to control the railway zone were defined clearly (Zewde 1991: 150-151). Although Italy's intentions were shrouded with vague language, the country took the largest claim amongst the other colonial powers: northern region (Eritrea) and south-eastern region of Ethiopia (Somaliland). These European colonial encroachments posed existential threats to Ethiopia and therefore expanding the effective frontiers of the state to establish a buffer zone designed to protect the central and northern highlands became a key priority. This process of incorporation of the periphery into the larger Abyssinian kingdom was largely a response to European colonial expansion and the threat it posed to Ethiopia. The following sections will narrate state-building in the country through the interrelated processes of war-making, state-building, extraction and protection as a Tillyan story, supplemented by discussions on the social and cultural landscape that facilitate national articulation.

### **Territorial and Cultural Expansion**

The acquisition of military aid from external actors, facilitated through diplomatic maneuvering, was instrumental in the consolidation of the boundary of the modern Ethiopian state. Congruent with the Tillyan perspective, territorial expansion also entailed securing resources that proved essential in building the Ethiopian state. As European powers intensified their colonial assaults in the territories of the Horn, Menelik II was aware that Ethiopia could also fall prey to colonization. He warned, "If Powers at a distance come forward to partition Africa between them, I do not intend to be an indifferent spectator" (quoted in Hiwet 1975: 6). As the only ruling province excluded from the civil wars of the Era of Princes, the Shewan dynasty seized the power basis and eventually imperial throne (Markakis 2011: 90). Menelik II began his expansion project as a vassal of Emperor Yohannes and followed a pattern of territorial expansion that marked the Shewan dynasty (Zewde 1991: 60). The mid-nineteenth century saw the great expedition of Menelik II and his

Abyssinian counterparts to incorporate peripheral lands into the core Abyssinian empire. This brought conquered territories into the political economy of the Ethiopian state-in-the-making and began the imposition of the 'high culture' of the northern Abyssinian kingdom on conquered territories (Markakis 2011: 98).

A strategic calculation went into conquering the lands in the periphery; incorporated territories were integrated through different methods and to varying degrees. This was based on the different levels of threat and benefits to political and economic state-consolidation. Forms of incorporation were judged based on categories such as religion, structure of indigenous subsistence production, ability to produce internationally tradable goods, and the territories strategic importance to the imperial state (Clapham 2002: 13). Of these, Zewde notes that the desire to control long-distance trade was probably the most important consideration (Zewde 1991: 60). These motives prompted Gojamites and the Shewan forces to secure the Oromo Gibe region: "the green and lush Oromo lands and their boundless commodities (gold, civet, ivory, coffee) and the prosperous markets of Assenedbo (whose population swelled to 100,000 on market days), Embabo, Jimma and Billo" (Hiwet 1975: 4).

The victory at the Battle of Embabo (1882) marked a critical moment for Menelik II to begin articulating the boundaries of the Ethiopian state internally and externally. He recognized the "external implications of his internal expansion" in light of the scramble for Africa that would take place shortly after (Zewde 1991: 61, Hiwet 1975: 6). A month after his expedition in the South, he pronounced to the European world: "I am happy to be able to tell you that a long and hard campaign of seven months against the kingdoms...lying to the south and west of my dominions and masters of the route from Shewa to Kefa, has just permitted me to subject and render tributary the kings of Limmu, Gomma, Guma, Gera, and the Christian king of Kafa" (quoted in Hiwet 1975:6). His

announcement to European powers confirmed the fixed borders of the Ethiopian state-in-the-making.

