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The politics of dominating Addis Ababa (2005-2018)

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Abstract

After surviving the most challenging electoral competition in May 2005, the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) (now defunct) remained the dominant political force in Addis Ababa for a considerable time. This paper seeks to answer how the Ethiopian ruling coalition under EPRDF succeeded in dominating the socio-economic and political spheres in Addis Ababa (2005-2018). The paper argues that three interrelated strategies enabled EPRDF to effectively dominate and govern Addis Ababa during the above-mentioned period. The first, perhaps overarching, strategy is the use of state-led developmentalism as a legitimising discourse. Developmentalist discourses and narratives played an instrumental role in generating acquiescence among the public and as sources of legitimacy for the ruling coalition. The second, no less overreaching, strategy is legal manoeuvring. Politically inspired legal manoeuvring helped EPRDF to shape and reshape formal and informal channels of governance and control for the ruling coalition. The simultaneous role of the formal and informal channels of control was quite instrumental in constraining the organisational power of rival political coalitions. The third strategy is co-optation, which includes a contextual use of both 'passive co-optation' and 'co-operative empowerment'. These context-dependent tactics enabled EPRDF and different social groups in the city to establish dynamic relationships that contribute to the ruling coalition's agenda of dominance in Addis Ababa. The empirical section of the paper analyses the case of Urban Consumers' Cooperatives (UCCs) and urban youth employment programmes in Addis Ababa.

Keywords: political dominance, state-led developmentalism, youth employment, consumers' cooperatives, EPRDF, Addis Ababa

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1. Introduction

In May 2005, Ethiopia held perhaps the only open and competitive election in its recent history. One of the most important consequences of the election was the unprecedented electoral defeat of the ruling party in the capital city, Addis Ababa. The ruling party, Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF),¹ failed to win a single seat in the city council. However, the party remained in power to control the federal government. The now-defunct ruling party, EPRDF, responded to the extraordinary political surge of opposition groups by aggressively pursuing a developmental model and revamping its strategy of political mobilisation. This paper argues that EPRDF succeeded in building and maintaining dominance in Addis Ababa, particularly between 2005 and 2018, through politico-legal frameworks and socio-economic policies derived from its developmental aspirations. The politico-legal frameworks constitute the repressive interventions of the ruling coalition. The case studies specifically focus on the provision of socio-economic services through generative interventions and politically driven mobilisation of social groups in the city. Effective use of both interventions gave EPRDF an advanced organisational power to control and dominate Addis Ababa for a considerable time.

More specifically, three interrelated strategies enabled EPRDF to effectively dominate and govern Addis Ababa during the above-mentioned period. The first, perhaps overarching, strategy is the use of state-led developmentalism as a legitimising discourse. Developmentalist discourses and narratives played an instrumental role in generating acquiescence among the public and as sources of legitimacy for the ruling coalition. The second, no less overreaching, strategy is legal manoeuvring. Politically inspired legal manoeuvring helped EPRDF to shape and reshape formal and informal channels of governance and control for the ruling coalition. The simultaneous role of the formal and informal channels of control has been constraining the organisational power of rival political coalitions. The third strategy is co-optation, which includes a contextual use of both passive co-optation and co-operative empowerment. These context-dependent tactics enabled EPRDF and the identified social groups to establish dynamic relationships that contribute to the ruling coalition's agenda of dominance in Addis Ababa.

The empirical section of the paper takes two case studies. These are Urban Consumers' Cooperatives (UCCs) and employment creation programmes targeting young people in Addis Ababa. The paper uses primary data generated through in-depth interviews, focus group discussions and observations. The primary data was

¹EPRDF (Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front) was a coalition of four ethnically organised political parties, namely: TPLF (the founders of EPRDF) – Tigray Peoples' Liberation Front; OPDO – Oromo Peoples' Democratic Organisation, which changed its name into ODP (Oromo Democratic Party) in 2018; ANDM – Amhara National Democratic Movement, which also changed its name into ADP (Amhara Democratic Party); and SEPDM – Southern Ethiopia Peoples' Democratic Movement. Since December 2019, as part of the ongoing political 'reform' in Ethiopia, three of the EPRDF member parties dissolved themselves and established a new party called Prosperity Party. The only party that refused to join the Prosperity Party is TPLF.

collected in two rounds. The first round was from November 2014 to April 2015, as part of doctoral thesis fieldwork. The second round of data collection, focusing on both case studies, was conducted for 20 days during April and September 2018. In total, 36 interviews were run to inform the analysis for this paper. A close reading of government publications, reports and policy documents, as well as official and internal documents from EPRDF, also contributed to the analysis of the empirical section.

This paper is part of a comparative research initiative, entitled *Cities and Dominance: Urban strategies and struggles in authoritarian transitions*, supported by ESID. The research compares three capital cities in Africa: Addis Ababa, Kampala and Lusaka; and Dhaka from South Asia. The overall objective of the research initiative is to explain how ruling coalitions approach capital cities to enhance political dominance, weaken opposition groups (Goodfellow and Jackman 2020). The research also seeks to understand the strategies of ruling coalitions towards either the broader urban populations, specific social groups or urban spaces within the city in the processes of ensuring political dominance.

The remaining part of the paper has four parts and a conclusion section. Section 2 presents both a historical and political economy understanding of Addis Ababa. Section 3 then follows, presenting the broader politics of state-led developmentalism in Ethiopia by adopting a brief historical review of the contemporary Ethiopian state and the ideology of the now defunct ruling party, EPRDF. Both Section 4 and 5 present the two case studies: the UCCs and the urban youth employment programmes, followed by a conclusion section.

2. Situating Addis Ababa

Addis Ababa is one of the two semi-autonomous city administrations within the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia. Founded in 1896 during the reign of Emperor Menelik II, Addis Ababa has served as the seat of Ethiopia's successive regimes. According to 2015 data, Addis Ababa is also a prime city and ten times bigger than the next largest city in the country, Adama (Gebre-Egziabher and Abera 2019). However, recent statistics also show that the primacy of Addis Ababa has been decreasing significantly over the last three decades, with its percentage of population declining from 36 percent in 1984 to 18 percent in 2015 (ibid). Currently, the total population is estimated around 3.8 million (CSA 2013).

Over the past 125 years, Addis Ababa has been playing a pivotal role in showcasing the socio-economic and developmental aspirations of ruling elites. Since its emergence as a small village, the city has evolved into an epicentre of the modernisation and 'nation-building' political projects pursued by the last two imperial regimes in particular.

'The capital was the place for the making of the nation and the attainment of certain attributes of modernity (such as clean neighbourhoods, healthy citizenry, organized and ordered community, and economy) that

were considered the basis of a strong nation and society' (Gulema 2013: 172).

The political project of 'nation-building' by successive Ethiopian regimes elevated Addis Ababa as the cultural, economic and political capital. In a nutshell, the cultural role of Addis Ababa can be seen from two different but not necessarily unrelated critical points. On the one hand, the city manifested the modernist aspiration of the rulers through its public spaces, buildings and planning arrangements (Gulema 2013). On the other hand, Addis Ababa has also witnessed the eviction of the indigenous Oromo community, which led to their socio-cultural, political and economic marginalisation under the banner of a 'nation-building' project (Benti 2002; Gulema 2013). As a result, Addis Ababa has been one of the hotbeds across the country, where the lingering fundamental questions of the 1974 revolution – 'the land question' and 'the national question' – remained unanswered.

In recent years, Addis Ababa served as a primary site of showcasing EPRDF's stated hyper modernist approach to development. Compared with other urban centres in Ethiopia, Addis Ababa has received the highest proportion of infrastructure investment. The capital city accommodates slightly above 60 percent of the service sector and nearly 40 percent of the manufacturing industry of the country (Spaliviero and Cheru 2017). In recent years, the city has benefited from multiple major infrastructure projects, including the construction of condominium houses sponsored by the government, as well as private real estate firms, road complexes and a light train system (GCAO 2016). These investments were part of EPRDF's aspiration to transform Ethiopia into a middle-income country by 2025.

Geographically, Addis Ababa is in the middle of the Ethiopian state territorial jurisdiction. The historical processes that facilitated the emergence of the modern Ethiopian state provided both a political and economic rationale for the capital's location. According to Clapham (2019), one of the fundamental features of the modern Ethiopian state is the degree of divergence in the sources of economic power and political power. The elites that controlled the state were primarily from the northern highland regions. In contrast, the southern region remained marginal in terms of generating political elites, but continued to provide the economic sources that supported the political elite (Zewde 2002, Gudina 2007). Addis Ababa played a vital role in connecting these two sources of power for the state, by providing a socio-economic and political centre.

