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EVERYDAY PRACTICES OF STATE BUILDING IN ETHIOPIA

Power, Scale, Performativity

Davide Chinigò

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Glossary

ADLI: Agriculture Development Led Industrialization

ANDM: Amhara National Democratic Movement

ARDO: Agriculture and Rural Development Office

CF: contract farming

CSA: Central Statistical Agency

CUD: Coalition for Unity and Democracy

DA: Development Agent

DAP: chemical fertilizer

*Derg***:** the military junta ruling Ethiopia between 1974 and 1991

DFID: Department for International Development, United Kingdom

DIDR: Development-Induced Displacement and Resettlement

EFFORT: Endowment Fund for the Rehabilitation of Tigray

*enset***:** false banana

EPDM: Ethiopian People's Democratic Movement

EPLAUA: Environmental Protection and Land Use Authority

EPRP: Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party

ETB: Ethiopian birr (currency)

EPRDF: Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front

ETIDI: Ethiopian Textile Industry Development Institute

FAO: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

GDP: Gross Domestic Product

GEE: Global Energy Ethiopia

GPN: Global Production Network

GTP (I and II): Growth and Transformation Plan

GVC: Global Value Chain

HABP: Household Asset Building Programme

IMF: International Monetary Fund

IP: Industrial Park

kebele: village level administration

LAC: Land Administration Committee

LR: land registration

MF: model farmer

MFI: microfinance institution

MoARD: Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development

MoI: Ministry of Industry

NRS: National Regional State

MSE: Micro and Small Enterprise

NGO: Non-Governmental Organization

OFC: Oromo Federalist Congress

OFDM: Oromo Federal Democratic Movement

OLF: Oromo Liberation Front

ONC: Oromo National Congress

OPDO: Oromo People's Democratic Organization

PASDEP: Plan for Accelerated Development to End Poverty

PP: Prosperity Party

PSNP: Productive Safety Net Programme

PRSP: Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper

SDPRP: Sustainable Development Poverty Reduction Programme

SEPDF: Southern Ethiopian People's Democratic Front

SNNPR: Southern Nations, Nationalities, and People's Region

T&G: Textile and Garment industry/sector

timad: area of land a pair of oxen would plough in one day, corresponding to approximately
0.25 hectares

TPLF: Tigray People's Liberation Front

TVET: Technical Vocational and Educational Training

UEDF: United Ethiopian Democratic Forces

UNIDO: United Nations Industrial Development Organization

USAID: United States Agency for International Development

USD: United States dollar (currency)

VRP: Voluntary Resettlement Programme

WB: the World Bank

woreda: district level administration

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The State in the Everyday: Conceptual and Methodological Challenges

1.1 Introduction

In recent years Ethiopia has been in the spotlight of African politics and international relations. The surge to power of Abiy Ahmed in April 2018 following a wave of anti-government protests that swept the country from the mid-2010s marked the demise of the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), the party coalition that had ruled Ethiopia since 1991, a few months later. While initially the transition was characterized by a liberalization of the political landscape, the country descended rapidly into a deep political crisis marked by a surge of ethnonationalist politics, which, among other outcomes, escalated into a fully-fledged military conflict in Tigray after November 2020. The current political crisis is rooted in deep transformations that have simmered over a long period of time, and that have at their heart the contested nature of Ethiopia's history of state and nation building. The crisis thus raises the important question about how to interrogate historical dynamics of state formation from the perspective of the present. In this book I explore the concept of the everyday to study how social and political formations, and the material and representational forces they carry, articulate practices of state building over time.

Ethiopia under EPRDF is a productive ground on which to reappraise one of the most lively and yet controversial debates in African studies: how to conceptualize the relationship between state formation and social change. Today this debate remains open to two kinds of question. One is the familiar problem about how to escape the analytical framework of the nation-state model to analyse African social and political formations rooted across increasingly globalized and localized scales. This problematic has been articulated by a considerable body of literature addressing the nature of colonialism and its legacies, the definition of national, sub-national and trans-national identities in the context of globalization, and the structure of African economies in relation to the development of capitalism. State formation as a set of meta-historical and structural transformations confronts the problem of methodological nationalism, which is the tendency of theory to restrict the analytical scope of social and political change against the lens of the nation-state. The second is the debate about how to conceptualize elusive state-society relations. This has led to a wealth of studies focusing

on a sociological reading of the state interested in the practices through which a wide variety of actors negotiate state authority in specific contexts. Rejecting meta-historical explanations, the sociological reading has nonetheless confronted the challenge of descriptive empiricism, which is how to inscribe micro-empirical realities within broader trajectories of state formation without reifying contextual specificities, particularly the tendency to culturalize power relations.