The Battle of Embabo made the south-west region vulnerable to Abyssinian conquest (Zewde 1991: 62). In this process of internal expansion and consolidation of central authority, Menelik eliminated enemies who resisted his rule or neutralized his enemies by integrating them into the empire building project. The Oromo rulers Kumsa Moroda (later *dajjazmach*<sup>9</sup> and baptised Gabra-Egziabher<sup>10</sup>) of Leqa Naqamte, Jote Tullu (also made *dajjazmach*) of Leqa Qellam, Abba Jifar II of Jimma, and the rulers of the other Gibe river states, such as Illubabor, further to the west surrendered to Menelik with “little to no resistance” (Zewde 1991: 62). The conquest of south-west Oromo region not only signified territorial expansion and consolidation for the Emperor but also allowed the Emperor to secure economic gain that would strengthen his political and military power (Zewde 1991: 62). In the Southern plateau, Shoan forces met fierce resistance from the Arsi Oromo. Arsi leaders Suffa Kuso and Damu Usu were willing to accept the offer of internal autonomy in return for the acknowledgement of Menelik’s suzerainty. However, the other clan chiefs and elders remained resistant to this exchange, offering levies from different clans in the region to muster an army against Menelik’s men (Zewde 1991: 62). Although the fight marked an unequal struggle between arrows and firearms, the battles between Menelik’s army and Arsi fighters lasted for four years. The final conquest of Arsi opened the way for the seizing of the city-state and commercial center of Harar in 1887 (Markakis 2011: 90).

As the incursion into Harar needed more sophisticated planning than the battle at Embabo, Menelik dispatched one of his spies, Asme Giyorgis, to secure inside information needed for the attack. In his assessment of European state formation, Tilly emphasizes the establishment of

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<sup>9</sup>The term is equivalent to lieutenant-general

<sup>10</sup>Translates as slave of God

surveillance systems and forms of guaranteeing control as key in the state building process. Disguised as a Muslim merchant, Asme collected data for three months on the city-state ranging from its “cultural life, economic conditions, number of dwellings, composition and size of population” (Hiwet 1975: 7). Menelik made a rationale for conquest, relaying to Italy a proposal for their co-scramble for Southern territories: “Italy was to occupy Zeila and Berbera, and Minilik was to occupy Harar” (Hiwet 1975: 8). Two months later, he expressed his intentions of annexing all of the territory mentioned above (Hiwet 1975: 8). Menelik led his men of 20,000 against the emir of Harar, commanding no more than 4,000 men. The victory at the Battle of Chelenqo, January 6, 1887, marked the opening of Harar to the exploitive Shewan domination. After securing the imperial throne in 1889, Menelik commanded forces from other Christian provinces to continue his Southward expansion. This was briefly checked by the Italian invasion from the north, which resulted in the Battle of Adwa (1896).

Through methods of forced incorporation and concessions, land in the periphery became articulated into the larger Abyssinian kingdom. Territorial expansionism was embedded within the tripartite process of what Donham (1986: 11) calls *Abyssinianization*: rist land-tenure system, the establishment of Amharic as a dominant language and the proliferation and expansion of the Orthodox Christian Church. The latter two were critical in sustaining the cultural and political hegemony of the Abyssinian kingdom and the religious traditions of the northern, Semitic-speaking peoples while the previous instigated the systematic practice of extraction. The “Great Tradition” of the Abyssinian kingdom, as it expanded southward, defined the national history of Ethiopia at the cost of the historical, social and economic subjugation of colonized areas. The set of Abyssinian ideologies and attitudes, coupled with the Orthodox religious institution and the Amharic language, served a self-legitimizing purpose that defined the northern peoples as more

civilized than their southern neighbors (Clapham 2002: 11). Having their cultures and traditions condemned to second class status, conquered peoples in the south could only enter into the political and social life of the defined Ethiopian state through adopting the lingua franca of Menelik's empire and through conversion to Ethiopia Orthodox Christianity (Marcus 1995: 2). Furthermore, the Emperor used the method of name changes to Amharic to reinforce Abyssinian hegemony. This forced an identity on conquered peoples that would erase their historical lineage and cultural traditions. Their collective lives would now become narrated through the 'greater' Ethiopian historical narrative that was only defined by Abyssinian customs and traditions.