Under the current federalist arrangement, Addis Ababa is the seat of both the federal government as well as the Oromia regional state. Recent political tensions have shown that EPRDF's ethnolinguistic federal system has barely provided a lasting solution concerning Addis Ababa. A historically rooted claim of ownership is being echoed primarily by Oromo nationalists. There is also an equally valid question of belongingness to the city by rejecting any claim of exclusive ownership by a single ethnolinguistic group. Legally speaking, the constitution (Article 49 (5)) recognises the

'administrative' links between Addis Ababa and the Oromia region, mainly because the city is an enclave within the Oromia region.²

The symbolic and actual position of Addis Ababa as a centre of political and economic power made the stakes of either winning or losing the capital high during the 2005 elections. The capital city was the epicentre of opposition political mobilisation. Eventually, the opposition succeeded in achieving the ultimate objective of winning all but one of the 138 seats. However, allegations of vote-rigging, primarily in other parts of the country against the ruling party EPRDF, created national-level confrontations and political crisis. Boosted by its overall victory, albeit contested, to form a government, EPRDF was determined not to lose its grip in controlling Addis Ababa. The then mayor-elect of the city, Berhanu Nega, recently revealed that the EPRDF government 'refused to hand over' the city administration for the victorious political party.³

After violently suppressing the post-election protest in 2005, EPRDF revamped its approach to governing the city. The party implemented three interrelated strategies that contributed to the eventual recovery of the political and administrative setback from the 2005 elections. The first vital strategy offered an administrative solution by establishing a 'caretaker administration' with a temporary technical mandate and a lifeline until a by-election. While the 'caretaker administration' fills the administrative void, EPRDF mobilised city dwellers proactively, using its power as the leader of the federal government as a pretext. The historically unprecedented mobilisation of different social groups in Addis Ababa came under the banner of establishing a tripartite relationship between the federal government, the caretaker administration, and city dwellers (Gebremariam 2017b). The implicit political agenda was establishing a social foundation to regain full political and administrative control over Addis Ababa.

The second strategy was purely political, and it introduced new laws of city governance. One of the election-related laws helped EPRDF to restructure the local councils at the national level. EPRDF enacted legislation to exponentially increase the local council seats, from 15 to 300 (Aalen and Tronvoll 2009). As a result, nearly 3.6 million seats became available in the local councils across the country.⁴ The decision put massive pressure on opposition political parties to put up several thousands of candidates to win local government administrations. None of the opposition parties were in a position to mobilise such a considerable number of candidates and to win a meaningful majority.

The other post-2005 Addis Ababa-focused political strategy was an aggressive mobilisation of different social groups (young people, women, inhabitants, traders, etc.). By July 2006, EPRDF facilitated the establishment of three forums: Youth Forum,

² <https://www.africanews.com/2019/03/09/ethiopia-pm-moves-to-resolve-romia-addis-ababa-boundary-rift/> (accessed 22 March 2019).

³ Bertu Weg interview on Ethiopian Broadcast Corporation (EBC): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b3QgCIJNx-Y&t=2s> (accessed 16 November 2019).

⁴ <http://www.ceict.gov.et/web/am/-1> (accessed 18 March 2019).

Women's Forum and Inhabitants' Forum. The mobilisation was the third post-election strategy aimed at boosting EPRDF's membership and thereby its political power. The party was successful in recruiting enough new candidates to represent the party during the 2008 by-election (Gebremariam 2017b). As a result, EPRDF won the local elections across the country with an unprecedented margin and set the ground for the 99 percent control of the federal parliament in the 2010 election.

In addition to the legal manoeuvring to expand the formal structures of local government, EPRDF also facilitated the establishment of non-formal channels of power that fed into the formal offices of governance (see Figure 1). An internal policy document argues that 'developmental good governance' is an essential element of transforming rent-seeking-based socio-economic relations in the city into developmental relations. Hence, the government took a proactive action to mobilise and organise the public in the city into zones and development teams (AACA 2014: 5). As a result, the city government has established 771 zones to facilitate interactions between development teams (18,000 across the city) and the districts through public mobilisation, participation, monitoring and evaluation.

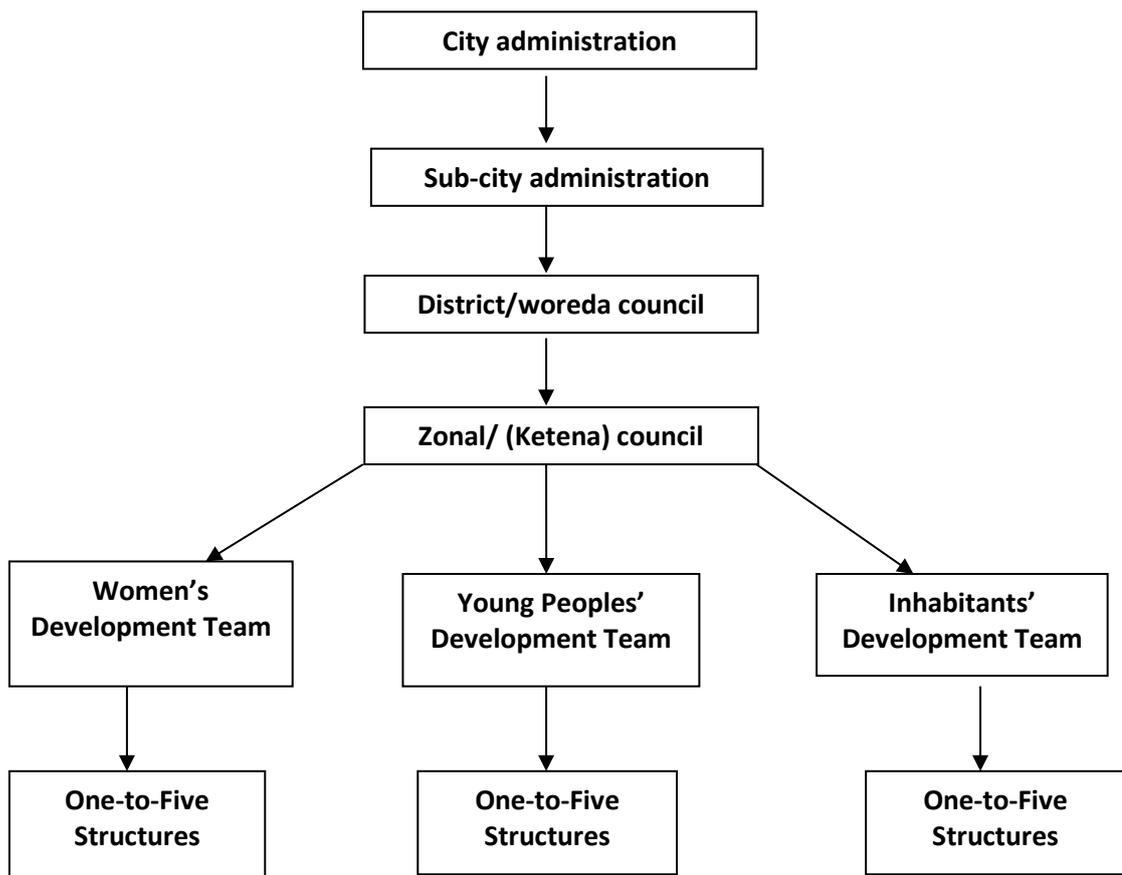


Figure 1. Addis Ababa city administration sub-district level organisation, mission and execution manual (November 2014)

EPRDF's effort to build and maintain dominance in Addis Ababa succeeded because of the meticulous political processes of shaping the distribution of power to its advantage. There is also a direct relationship between national-level politics and Addis Ababa-focused political processes of building dominance. The following section provides the broader historical and political-economic context at the national level.

3. Historicising developmentalism in the Ethiopian context

The post-2005 state-led developmentalism that has significantly shaped EPRDF's relations with various social groups in Addis Ababa has a historical ground. Developmentalism has been one of the primary engagements of consecutive Ethiopian governments, particularly after the end of the Italian occupation in 1941. This section will provide both the historical context and the political dynamics behind the Ethiopian model of state-led developmentalism, as well as a brief review of EPRDF's ideological orientation.

There were at least two critical junctures that preceded the 2005 election and set the ground for the election to be a turning point for state-led developmentalism. Each critical juncture has an element of a robust state-led intervention of shaping socio-economic and political dynamics of different magnitude. There are both common attributes and differences in the consecutive critical junctures. The most important standard features are the centralisation of state power (either *de facto* or *de jure*) and the tendency to derive legitimacy from economic success. The continuity of these common features contributed to the evolution of institutions across time without a radical change, despite an entirely new political settlement. However, there are also differences between the consecutive critical junctures. The differences are part of the new political dynamics and change of power configurations when a new political settlement emerges.