### **Militarization and Internal Legitimacy**

Territorial and cultural expansion gave Menelik and his men the means to engage in external war making. In the Tillyan typology, war-making involves the capacity to fight against outside intruders by securing a monopoly over the means of coercion. In the Ethiopia case, this process was facilitated by Menelik II's keen ability to secure modern weaponry from European powers. By playing the colonizing powers against each other, Abyssinian leaders secured modern weaponry and ammunition (Markakis 2011: 92). Against Britain's arms embargo imposed on Ethiopia, France and Italy allowed Menelik to secure sophisticated firearms. Ironically, the same rifles and fieldpieces Italy granted to the Abyssinians as a sign of cordial friendship would later be used against them at the battlefield of Adwa (1896). During the Battle of Adwa, the Ethiopian force of 100,000 annihilated Italy's army of 20,000 (Markakis 2011: 3, Hiwet 1975: 12). Among Ethiopia's 100,000 men, "80,000 were armed with rifles, while there were nearly 9,000 cavalry as well as 42 artillery and machine-gun batteries" (Hiwet 1975: 12). The rest of the men carried all types of weaponry, ranging from swords and lances to sabres and spears (Hiwet 1975: 12), equipped by all possible means to ward off Italian intrusion. The fight put up by the Ethiopians was no "primitive"

warfare but the result of state building: “Unlike the rest of the continent, European imperialism met its match in this corner of Africa” (Markakis 2011: 3).

The building of an Ethiopian army was precipitated by the precarious security threat posed by imperial powers: “By the turn of the twentieth century, Menelik’s army consisted of approximately six hundred thousand riflemen and innumerable traditionally armed warriors” (quoted in Keller 1988: 37). Before securing the throne as emperor of Ethiopia, Menelik also invited foreign officials, mostly French and Russians, to instruct Ethiopian soldiers in the use of modern weaponry (Keller 1988: 37). During his rule, Menelik introduced two dominant features that contributed to the state-making process: a standing army and salary payment for soldiers (quoted in Keller 1988: 38). Despite the efforts of the emperor to professionalize the army in lieu of European military organization and strategies, many traditional patterns and organizations persisted (Keller 1988: 38).

Congruent with Tilly’s core logic, this organizational feature of the Ethiopian-state-in-the-making was critical in eliminating a powerful external enemy. Furthermore, Ethiopia’s relations with European powers during the time of Africa’s colonization and its victory over Italy planted seeds of legitimization for Ethiopia’s state-formation process. As Clapham (2002:11) rightly notes, Ethiopia benefited from the “the norm of sovereignty” and gained a level of recognition for statehood through displaying its ability to secure modern weaponry (Clapham 2002: 11). In other words, the emperor’s ability to negotiate with European powers articulated the state to outside powers and thus, legitimated the notion of fixed Ethiopian borders. Furthermore, there was a racial dimension to the battle that gave the victory at Adwa great significance: “It was a victory of blacks over whites” (Zewde 1991: 81). As Ethiopia symbolized hope and independence, Blacks all over the world rallied around this victory and gained great inspiration to fight against white domination.

The Ethiopian state gained a level of legitimacy through such Black solidarity. In addition, the Addis Abeba Treaty, signed after the Battle of Adwa, affirmed Ethiopia's independence and territorial sovereignty. Through the treaty, the northern frontiers of Menelik's empire were clearly defined (Hiwet 1975: 12). Through the process, Ethiopia lost access to the sea through the creation of the colonial state of Eritrea (Crummey 2000: 226).

Although the victory at Adwa guaranteed a level of international recognition and legitimacy, Menelik II had to think about how to further secure and stabilize his rule. In the Tillyan perspective, protection involves securing allies internally and providing protection for domestic players and chief supporters of the empire; this facilitates the guaranteeing of internal legitimacy. Similar to the European experience of local magnate installment to rule different provinces, the Ethiopian example, in particular, confirm the importance of indirect rulers in state-consolidation. In Ethiopia, indirect rulers who occupied intermediate positions were crucial in securing Abyssinian power in the periphery. While assimilating to the dominant culture of the Abyssinians, local *balabbats* (indigenous elites who were subordinate to the lowest *neftegna*) served as social bridges linking the imperial state to local inhabitants (Crummey 2000: 225). They proved crucial in the extraction process and transferring of capital to the centre and provided a protected provincial ruling structure: "Rulers of empires generally sought to co-opt regional and local power holders without utterly transforming their bases of power, and to create a distinctive corps of royal servants...whose fate depended on that of the crown" (quoted in Markakis 2011: 110) They carried out functions of the state as "maintaining law and order, reporting crimes and apprehending perpetrators, hearing disputes and administering traditional justice, as well as assessing and collecting taxes." (Markakis 2011: 110) Furthermore, the *balabbats* were rewarded and transformed to a land-owning class themselves; they also usually retained a tenth of the state tax (Markakis 2011:

110). This allowed them to secure a higher status in the newly engineered socio-economic hierarchy (Markakis 1973: 364).

For some, submission to Abyssinian powers led to “assimilation into the Abyssinian ruling class, and even links with the royal household” (Markakis 2011:95). In regions such as Wellegga and Tigray, marriage with the imperial family provided the linkage of indigenous rulers to the imperial family. Places like Jimma, which held vast Muslim population, were excluded from marriage prospects (Clapham 2002: 13). The political nature of marriage prospects signals the cultural and social landscape that underlined Abyssinian cultural and religious domination. Menelik used both indigenous intermediaries and transplanted Abyssinians to rule the incorporated territories (Markakis 2011: 4). Amhara and Tigrean naftannas, the Orthodox church and balabbats (subjected themselves to political and cultural assimilation) aided in the development of the Ethiopian “nation” defined under predominantly Amhara hegemony (Marcus 1995: 2). The particular use of armed retainers and churchmen by the Ethiopian state echoes that of the European experience.

### **Taxation, the Gult System and Slave Trade**

A key component of the process of state-formation is the process of extraction or capital accumulation. The extraction process entails the expansion of the state’s geographical reach and the establishment of institutions of extraction that could guarantee the collection of tax revenue. In effect, this process entails the formation of a social contract of sorts. As such, the extraction process is almost inextricably linked to the legitimacy of the state, since coercion alone is insufficient for resource extraction. In Ethiopia’s state-building process, this processes evident in the areas of taxation and law. In the 1890s, Menelik II instituted several national levies, i.e. the agricultural tithe, and constructed a centralized department of taxation for revenue collection throughout the regions: “No longer could provincial administrators arbitrarily forward the minimum acceptable

amount to Addis Ababa; they had now to justify their receipts and render a full accounting” (Marcus 1995: 3). Taxes were commonly levied after conquering a particular land and in preparation for an upcoming external war. After securing the city-state of Harrar, for example, the emperor imposed a compensation cost of 10,000 Maria Tereza dollars to be collected from each gate of Harar (Hiwet 1975: 8). In the fight against Italy in the late 19th century, the emperor would impose a special tax to pay for the importation of 100,000 carbines (Markakis 2011: 92). Taxation was also purposed to build a national economy that linked the centralized, state apparatus to the social and commercial developments of provincial hamlets (Marcus 1995: 3).

After the subjugation of the Southern region of Ethiopia, the building of the Ethiopian empire was further facilitated through the implementation of the *gult* land system. This system entailed “the parceling out of the conquered lands and peoples in tributary relationships to the groups and individuals who conquered them” (Crummey 2000: 229). This land tenure policy primarily functioned to reward or to support Menelik’s military forces. To exploit the resources of the conquered lands remained a priority, as it proved the only way to pay the soldiery and to maintain the imperial treasury (Markakis 2011: 97). Military garrisons or rifleman, named *naftannas*, were crucial in keeping peace and security within the newly colonized spaces. The “ethos” of the *gult* system became for Menelik’s men “to eat” the land (Markakis 2011: 91, 97). The new garrisons that occupied the south were supported through the tributary relationship between the new settlers and the *gebbars*” (Crummey 2000: 223). Furthermore, the rank of the garrisons determined the number of *gebbars* they received; while a commander might receive a hundred, a private might get less than five (Crummey 2000: 223). Through such economic exploitation and

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“Peasant or taxpayer who owed labor service and material tribute to the garrisons. This person was usual the male head of a household (Crummey 2000: 223)

social stratification, the Abyssinian rulers defined their upper class status and secured their rule in the periphery.