Critical junctures are historically significant periods of 'relative opening', where the constraining capacity of structures become weak. In such moments of opening, agents, particularly political actors, become relatively more influential in shaping and, if necessary, changing institutions of society (Capoccia and Kelemen 2007; Soifer 2012). Soifer argues that every critical juncture is an outcome of the interplay between factors that contribute to the emergence of significant change in the institutional features and power configurations within society and political processes that consolidate the change (Soifer 2012). Adopting the approach of critical junctures enables tracing of not only change but also continuity in the form of ideas, actors and institutions, while recognising processes of divergence.

The first critical juncture that has a bearing on EPRDF's developmentalism is the 1974 Ethiopian revolution. The revolution occurred in the context of a high-modernist developmental intervention by the Imperial regime after the end of the Italian occupation in 1941. The Imperial regime established agencies and commissions that have continued to shape the Ethiopian socio-economic development trajectory to the present. New government offices, such as offices for planning, human resource,

banking, telecommunication, statistics, infrastructure (shipping lines, electric and power, airlines, highways) came into existence between 1943 and 1969 (Bekele 2019). These newly inaugurated government offices become centres of state capacity to consecutive regimes, with continuously improving technocratic, bureaucratic and professional expertise.

However, the attempt to modernise the Ethiopian state also became a source of tension within the dominant features of the regime, which was landlordism (Rahmato 1984; Tareke 1991; Admasie 2016). Landlordism was an outcome of the 'historical divergence' in the sources of the political and economic power of the modern Ethiopian state (Clapham 2019). According to Clapham (2019: 37), political power remained in the hands of northern socio-cultural and ethnolinguistic groups, while economic resources from the south continued to drive the capitalist thrust of the regime. Socio-cultural and religious subjugations were also rife in the southern regions (Zewde 2002; Gudina 2007). As a result, the political, economic and cultural elements of landlordism contributed to the articulation of the two fundamental questions of the revolution: 'the national question' and 'the land question' (Markakis 1973; Zewde 2002; Gudina 2007).

The 1974 revolution was a critical juncture because it has fundamentally changed the political, economic and ideological structures and institutions of the Ethiopian state. The Derg regime, which controlled state power after the revolution, consolidated the outcomes of the revolution. The two most significant institutional outcomes of the revolution with a substantial developmental role were the nationalisation of land and the establishment of lower-level tiers of governance (*Kebele*) (Zewde 2002; Gudina 2007; Clapham 2019). The post-2005 aspiring developmental state effectively capitalised on both the state ownership of land and the extended presence of local government to pursue its intertwined developmental objective and political purposes.

The second critical juncture was the regime change in May 1991 by the victorious rebel groups, under the leadership of the EPRDF. The 1991 regime change qualifies as a critical juncture, because it marked the beginning of the formal democratic transition processes, the replacement of the centralised state with a federal state, and the consolidation of ethnolinguistic institutions of governance and political mobilisation. The formal transition into a democratic political system hardly succeeds in establishing a competitive political settlement. Instead, EPRDF dominated the regular elections occurring every five years since 1995, except for the 2005 elections. Several factors contributed to EPRDF's dominance in post-1991 Ethiopia. These include the party's upper hand in the security and military apparatus of the state, its leading role in setting both the dominant discourse of political mobilisation along with ethnolinguistic identity, and the institutional frameworks that accommodated this new form of political contestation.

The third critical juncture is the May 2005 national election. The election was by far the most competitive political process after the country installed and adopted formal institutions and practices of democracy in 1995. After the election, the total number of opposition seats in the parliament increased from 12 to 170 out of 547. However, the

immediate aftermath of the 2005 elections also witnessed an intensification of repressive strategies by the EPRDF-led government against the rival coalitions. The intensity of the repression had various manifestations. This includes the closing down of opposition party offices, harassment and the imprisonment of opposition party members, and restriction of services such as fertilisers and special seeds for farmers in constituencies that voted for opposition parties during the 2005 elections (Lefort 2010; Tronvoll 2010). These post-election scenarios also forced observers to categorise the 2005 election as a democratic practice with a long-term authoritarian impact (Abbink 2006; Aalen and Tronvoll 2009; Lefort 2010; Gudina 2011).

The 2005 national election qualifies as a critical juncture because EPRDF used the post-election crisis as a pretext to restrict the constitutionally sanctioned practices and processes of democratisation in favour of developmental authoritarianism. EPRDF effectively used its prerogative power to close down the competitive electoral system promised during the regime change in 1991. The May 2005 electoral threat forced EPRDF to vigorously launch a combination of an ideological, politico-legal and administrative mission of controlling the Ethiopian state. Ideologically, EPRDF pursued state-led developmentalism as a superior mission. More specifically, building a developmental state became an official policy of the government (MOFED 2010; Weldeghebrael 2020). At the same time, the government put in place draconian politico-legal frameworks that curbed constitutionally guaranteed civil and political rights. The legal frameworks primarily affect actors such as civil society, private media and opposition political parties (Hailegebreil 2010; Tronvoll 2012; Dupuy, Ron and Prakash. 2015). Administratively, EPRDF expanded the lowest tier of government with a primary purpose of enhancing its presence in every locality and thereby its control (Aalen and Tronvoll 2009; Gebremariam 2017b).

EPRDF's commitment to centralise state power and to deliver socio-economic development has an ideological ground. It is imperative to go deeper into the ideational elements of the ruling party's practices since it came into power in 1991 and its role in shaping the socio-economic and political trajectory of the country.

3.1 Revolutionary democracy and the discourse of state-led developmentalism

This section seeks to dig deeper to grasp the ideological and organisational features of EPRDF. This will enable us to understand how the political processes of establishing dominance at the national level are either similar or different from a kind of dominance built at the capital city level. Before delving into the different politico-legal frameworks and socio-economic policies that shape both the generative and repressive strategies of the government, the following paragraphs will briefly analyse EPRDF's ideological orientation.

EPRDF followed an ideology called revolutionary democracy, pioneered by V. I. Lenin, which seeks to establish a proletarian dictatorship that could challenge a bourgeois democracy (Berhe 2009; Bach 2011). Revolutionary democracy advocates for a

'vanguard party' that is committed to the principles of 'democratic centralism'. Democratic centralism is a decision-making process whereby members of the core leadership of the party have more freedom to thoroughly debate and criticise an idea before it is adopted. Once a given idea or decision is adopted by the party, 'everyone must implement the decision of the [party] no matter what their view' (Angle 2005: 525).

Ideological pragmatism is one of the vital features of EPRDF, and it enabled the party to remain the most dominant political force within the Ethiopian political settlement. The party managed to manoeuvre around a number of internal and external challenges over the last three decades without necessarily abandoning the pillars of its ideology. At the same time, the party remained adaptive and resilient to new challenges and maintained its ground to remain the most dominant political force. The pragmatism and resilience of the party were also visible in its capacity to establish a strong organisational power that has kept the balance in the distribution of power, both horizontally and vertically.

In the first phase of revolutionary democracy (from 1989 to 1995), EPRDF aspired to build a socialist Ethiopian state. This objective remained intact when EPRDF toppled the Derg regime in 1991 and formally started spearheading the establishment of democratic institutions in post-Derg Ethiopia. Leaders of EPRDF were 'reluctant liberals' who were trying to reconcile their Marxism and Leninism-inspired socialist ideology with the practices of facilitating the democratic transition to liberalism (Asrat 2014). While adhering to the influence of the triumphant liberal world order in terms of setting up formal institutions of democracy, EPRDF also maintained a firm ground to keep some of its ideological bases. This is exemplified by the party's success in resisting a full-scale economic liberalisation, as advised by Western powers, including the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) (Stiglitz 2002; Feyissa 2011). EPRDF kept the state at the centre of its economic development plan as the only political actor to 'coordinate, shape, and guide' economic forces with fiscal and monetary policies (EPRDF 1993: 43-44).

In the second phase of revolutionary democracy (from 1995 to 2005), EPRDF attempted to use the formal institutions of democracy as a shield to continue its project of building hegemony of revolutionary democracy. Formally speaking, the country adopted a liberal constitution and installed the formal institutions of a democratic government (Yeshanew 2008; Hessebon 2013). Regular elections were also introduced as constitutionally sanctioned ways through which state power was contested and controlled. However, two basic factors limited the possible emergence of a competitive political settlement. The first factor was that EPRDF continued to exercise its political power, derived mainly from being the leading architect of both the structural and institutional features of the new Ethiopian state. Such a position offered the party a superior advantage vis-à-vis competing political parties. The second related factor is the contradiction between the ideological orientation of EPRDF and the kind of politics that it formally promoted. Despite the liberal constitution, institutions and legal frameworks, EPRDF's intention was to build a hegemony of its ideology using political manoeuvres that were no less authoritarian. Regardless of the rhetoric of

democracy and the establishment of liberal institutions, EPRDF's determination to achieve absolute dominance remained intact.

In the third phase of revolutionary democracy (from 2005 to 2018), EPRDF pursued state-led developmentalism as its primary objective. The highly contested election in May 2005 was a watershed moment for state-led developmentalism to become the primary objective of the regime. After suffering a heavy electoral loss, particularly in Addis Ababa and in many urban areas, EPRDF quickly adopted a new strategy of proactively mobilising different social groups. The new strategy of the party came at the expense of two of its longstanding beliefs, i.e. ethnic-based mobilisation and being a vanguard party. EPRDF was quite aggressive in preaching ethnolinguistic identity as the most basic unit of political mobilisation (Berhe 2018; Gudina 2011). The party's commitment to the role of a vanguard party, derived from its revolutionary democracy ideology, as a few enlightened revolutionaries leading the majority also became obsolete. Immediately after the 2005 elections, EPRDF started to become a mass-based party. The aggressive strategy of mobilisation focused on different social groups identified primarily in relation to their socio-economic status, rather than their ethnolinguistic identity. As a result, the party's membership grew exponentially after the 2005 election, from roughly 760,000 to more than 4 million in 2008 and to 6.5 million in 2013 (Aalen and Tronvoll 2009; EPRDF 2013). These political processes played a crucial role in consolidating EPRDF's dominance, primarily in controlling the vertical distribution of power and expanding the social foundations of the party.

EPRDF succeeded in pursuing state-led developmentalism because of the synergy created between the politico-legal frameworks and socio-economic policies. The synergy also enabled the emergence of a 'political set-up' (Zenawi 2012: 170) that enabled the implementation of interventions that are both generative and repressive (Gebremariam 2018). The generative interventions enabled the mobilisation of different social groups in line with the political orientation of EPRDF. The repressive interventions, in their turn, contributed to keeping rival political coalitions at bay, preventing them from significantly disrupting the mission of state-led developmentalism.

Key deliverables of developmentalism through generative interventions have been socio-economic policies that eventually contributed to wellbeing and the welfare of society. In the Ethiopian context, these include the Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP) (Cochrane and Tamiru 2016; Lavers 2019), industrial policy (Altenburg 2010; Ouqubay 2015); Agricultural policy (Berhanu and Poulton 2014), micro and small-scale enterprise schemes (SMEs schemes) (Gebremariam 2017a,b), agricultural and health extension schemes (UNDP 2015; Lenhardt et al. 2015) and infrastructure development (AfDB and OECD 2016; UNDP 2015; Moller 2015, Goodfellow 2018; Weldeghebrael 2020). As a result, the country was praised for rapid economic growth for more than a decade (Moller 2015), for achieving six of the eight GDP targets in time (World Bank 2016, and, most importantly, for allocating nearly 73 percent of the national budget for 'pro-poor expenditure' (UNDP 2015; AfDB and OECD 2016). The political outcome of these socio-economic policies is primarily to keep non-elite groups closer to the ruling

coalition and to make the political structures that shape the vertical distribution of power relevant for the wellbeing of the majority.

State-led developmentalism prevails when dominating the vertical distribution of power goes hand in hand with controlling the horizontal distribution of power. Repressive strategies play a paramount role to 'destroy or inhibit' (Goodfellow and Jackman 2020) rival coalitions from disrupting the horizontal distribution of power. EPRDF launched three legal frameworks that ultimately enabled the ruling coalition to have the upper hand in the horizontal distribution of power. These legal frameworks were: the Freedom of Mass Media and Access to Information Proclamation (Proclamation 590/2008); the Civil Society and Charities Proclamation (Proclamation 621/2009); and the Anti-terrorism Proclamation (Proclamation 652/2009). All three proclamations came into force in the wake of the 2005 elections.

The primary purpose of these legal frameworks was curbing the potential of rival coalitions from mobilising their organisational power. Even though it is not the primary focus of this paper, the cumulative political implications of these three legal frameworks cannot be overemphasised. EPRDF applied these politico-legal frameworks to criminalise, persecute, silence and intimidate politically active young people (Gebremariam and Herrera 2016), rival political and social groups (Allo and Tesfaye 2015), journalists and civil society activists (Human Rights Watch 2013, 2014a,b). By suppressing the horizontal distribution of power using these politico-legal documents, EPRDF aspired to build a dominant-party political settlement. As a result, the political sphere became quite narrow, and the repressive strategies enabled EPRDF to have almost absolute control over the Ethiopian state after both the 2010 and 2015 elections. In general, it can be argued that the post-2005 political settlement features a delicate balance between repressive interventions that kept rival coalitions at bay and generative interventions that distributed benefits and services for the non-elites.

3.2 The post-2018 Ethiopian political economic dynamics

Ethiopia has gone through a period of intensive and rapid socio-economic and political change since April 2018. EPRDF's authoritarian and developmental dominance, both at the national and the city level, finally gave way to the pressure for change. The party failed to sustain its dominance, despite establishing a de facto one-party state with a 100 percent control over the parliament and the entire structure of the Ethiopian state. All the politico-legal frameworks that legalised the government's repressive interventions were utilised to keep the balance of power in favour of EPRDF. However, two states of emergency (October 2016 – August 2017 and February – June 2018), a loss of more than 900 lives and the detention of more than 22,000 individuals could not curtail the demand for change (EHRC 2017).

EPRDF's slowly dwindling dominance since the peak period of the protest was exacerbated by an internal power struggle within members of the ruling coalition. Finally, following an election of a new chairperson and prime minister, a large-scale political and economic 'reform' has been under way since April 2018. Some of the key

changes so far, relevant to the overall focus of the research initiative, include the change in the ruling coalition's composition, the dual liberalisation processes, i.e. political and economic liberalisation, and the relative weakening of the federal government.

Each of these three specific changes has a discernible impact. The change in the composition of the ruling coalition resulted in the dissolution of the EPRDF and its replacement by a new party called the Prosperity Party. Prosperity Party has rejected the revolutionary democracy ideology and promotes a relatively less coherent idea, called '*Medemer*'. The process of dissolving EPRDF sidelined one of its founding members, TPLF. The interplay between the newly introduced ideational orientation, the political rift with TPLF and the fragile coalition between ODP and ADP is at too early a stage to make a systematic analysis. But there are indications of a fragility, particularly in the coalition between the Amhara and Oromo elites.

The current leadership under Prime Minister Abiy has embraced liberal democracy as a panacea for Ethiopia's multifaceted socio-economic and political problems. Hence the political determination to dominate both the vertical and horizontal distribution of power will no longer be the driving force for the new elites. The opening up of the media and political sphere and the move towards competitive elections might nurture a competitive clientelistic system. In such a system, short-sighted consumption-oriented policy frameworks will prevail at the expense of long-sighted development endeavours. It appears that Ethiopia is quickly moving in the direction of a competitive but less developmental political settlement.

The Ethiopian state that has remained relatively strong over the above-discussed periods of critical junctures might also be weakened by the current processes of 'reform'. There are both internal and external forces that are eroding the capacity of the Ethiopian state. The internal factor is linked with the rivalry between regional elites and the states they controlled and has been fermenting within the institutional arrangements of ethnic federalism. The relative assertiveness of the regional states shows both the lack of internal cohesion among the ruling coalition and the weakening of the federal government. The external factor of weakened state capacity comes from the increasing role of foreign actors, such as the World Bank, IMF and Gulf countries, in shaping the policy sphere. The intervention of, particularly, the World Bank and the IMF is quite substantive, both in revamping the developmental orientation as well as in restructuring the economy.

The subsequent sections will provide the empirical evidence of the paper, illustrating how EPRDF dominated the socio-economic spheres in Addis Ababa. The evidence in the following case studies of the Urban Consumers' Cooperatives (UCCs) and Youth Employment Programmes seeks to demonstrate that EPRDF's dominance in Addis Ababa, including not only repressive but also generative strategies. These strategies eventually helped the ruling coalition to broaden its base and form new sources of political support.