The presence of *ketemas* (garrison towns) also became crucial for the greater security of the Imperial authority within the provincial regions. These garrison towns were erected throughout Ethiopia's vast territory but were most apparent in the southern regions (Keller 1988: 39). Menelik dispatched his "watchmen" or soldiers for the administration of conquered territories and to mitigate any uprisings in the regions (Keller 1988: 39). Where these men were present, they also worked to reinforce Abyssinian cultural hegemony. Compared with the *naftannas*, "The subject peoples in the empire were generally seen as primitive, without culture or effective government, and lazy, dirty, and warlike: they were naked or dressed in skins; they were heathen who needed the word of God" (Marcus 1975: 193). If a particular soldier had an offspring by a southern woman, the northern wife would often adopt the child into her household to raise him in Abyssinian culture (Marcus 1975: 194). As part of this assimilation process, the status of an Oromo woman was enhanced through becoming mistresses for a northerner (Marcus 1975: 194). These, among many, serve as examples by which Abyssinian culture reinstated its hegemony, relegating all other peoples are subordinate and backwards.

Further, the army or military garrisons played a central role in developing Ethiopia's centralized state apparatus and bureaucratic authority. Trusted generals were given important posts such as governor-general of different provinces (Keller 1988: 38). The installment of these men proved crucial in securing successful submission of new territories. This would later prove a challenge as the presence of *naftannas* "blocked the state access to local tribute and the producers' access to economic opportunity" (Crummey 2000: 229). In other words, the *naftannas* often failed to pass on the large majority of the tributes received from their tributaries, thereby blocking the

transfer of wealth to the imperial state (Crummey 2000: 224). Consequently, the state pursued its own land-owning objectives through the measurement of land under the *qalad* (rope) system. This made the state not only a distributor of land but also a major claimant in the process of land allocation. Congruent with Tilly's thesis, practices of revenue collection and the gult land-tenure system functioned as extractive mechanisms that facilitated the building of a more centralized, Ethiopian state.

With the *naftanna-gebbar* system, members of the conquered people became tillers and servants on their own land. They were forced to surrender their production to the soldiers, the Crown and The Ethiopian Orthodox Church (Lata 1999: 156). Although the gult system did persist in the northern highlands previously, the system reflected a new socio-economic dimensions that evidenced "subordination and inferiority of status" in the conquered regions (Crummey 2000: 223). The nature of the gult system was also transformed, particularly in the southern regions, through the introduction of the railroad in 1917. Two commodities drove the commercial exports from the highlands: skins, hides and coffee. While skin and hides were the products of Ethiopia's agrarian and pastoral society, the second was key in allotting new value and importance to land. As Crummey writes, "[Coffee] gave new value to land and reinforced efforts by the state to break down the social relations which it had, itself, originally put in place." (Crummey 2000: 230). This confirms Polanyi's discussion on the social and cultural transformations produced by the free-market system. In places such as Sidamo, Gedeo and Wallaga, coffee growing increased rapidly. Gult was particularly converted from "direct appropriation of labor toward tribute based on agricultural production" (Crummey 2000: 230). The railroad itself was also a great force of change. More lands were brought into the Ethiopian empire and the holders of the lands now got the opportunities to grow and to export coffee, becoming part of the larger economy of the Ethiopian empire and the

global market. For the first time in the history of Ethiopia, western manufactured products were also made available through the railroad. This gave new value to cash that previously did not exist (Crummey 2000: 230)