4. Urban Consumers' Cooperatives (UCCs)

Food prices are one of the politically contentious issues that mainly affect the relationships between urban dwellers and governments. The most recent price hikes at the global level (2007-2008 and 2011-2012), mainly of agricultural products such as wheat, maize and rice, affected food prices in many countries. Accordingly, most countries took different policy measures to reduce the impact of price volatility in their respective political economies (Babu 2015; Watson 2015). Protests and food riots are one of the most common consequences of rising food prices in many countries. Studies have shown how different rising-food-price-related demonstrations and riots have influenced policy decisions by governments, for example in Egypt (; Ghoneim 2015), Senegal (Resnick 2015), and Zambia (Chapoto 2015).

Despite significant increases in food prices, however, Ethiopia has never experienced any form of protest or food riots. Indeed, some would argue that the memory of the post-election violence of 2005 has made the possibility of street protests very unlikely. Nonetheless, low-income families faced a considerable amount of pressure because of the price hikes. For example, national food inflation in Ethiopia was at a record rate of 61.1 percent in mid-2008. There was also an alarming increase in the retail prices of major grains, such as wheat, teff, and sorghum, by 60, 80 and 90 percent, respectively, between April and August 2008 (Admassie 2015). Like other governments, the Ethiopian government took various policy measures to address the negative impact of food price hikes. However, there has hardly been any protest movement demanding that the EPRDF-led government address the food price hikes. The absence of any forms of high- or low-level organised protests in urban centres makes the Ethiopian case noticeable.

This case study demonstrates how EPRDF's generative intervention towards addressing food price hikes, by targeting the urban poor, contributed to building and sustaining the party's dominance. The empirical analysis focuses on Urban Consumers' Cooperatives (hereafter UCCs). By examining the emergence and role of the UCCs, the case study answers the questions of how and why the EPRDF used the UCCs in efforts to increase and maintain its dominance in Addis Ababa.

EPRDF applied a robust political strategy of mobilising the most affected groups of society in Addis Ababa, hand-in-hand with policy measures to fight the drastic impact of food price hikes. The party built on the momentum it had established in the wake of the post-2005 election to initiate a new channel of mobilisation. EPRDF crafted a new player, the UCCs, to join the market and play a key role in facilitating access and distribution of essential household commodities that the government had been subsidising and rationing. In July 2008, at one of his public meetings with thousands of members of the forums and EPRDF's youth and women's leagues, the late Prime Minister Meles Zenawi gave a specific recommendation on the mounting problem of food prices. He strongly encouraged the participants to establish consumers' cooperatives in their respective districts, to become vital players in the market. One of the respondents, who was a founding member of a UCC, recalls that ' . . . the response

from the PM [to the question of price hikes] was that people need to get organised and collectively bring their skills, labour, and capital to play a role in the market'.⁵

The prime minister's advice became a de facto policy direction. As a result, the government started to provide all the necessary political, legal, administrative and technical support for the establishment of UCCs in every city district.⁶ Members of the forums and women's and youth leagues of EPRDF that were already on the ground as auxiliaries of the party played a crucial role in mobilising the public to establish the UCCs.⁷ Despite the essential role played by the party-affiliated forums and leagues as founding members, the UCCs targeted every household in the city. Bringing everyone on board was one of the strategies of deriving legitimacy. As a result, every district in the city formed its UCC within a short time. Founding members bought a maximum of ten shares with 100 Ethiopian birr, with a one-off 20 birr registration fee. The government provided office spaces within every local government compound for the UCCs to start operating. Before the establishment of UCCs, the government was rationing subsidised wheat to the residents of the city, using local government structures. Once UCCs become operational, the government transferred the responsibility of rationing subsidised food items entirely to the UCCs.⁸ By doing so, the government both empowered and legitimised the UCCs as vital actors in the everyday life of the city dwellers.

According to a 2015 study by the Federal Trade Competition and Consumers' Protection Agency, there were 150 Urban Consumers' Cooperatives (UCCs) in Addis Ababa's ten sub-cities (FTCCPA 2015). Each sub-city has a Union of Cooperatives. The primary purpose of the UCCs was to distribute 'basic goods' to the broader public. According to the Trade Competition and Consumer Protection Proclamation (813/2013), 'basic goods' are items that the government has placed in 'price regulation', as deemed necessary. The government would also control and strictly regulate the distribution, sale and movement of 'basic goods' to avoid any shortage in the market (FDRE 2013). The underlying rationale of legally protecting these 'basic goods' is to ensure that every citizen has equal access, at least in principle. Until the last round of fieldwork (September 2018), the government categorised sugar, cooking oil, wheat flour and petroleum products as 'basic goods', and there was a set price to buy/sell them.

The proclamation also gives the government the responsibility to monitor the production and distribution of 'basic goods'. For example, to avoid a shortage of bread, every bakery in Addis Ababa is linked with flour mill factories that receive subsidised wheat primarily imported from the international market. The city's trade and industry bureau then conduct rigorous monitoring and control on the size/weight, quality and price of bread sold by the bakeries that received flour from the designated flour mills.

⁵UCC leader, 03 (April 2018).

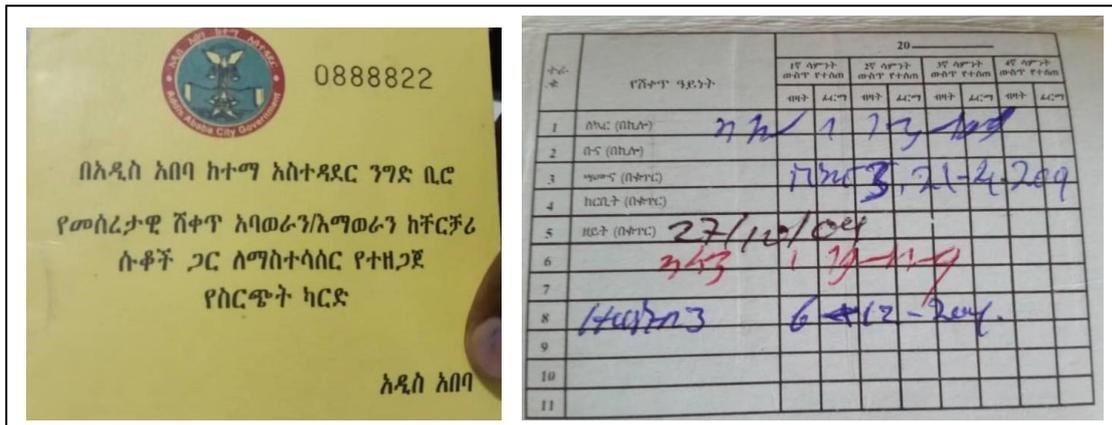
⁶ UCC leaders 01,02,03,04 (April 2018).

⁷UCC leaders 01, 02, 04 (April 2018).

⁸ UCC leaders 01,02,03,04 (April 2018).

Likewise, the government also subsidise private palm oil imports, and the cooking oil is distributed to the public in the city through UCCs, retail shops or designated retailers. Similarly, the government used the UCCs shops to distribute sugar to every household, at least in principle, in the city. Every household in the city with a yellow rationing card of the 'basic goods' is entitled to 5 kilos of sugar and 5 litres of cooking oil every two weeks.

Figure 2. Basic goods rationing card



Note: © Author. The cover of the yellow card reads 'Addis Ababa City Administration Trade Bureau: A distribution card prepared to link households (male/female headed) with retailers of basic good'. The numbered items in the inside of the card from 1 to 5 are sugar, coffee, soap, matches, cooking oil.

4.1 UCCs and the legitimising discourse of developmentalism

The authoritarian nature of most developmental states pushes them to derive their legitimacy from their performance of improving people's socio-economic wellbeing. Because of a direct implication on the welfare of low-income families, increasing food prices have the potential to damage EPRDF's legitimacy. During the price hike, the government took a swift decision of rationing subsidised wheat in the city as a temporary solution until it aligned its ad hoc response to its developmental orientation. Through the establishment of the UCCs, EPRDF achieved both its developmental objective and political purpose. The development objective was ensuring that the urban poor are not severely affected by the price hike. The political purpose was broadening its social base and improving its legitimacy by mobilising people at the household level. Hence, instead of facing potential food riots, EPRDF capitalised on the phenomenon of increasing prices by organising the urban poor and using the UCCs as additional channels to build its dominance.

At present, EPRDF has successfully installed the UCCs as one of the vital players in the market facilitating access to the 'basic goods' and other essential household items. On top of rationing subsidised 'basic goods' to their membership of more than 400,000

people, the 150 UCCs also provide retail service. According to the UCC leaders,⁹ they sell all kinds of groceries, with a maximum profit margin of 15 percent.

'Initially, we were tied with three "basic goods": sugar, cooking oil and wheat flour. Now, we sell more than 45 items in our shop, both agricultural and manufactured products. Then a member or a customer coming to buy sugar will also find other essential groceries. This makes us competitive with other privately run shops'.¹⁰

The UCCs have established themselves as vital players of the market, particularly concerning households in the lower socio-economic status. They use different strategies to lure consumers to their shops. The UCCs may add new items to be sold at a competitive price whenever necessary. Usually, during holidays, there is a shortage of household items and an increase in the price of food or non-food items. The UCCs usually add the most wanted items on their shelf. The UCCs also work in close collaboration with each other. They avoid competition amongst themselves by establishing a Union which sets commodity prices centrally. The UCC leaders declare that their primary objectives are protecting their members from unfair market competition and stabilising the market. As one of the respondents stated, the UCCs would prefer to help their members make a saving by selling essential items at a low price.¹¹

The UCCs are playing a role that dovetails into EPRDF's discourse of developmentalism and practices. Politically, the UCCs are primarily established by initiatives that are either within the ruling party structure (youth and women's leagues) or directly controlled by the party (forums). Hence, the UCCs add a new force to the EPRDF's organisational power, both to garner support from the grassroots as well as to constrain competing political forces. Especially during specific periods that require mass mobilisation, such as rallies or elections, the UCCs play an equally important role as any other ruling-party-affiliated mobilisation platforms within Addis.

Economically, the UCCs serve a vital role in the developmental image of the government as effective and capable. The UCCs help particularly the urban poor, who may not have the economic means to access either the 'basic goods' or other essential household commodities. Indeed, the price difference between UCCs' operated shops and other privately owned shops is significant. As one UCC leader puts it,

'Our price is relatively lower than other retailers because we have very low-profit margins. We prefer to let our customers/members keep the money in their pocket than distributing a higher dividend. A kilo of beef meat is, for example, 210/220 birr in the market, but we are selling at 85

⁹UCC leader 01,02,03 ,04 (April 2018).

¹⁰UCC leader 01 (April 2018).

¹¹UCC leader 03 (April 2018).

birr. By keeping the money in their pocket, we help our members use the money for other essential expenses'.¹²

Such service provision to the urban poor at a relatively affordable price vis-à-vis other privately operated retailers helps to build a positive image of the EPRDF-led government. As argued by Wade (2004), 'governing the market' is one of the key features of developmentalism.

4.2 Contextualised cooperation and co-optation

While the discourse of developmentalism sets the overarching framework of relations between the UCCs and EPRDF, the specific features of the strategies that mediate the efforts of building and maintaining dominance vary, depending on the context. Examining the contextual elements of the strategies allows us to identify the specific role that social groups play while a ruling coalition pursues its political goal. It is also imperative to note that, like a ruling coalition, social groups also have an agency and vested interests. Hence, the political processes of building a social foundation by a ruling coalition are far from a one-way project involving passive actors.

An overlapping interest between EPRDF and the urban poor was one of the main reasons why the ruling party succeeded in mobilising the UCCs as part of its effort of building dominance. By the time EPRDF actively encouraged the establishment of the UCCs, the unorganised urban poor were suffering from not having any meaningful influence in the market transaction. Instead, the majority of city residents were at the mercy of either the government, which was rationing some essential items, like wheat, or the market, which was selling essential household items at inflated prices. This ad hoc decision temporarily addressed the problem. A more systematic approach needed the collaboration of both the urban poor and the government. Eventually, the overlapping interests of the urban poor and the EPRDF-led government became an essential component of establishing a symbiotic relationship.

Cooperation becomes the most reasonable strategy when overlapping interests become apparent between a ruling coalition and a specific social group. For cooperation to become a viable strategy, all parties should see the vital role of their counterparts in pursuing their respective interests. For example, the first food price hike from 2008 to 2009 was a period in which EPRDF was aggressively working to regain its legitimacy in Addis Ababa. It was a period of reclaiming administrative, legal and political legitimacy in Addis Ababa and equally preparing for the 2010 national election. The political context in the aftermath of the 2005 election forced EPRDF not to squander any opportunity to keep the momentum of regaining its legitimacy. Hence, facilitating the emergence of the UCCs was a political endeavour of capitalising on the overlapping interests of the urban poor and the ruling party. By way of creating a new grassroots social group, EPRDF also expanded the social foundation of its coalition.

¹²UCC leader 03 (April 2018).

Social groups that have already empowered themselves through their co-operation with the ruling elites may demand more, by broadening the frontiers of their engagement. In this case, the UCCs have successfully lobbied the government to transfer publicly owned businesses into their administration. One respondent involved in the process recalled: 'the UCCs effectively argued that they would become stronger and effective if their economic and financial power is boosted'.¹³ The city administration responded positively to the UCCs' pressure and issued regulation no. 42/2012 to legalise the transfer. At the time of passing the regulation, there were 1,069 publicly owned businesses (recreation centres, butcher shops, warehouses and grain mills) worth 104 million birr (Legesse 2012).¹⁴

Strategies are context-dependent. While the overarching strategies of using legitimising discourse and legal manoeuvring play a paramount role, the dynamic nature of the context in which the relations are occurring also matters immensely. There are contexts where EPRDF gained more power over the UCCs. In the early days of the UCCs, it was relatively easy for EPRDF to mobilise the UCCs for party-specific activities, such as rallies. 'We were benefiting from the support of the government. Hence, we were also doing our part for their political interest', noted one UCC leader.¹⁵ One respondent further claimed that, especially the early years, 'EPRDF used to see UCCs as one of its leagues'.¹⁶ However, as time passed, a power imbalance occurred, and the EPRDF started to force the inclusion of its propaganda messages and agenda items into the general assembly meetings of UCCs. A former city government official recalled that '... the inclusion of the party's agenda depends on the affiliation and opinion of the government official and UCC leaders'.¹⁷ In a context where the UCCs are effectively infiltrated by EPRDF youth or women's league members, there is a tendency for the general assembly of the cooperative to be co-opted.

5. Youth employment programmes in Addis Ababa

In a context where young people make up a significant proportion of a capital city's demography, addressing their economic needs and expectation is one aspect of building and maintaining dominance. EPRDF has a positive record in solving the problems of both unemployment and underemployment. For example, between 2003 and 2014, the rate of unemployment in Addis Ababa dropped from 33 to 24 percent (World Bank 2016). Over the same period, the level of underemployment also fell much faster, from 52 to 31 percent in Addis Ababa (ibid). This case study will specifically focus on how EPRDF's approach towards addressing urban youth unemployment contributed to its efforts of building and maintaining dominance.

¹³ Interview with an officer at Addis Ababa City Administration trade and industry bureau, April 2018.

¹⁴ Link to the newspaper article (<https://addisfortune.net/articles/addis-abeba-transferring-public-businesses-to-consumers-cooperatives/>) – last accessed 3 July 2020.

¹⁵ Interview with UCC leader 04, April 2018.

¹⁶ Interview with UCC leader 06, April 2018.

¹⁷ Interview with former Addis Ababa City Administration officer, April 2018.

After the 2005 election, the EPRDF-led government produced three relevant policy documents directly aimed at addressing youth unemployment in urban areas. The three youth-specific policy frameworks were the Urban Youth Development Package (U-YDP 2006), the Revised Micro and Small-scale Enterprises Development Strategy (2011 MSEs Strategy) and the Revolving Youth Fund (RYF 2016). EPRDF produced each policy document either as a response to a political threat to its legitimacy or as part of its political dominance project.

For example, the U-YDP came into existence after EPRDF lost its political legitimacy in Addis Ababa in the wake of the 2005 elections. The subsequent post-election violence also played a significant role in ruining EPRDF's legitimacy among young people in Addis. Hence, the U-YDP had both an implicit and explicit intention of restoring and building the dominance of the ruling coalition (FDRE 2006; Gebremariam 2017a). EPRDF introduced the 2011 revised MSEs strategy as a vital policy document after the 2010 election had ensured EPRDF's total control over the entire governance structures of the Ethiopian state. The strategy was one way of translating the newly stated objective of building a developmental state within the MSEs sector. The most recent RYF also came into play as a response to the unprecedented wave of violent protest, particularly in Oromia and Amhara regions, while Addis Ababa remained relatively calm.