Another common form of extraction during this period was Ethiopia's involvement in the slave trade. Menelik is noted in history as "Ethiopia's greatest slave entrepreneur" (Marcus 1995: 73). Menelik and his wife reportedly owned 70,000 slaves (Markakis 2011: 97). This was also common among some of the indigenous elites who served as intermediaries on behalf of the state. Aba Jiffar of Jimma reportedly had 10,000 slaves (Markakis 2011: 97). Menelik led slaving expeditions (*razzia*) around the conquered areas. His heir presumptive, Lij Yasu, forcefully dragged about 40,000 Dizi slaves to the city of Addis Ababa; almost half did not make the journey alive (Zewde 1991: 93). Both goods from the south-west and slaves were used for exchange to garner modern weapons (Marcus 1995:73).

The practices of extraction were key in processes of power consolidation by the Abyssinian empire. This occurred through political, economic and social processes that were embedded in practice. The cultural and economic landscape was transformed through an extractive economy that formed hegemonic institutions, which dictated social class formations. Subordination, cultural annihilation and poverty became the products of policies pursued in the southern regions (Crummey 2000: 225). The superimposition of a supposedly 'high' Abyssinian culture with its "Amharic speech, Christian religion, distinctive dress, and a refined cuisine" displaced the historical and social roots of its inhabitants (Crummey 2000: 225). Land alienation and dispossession not only created divisions that intensified ethnic and religious differences. They also created class divisions and social hierarchies based on property ownership and cultural superiority. Practice of the *gult* land-tenure system and Ethiopia's slave trade rightly characterize the commodification of man and

nature. This occurred within the larger framework of a capitalist, exploitative economy brought upon by European imperialism in the region. This also affected the cultural political economy of the Ethiopian state-in-the-making, leading to the internal colonial practices of the Abyssinian counterparts.

### **Education and Centralization**

Tilly notes that the building of educational institutions serves to solidify state infrastructure. This is particularly shown in the modernizing adventures of Menelik II as the Emperor strived to modernize the state through the expansion of education. This provided further support for strengthening the country's knowledge economy and undertake the process of modernization. The intensified relations with Europe after the Battle of Adwa in 1896 provided more educational opportunities for Ethiopians (Zewde 1991: 103). The new intelligentsia, with French as its new lingua franca, proved critical for the expanded state infrastructure: "The expansion of the state apparatus...made the training of a cadre of officials imperative" (Zewde 1991: 104). Some of these educated men would later serve as radical voices for the marginalized communities of the Ethiopian state (Zewde 1991: 104). Missionaries sponsored most of the first educated Ethiopians; men such as *Kantiba* (Mayor) Gabru Dasta of Gondar region and Onesimus Nasib of Wallaga, served their respective peoples through increasing literacy and educational opportunities. Education was also a site of struggle for the state seeking to balance both elements of tradition and modernity. This is evidenced through the introduction of Menelik II School in 1908. The staff was made up of Egyptians of the Orthodox Coptic Christian Church: "It was felt that the Copts would filter down to their pupils a tempered version of modern ideas" (Zewde 1991: 108). The ministry of education, although it did not function as an independent entity, developed alongside the office of the archbishop (Zewde 1991: 109). Modern education provided both skilled individuals for the state

apparatus and facilitated the “dissemination of ideas and change” (Zewde 1991: 109). The place of the Church in educational institutions was also a way to sustain Abyssinian religious tradition.

According to Tilly’s argument, war-making and the processes of extraction and protection facilitates institutional development and centralization. In 1907, Menelik announced his consideration to create cabinet members to the outside world (Keller 1988: 40). Similar to European cabinet formation, Menelik appointed nine ministers in the office: ministers of justice, war, interior, commerce and foreign affairs, finance, agriculture, public works, and the ministers of the court and of the pen (quoted in Keller 1988: 40). The minister of the Pen acted as the emperor’s “chief secretary, archivist, and chronicler” (Marcus 1975: 228). Menelik did not select rich aristocrats or prominent men to these posts; instead, he was keen in selecting those who displayed loyalty to him and would thus strengthen his ultimate authority (Keller 1988: 40, Marcus 1975: 228). Despite his little reliance on their expertise, these posts signified the development of a “secularized central bureaucracy” (Keller 1988: 40). Both the ministers and employees of the ministers were paid salaries directly from the emperor’s treasury (Keller 1988: 40).