5.1 Youth employment programmes and developmentalism

All the post-2005 youth employment-focused programmes have both an explicit and implicit purpose of boosting the legitimacy of the ruling party. The programmes are part of the generative intervention with the provision of technical and vocational training for young unemployed people.

The support includes financial and administrative support to young peoples' efforts to 'empower' themselves economically. However, there are also moments where co-optation becomes a dominant strategy, especially in a context where young people are forced to trade of their civil and political rights in order to access the opportunities in the youth employment programmes.

EPRDF launched the U-YDP as part of its political strategy of regaining control over Addis Ababa after the 2005 election. The political salience of the topic of urban youth unemployment was so high that the government disregarded the technocratic processes of producing a new policy framework. The prime minister's office took a bold step of producing the U-YDP and channelled it to the youth ministry for implementation in September 2006. As a result, the U-YDP nullified the heavily consulted and formally launched national youth policy and its implementation strategy (Gebremariam 2017a). The urgency of formulating and implementing the U-YDP is justifiable, given the success of the opposition to effectively mobilise young people in the urban centres, particularly in Addis Ababa during the 2005 election. The post-election violence which brought young people to the front was also another reasonable ground to make them primary policy targets.

The U-YDP had both developmental objectives and political purposes. The developmental objectives sought to address the gaps in the education and skills training of young people vis-à-vis the available job opportunities in the market. It also included the need to boost private-sector engagement to create a vibrant economy with more jobs. In this approach, the leading role of the state remained intact (FDRE 2006; Gebremariam 2017a).

The political purpose embedded within the U-YDP emanates from the categorisation of young people as “marginalised social groups” (FDRE 2006: 10). Such labelling became the rationale behind a policy recommendation that proposed the establishment of permanent platforms of youth participation. As a result, EPRDF mobilised young people in every district of the city to establish the Addis Ababa Youth Forum – AAYF (Gebremariam 2017b). The AAYF then became one of the multiple channels of public mobilisation that EPRDF established to build and maintain its dominance in the city. At a later stage, the AAYF served as an embryo to create EPRDF's youth league in Addis Ababa (Gebremariam 2017b). The youth league then played a vital role in EPRDF's mission of maintaining dominance through repressive interventions. The EPRDF Addis Ababa youth league has been one of the channels through which the ruling party carried out its activities of surveillance and intimidation against potential and rival coalitions, and infiltration of community organisations, particularly before the 2018 sweeping reforms (Gebremariam 2017b).

The second most important post-2005 youth-employment-focused policy framework that contributed to EPRDF's dominance in Addis Ababa is the revised MSEs strategy of 2011. The EPRDF-led government revised the strategy 14 years after its first enactment in 1997. One section in the strategy document reads:

‘In rural areas, farmers are the base of our developmental state. In urban areas, a segment of society that is striving to unite its labour and property, as farmers, is a potential actor that will join micro and small enterprises. This segment of society is forced to rely not only on its property but also on its labour; hence, it gets only the leftovers of rent-seeking activities. This segment of society will never become a principal beneficiary [of a rent-seeking dominated economy]. Furthermore, this segment [of society] covers the majority of the urban population ... hence, it can become a reliable base for our developmental state.’ (FDRE 2011: 4)

In another section, the document reiterates that:

‘So long as they are carefully selected, we need to give recognition and incentives to successful role models [in the MSEs sector]. We also need to create a positive influence by promoting and encouraging role models. [Furthermore] *To attract these vanguards into our party* [emphasis added], we need to empower them to be leaders and mobilise others with their success.’ (FDRE 2011: 6)

As revealed in the above quotes from the revised MSEs strategy, EPRDF adopted a plan to use its generative intervention – the MSEs scheme – as one way of mobilising the socio-economically marginalised segments of society in urban areas. From a technocratic approach to development, targeting the urban poor with a generative policy framework is a noble objective. However, the developmental orientation hardly stops at addressing the socio-economic needs of the target group. The political purpose of ensuring dominance has remained an integral part of the developmental objective.

Such mobilisation of targeted social groups by the party structure has direct implications for the horizontal distribution of power. It enabled EPRDF to become a dominant player in the distribution of power, because it controls access to resources. While helping EPRDF to expand its social foundation, based on the provision of material benefits, the strategy has also kept rival coalitions at bay from mobilising different segments of society.

The most recent youth employment-focused policy framework, the Revolving Youth Fund (RYF), also has an embedded legitimising discourse, with the aim of maintaining dominance. The government launched the fund with an allocation of 10 billion birr (approximately £360 million). The three interrelated objectives of the fund are supporting young peoples' entrepreneurial initiatives, providing financial support for organised income-generating activities by young people, and ensuring young people's participation and benefits (FDRE 2017). There are at least two unique features of the RYF. One, for the first time, the federal government earmarked a specific amount of money to support young peoples' entrepreneurial activities. Two, the commercial bank of Ethiopia became the administrator of the fund on behalf of the federal government.

The RYF came into existence as part of EPRDF's response to the series of protests and unrest across the country. The central line of argument from EPRDF in explaining the causes of the widespread protest was deeply rooted in its developmental discourse. Hence, the remedy the government provided similarly echoes the developmental discourse. While declaring the fund in his presidential address, the former president reiterated that 'the cause of the recent wave of protests is related to economic interest and benefits' (Teshome 2016). The preamble of the proclamation launching the fund also states that.

' . . . despite benefiting from overall growth and development, young peoples' interests and demands have not been addressed adequately, mainly because of newly emerging needs and interests induced by recent growth and also because of unresolved problems inherited from the past.' (FDRE 2017)

It is imperative to note that the political context in which the RYF is currently being implemented is an exception. The current political 'reform' is a result of a concerted political struggle, both from within EPRDF and from rival coalitions. Hence, the political

scene in which EPRDF was playing a dominant role was quickly vanishing. Thus, it is quite unlikely, at least in today's context, to see EPRDF using the RYF as another policy instrument for mobilising young people to achieve its political purposes. Instead, the generative intervention of facilitating job creation for urban youth will be pursued in a more technocratic manner.

5.2 Contextualised relations of co-optation

The contextual strategies of co-optation have direct implications for the distribution of power and thereby for a political settlement. EPRDF's success in winning the acquiescence of many young people to participate in its developmental programme gives the party a sense of legitimacy and also broadens its social foundation. It also reduces the possibility of rival coalitions mobilising the same social groups against EPRDF. Furthermore, the use of multiple formal and non-formal channels of governance also shapes the distribution of power in favour of EPRDF. This is particularly true for the MSEs scheme. The apex of these structures of governance and mobilisation is a 'command post' overseen by the city's deputy mayor. The other structures of governance and mobilisation include 'village committees', 'zone committees', 'development teams', and the 'development army'. These structures co-exist along with the formal layers of governance in Addis Ababa. Having these structures also enabled the EPRDF to reach young people in every neighbourhood. For example, in 2014, the government went door to door to register unemployed young people and with a promise of facilitating opportunities for joining the MSEs scheme.¹⁸ This has both symbolic and material significance. It symbolically demonstrates the capacity of the government to reach every doorstep. Furthermore, it also reveals the real commitment of the regime to address the challenge of youth employment.

EPRDF uses a co-operative empowerment tactic by offering economic opportunities that the young people need to fulfil their aspirations of growing up. The revision of the MSEs development strategy and the provision of financial, administrative and technical support are actual manifestations of seeking acquiescence from young people. Furthermore, by setting political, legal, and administrative requirements, the government was also demanding meaningful action from young people to join the MSEs scheme. The political requirements came in a different form. This included subtle or open pressure to be a member of the ruling party, attending the ruling party's ideology training and the socio-economic policies derived from it, attending the ruling-party-organised demonstrations, and also making financial contributions to such events.

Young people play an active role in co-operative empowerment. Their decision to join the MSEs scheme, fulfilling its administrative and legal requirements, shows their level of commitment. Young people recognised the economic opportunities that the government was providing. There were minimal opportunities outside areas that are under government control. Establishing a business or joining a government-initiated

¹⁸ Interview with an officer at Addis Ababa Children, Women's and Youth Bureau (February 2015).

employment programme within the MSEs scheme thus requires conscious effort and decision. As a result, the young people responded positively and co-operated with the government for the reinvigoration of the MSEs scheme. When young people are cooperating, they are also contributing to the realisation of the political purposes and developmental objectives of the government, while achieving their own goal of pursuing economic rights. Hence, overlapping interests are crucial components of co-operative empowerment.

The overlapping interests between young people and EPRDF might not necessarily fulfil the expectations of both parties on equal terms, however. Depending on the context, asymmetrical power relations may give EPRDF an upper hand over the interests and capacity of young people. In this context, the political purpose of maintaining dominance may become the primary motive shaping the relationship between young people and EPRDF.