Menelik pursued both domestic control and international legitimacy through establishing important policies around money and banking. Ethiopia began to mint its own currency, the first becoming minted in Paris (Keller 1988: 40). This currency did not gain much acceptance at home or abroad in competition with the Austrian Maria Theresa dollar (Keller 1988: 40). Another monetary policy proposed by Menelik was the establishment of a national bank. Initiated by foreign capital, the Bank of Abyssinia was established as an affiliate of the Egyptian bank (Keller 1988: 40). The bank was tasked “to provide banking services in Ethiopia, produce and issue coins and notes, set up bonded warehouses, assume custody of all money belonging to the state, and receive preferential

rights to all state loans” (quoted in Keller 1988: 40-41). These financial institutions were crucial in centralizing the empire and garnering control in the internal activities of the state.

There were also other features of the state such as the building of railroad, postal services, telegraph and telephone operations, roads, bridges and hospitals that began to articulate the state as an institution. These new infrastructures served to facilitate the extraction process from the distant provinces and strengthened the viability of a centralized Ethiopian state (Keller 1988: 41). Innovations around communications allowed the emperor to reinstate “rapid communication with the outside world and facilitated administration and the dissemination of information within the country” (Marcus 1975: 200). Infrastructures such as roads were vital for the transport of troops and administrators while also providing the means to transport capital and human slaves that “produced the wealth needed to swell the imperial coffers” (Keller 1988: 41). Most importantly, these innovations provided a way for the emperor to legitimize his rule and secure his dominion over the Ethiopian state.

## **Conclusion**

The Tillyan perspective shows the importance of war as the primary motor for institutional development. The interrelated processes of war-making, state-making, extraction and protection are key to state-consolidation. Due to the history of colonization and the lack of “modern” warfare on the continent, the predatory theory fails to be tested in the region. The case study on Ethiopia, as one of the two African countries to have escaped colonialism, shows the relevance of predatory theory in state formation. While the vast historical literature on Ethiopia showcases the country’s state-formation process, there has been little theatrical approach to critically assess the country’s state development. Through the direct application of Tilly’s account, I follow the footsteps of Markakis (2011) who mentions the theory’s relevance in Ethiopia. Expanding on his work, I trace

Tilly's noted interrelated processes of war-making, state-making, extraction and protection to further draw attention to the Ethiopian state-building experience during the time of Menelik II. Through the interlinked processes of war-making and state-making, the Ethiopian state mustered a sizeable army to protect the state from both global and local opposition. Furthermore, Abyssinian rulers devised a scheme to secure modern weaponry from European powers used to defeat Italy and conquer the lands in the periphery.

Polanyi's work on the implications of the free-market, resulting in the commodification of human life and nature, also sheds light to the extractive means by which capital accumulation became a reality. The examples of the gult land-tenure system, the introduction of the railroad and the practice of slave trade serve as Ethiopia's examples by which free-market mechanism subsumes pre-existing political and social life in the periphery. Furthermore, assessment of the cultural landscape of Ethiopia's political economy confirms the embedded nature of Abyssinian high culture and tradition in defining the Ethiopian state-in-the-making. The installation of Amharic as the national lingua franca, marriages into the imperial throne, name changes to Abyssinian counterparts and the influence of the Coptic Church in educational institutions all display the social underpinnings of Ethiopia's 'national' articulation. Two dominant themes, which appear in this era but become more apparent in later periods of Ethiopian history, are that of modernization and legitimacy. Tracing these processes in the coming historical frontiers, after the forced achievement of a more centralized Ethiopian structure, reveal the many contradictions faced by country and the ever-present struggle to garner both internal and international legitimacy.

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