There are, for example, contexts in which young people already participating in the MSEs scheme are implicitly required to become members of EPRDF. For example, when one of the respondents joined the MSEs scheme to become a cobblestone producer, he never considered becoming a member of the ruling party. He mentioned that he had never had an interest in politics. When asked how he joined the ruling party, he said 'a membership form was being circulated, and everyone filled out the form. Only a few refused'. From his point of view, his ability to continue participating in the MSEs scheme was tied to his membership with the ruling party. At the time of the interview, he belonged to the ruling party's cell at his workplace, where he was required to attend meetings every two weeks. He further mentioned that the ruling party mobilised thousands of young people at his production site to get registered for the 2015 election, using the cell structure.

While some young people were implicitly forced to join the ruling party, other young people made a calculated decision to join the party as a means of accessing the support in the MSEs scheme. For example, a group of three young people joined OPDO, one of the coalition members of the ruling party, just before they graduated from university. Their main purpose in joining the party was to get a job. As planned, they were all employed in different government offices three months after graduation. A year later, these young people resigned from their respective low-paying and less-promising government jobs to establish a poultry and dairy product distribution business by joining the MSEs scheme. While endeavouring to succeed in their business, they found themselves in the same position again. Through their encounters with district officials, they found out that ruling party youth league members were favoured to get additional services that the government provided for MSEs operators. One member of the group said:

'In one of our several visits to the district MSEs office, we asked why we were not allocated a place in one of the buildings built by the city government as a selling hall. One of the officials replied: "you guys are not actively participating". We told them that we attended every training

session they organised and also made financial contributions whenever we were asked. Every time the district organises demonstrations and political rallies, they request MSE operators to contribute to the event financially. Finally, we understood what they meant when they said “you don't participate”. So we went to the district EPRDF office and fill out a membership form.’

After three months, the young people achieved their objective of getting access to the subsidised shop in the selling hall. The district MSEs Office offered them a 12 square metre room, which they had been formally requesting for more than a year-and-a-half. The rent for the subsidised shop was just £5.00 per month, which was significantly less than the £116.00 they used to pay to a private landlord. One member of the group said he was happy that they managed to get the subsidised shop. However, he also stressed that he was very frustrated. He regretfully mentioned that their business could have thrived if they had invested the money in their business, rather than paying private property owners. He summed up by his feeling by saying: ‘I felt that we were betrayed’.

EPRDF's attempt to seek dominance through co-optation sometimes created tension among a group of young people who may have different interests. A young MSE operator who was leading a group of 18 young people to run an urban agriculture business mentioned several incidents where his group had been approached by local cadres to join the ruling party youth league. The group leader specifically said ‘our district administrator called me to his office three times to convince me to join the ruling party. But I refused’. Both the leader and other members of the group had to deal with several rounds of pressure from local cadres and district officials to join the ruling party youth league. They were promised individual benefits and also better access to services, such as speedy processing of their requests to use adjacent land for their urban agriculture project. Most of the group members were determined not to join the ruling party; hence the potential progress of their urban farm was compromised. But the group members' refusal to be co-opted lasted only until three of them were recruited at later a stage. This created a tense relationship among the group members, because youth league members are believed to work as spies for the authoritarian developmental state.

It also appears that young people who are already members of the ruling party can use their position as leverage to speed up the process of establishing their business within the MSEs scheme. One young MSE operator, who was also an active member of the EPRDF youth league, shared his experience of setting up his print and advertising business. He highlighted the effectiveness of local government officials in helping him to establish his business in a short period of time. He started running his printing and advertising business at full scale within a six-month period. Registration, renting a subsidised shop, and getting a loan within six months was an extremely speedy process compared to the experiences of other respondents.

As mentioned earlier, the revised MSEs development strategy was in place until the Revolving Youth Fund (RYF) came into force in February 2017. In Addis Ababa, the

RYP injected a sense of urgency among government officers who were directly involved in the MSEs scheme to mobilise and organise young people. Indeed, the RYP added new dynamics into the relations between the city government and urban youth. The availability of additional money to support new MSEs created a new sense of responsibility. From the 10 billion birr national fund, 419 million has been allocated to Addis Ababa. In the two years from July 2016 to August 2018, the city government has dispersed 315 million birr for MSEs run by young people. Within the same period, 65 million birr has also been returned to the fund.

In summary, youth employment-focused programmes in the post-2005 period have been embedded into EPRDF's aspiration of ensuring dominance, both in Addis Ababa and at the national level. Addressing the problem of youth unemployment in the city is usually seen as a priority. One of the reasons is because of the potential threat posed by a large number of unemployed and disenfranchised young population and its exposure to violence, crime and political unrest. Ensuring legitimacy in the context of a high rate of youth unemployment can also be quite a challenge. Conversely, effective policy frameworks that reduce youth unemployment rate can play a substantive role in a ruling coalition's legitimacy. It is within this context that EPRDF has been actively trying to streamline its policy frameworks, as well as financial, technical and bureaucratic resources, to address the problem of youth unemployment in Addis Ababa.

The youth employment-focused programmes are part of the generative interventions wherein the strategies of co-optation and legitimising discourses play a substantive role. Both strategies enabled EPRDF to generate acquiescence and legitimacy in the eyes of the young people participating in the programmes. Examples with this regard include the overlapping interests of the government and the young people. The city administration actively mobilised and supported young people seeking employment opportunities. At the same time, young people are also fulfilling the expected legal and administrative requirements to benefit from the programme. As discussed in some of the case studies, some young people were willing to sacrifice their civil and political rights to access the available resources. Understanding the nuanced elements of such kinds of relationships contributes to capturing the day-to-day manifestations of generative interventions towards achieving dominance.

6. Conclusions

This paper has aimed to answer how the Ethiopian ruling coalition under EPRDF succeeded in dominating the socio-economic and political spheres in Addis Ababa (2005-2018). The paper has addressed the question by identifying two social groups with whom EPRDF has been mobilising quite actively. The analysis section presented a brief overview of Addis Ababa's historical and political-economic significance. The paper also provided a broader and historical and political-economic framework of understanding the Ethiopian context at the national level before delving into the two case studies. While the conceptual framework of the research initiative highlights the

importance of both generative and repressive intervention modalities for dominance, the case studies in this paper specifically focus on generative interventions.

There are at least three major points of conclusion. First, the empirical case studies illustrate that EPRDF has been effective enough in using both the legitimising discourse of developmentalism and legal manoeuvring as primary strategies of building and maintaining dominance. The use of developmentalism as a legitimising discourse was actively pursued by EPRDF as a way of offsetting the democratic deficit of the regime, particularly after the 2005 election, which was a clean sweep victory for the opposition in Addis Ababa. Similar to other developmental regimes, EPRDF sought to derive legitimacy from what it delivers to the wider public. But the provision of these services also came hand-in-hand with the political mobilisation of the target groups. The urban poor were mobilised to establish the Urban Consumers' Co-operatives (UCCs) and young people were mobilised into Youth Forum, Youth League as well as the micro and small-scale schemes.

Second, EPRDF's successful mobilisation of the urban poor that was heavily hit by rising food price hikes can be seen as one of the reasons why Addis Ababa has never seen food price hike-related protests. The mobilisation of the urban poor, and making them actors of the market through their cooperatives, were vital interventions, with no less impact compared to other macroeconomic and social policies. Concerning the tactics that shape the interplay between EPRDF and the UCCs, the case study illustrated that there is a contextual use of both co-operative empowerment and co-optation. Whenever there are overlapping interests between EPRDF and the UCCs, co-operative empowerment seems possible. However, in the moments of power asymmetry, where EPRDF has the upper hand, co-optation becomes dominant.

Third, the youth employment-focused programmes also illustrate the salient role of generative interventions, both in building and maintaining dominance. The case study showed that sometimes dominance is maintained through a combination of politically driven policies, active mobilisation of targeted groups and the deployment of bureaucratic, technical and financial resources of the government. The case study analysed series of youth-employment-focused policies, both at the national level and in Addis Ababa. The MSEs scheme is primarily in line with the strategy of using developmentalism as a legitimising discourse. The actual implementation of the youth-employment-focused programmes also revealed how tactics such as passive co-optation and co-operative empowerment prevail, depending on the context and the kind of citizenship rights that the young people are ready to trade off. For some young people, passive co-option is a comfortable way of securing access to resources. Whereas for others, benefiting from the youth employment programmes only through the fulfilment of the formal criterion is non-negotiable.

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