This book takes a perspective on state formation as an empirical object that requires investigating a wide set of open-ended processes articulating the mutual constitution of the state and society over time. The argument I propose is that if we want to escape depictions that conflate experiences of state formation across space and time, and the reification of micro-empirical realities, we need an empirical focus on social change. To take the problem of both methodological nationalism and descriptive empiricism seriously, this book puts into sharp focus those practices of the everyday that over time articulate state formation. This requires two propositions. First, I contend that the analytical lens of the everyday offers a productive ground from which to conceptualize state formation as epiphenomenal to social change. This is about studying how the material forces of history articulate new openings and possibilities, without incurring in deterministic readings of state formation as a teleological process. Second, interrogating state formation through the lens of social change requires an empirical focus on the social production of difference in the world and a methodological perspective that privileges questions around becomings over belongings in identity formation.

In this book I grapple with the question of how to reinstate movements to our conceptualization of state formation in Africa against increasingly globalized and localized dynamics. This is about studying how state power structures and constrains social life, while at the same time it creates the conditions of possibility for new openings and social formations. Drawing insights from the case of Ethiopia between 1991 and 2018, I engage with a set of broad questions about the theory of the state from the vantage point of the interdisciplinary field of African studies. What does state formation look like from the perspective of the everyday? What kind of methodological and epistemological clarifications do we need in order to study state formation from the perspective of the everyday? And how, to what extent, and through what means does state formation reflect new openings and becomings in the everyday?

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This book draws on five different qualitative fieldworks that I conducted in Ethiopia during my postgraduate career between 2006 and 2018. The case studies, located in Ethiopia's four most populous regions and its capital city, Addis Ababa, explore the relation between state formation and social change, analysing the politics and histories informing the design and implementation of policies of resettlement, decentralization and land registration, agriculture

commercialization, small business development, and industrialization. The case studies explore the set of diverse and incoherent practices of the everyday through which beneficiaries and local state officials negotiate abstract representations of the Ethiopian state. An empirical focus on societal conflict is my entry point to analyse how fieldwork subjects navigate state power by casting meanings and values to place, land, and work. Empirically I am particularly interested in those mundane practices that describe how people live alongside and despite the constraining power of state policies and development programmes, when their claims for recognition are dismissed or remain unacknowledged. In these fragments of everyday life, which prove central to identity formation, fieldwork subjects seek new forms of recognition, imagine alternative futures, and, in the process, rearticulate the scope of state authority.

From a perspective of experience and observation, this book explores some of the important challenges that the ruling EPRDF government, in power from 1991 to 2019, encountered in trying to institutionalize state power through flagship policies targeting selected groups in both rural and urban areas: landless people, smallholder farmers, entrepreneurs, urban unemployed, and industrial workers. The EPRDF came to power after a successful armed insurgency that ousted the military regime known as the Derg (1974–1991). In the course of the 2000s, the EPRDF elaborated a left-leaning political ideology that advocated for state-led development, dubbed the 'developmental state'. Drawing on experiences from East Asia, the developmental state model advocates for an active role of the state in promoting rapid economic growth and socio-economic upliftment through large-scale, public funded, and donor supported development programmes. The book reviews the design and implementation of key programmes and policies that illustrate how the developmental state model emerged and took shape since the early 2000s.

By conceptualizing the developmental state as a scalar project, the book demonstrates the ways local state officials and beneficiaries navigated and shaped state-sponsored programmes during implementation: it discusses the contingent politics and histories that determined specific outcomes of, and gave new meanings to, central state-sponsored schemes. Each case-study discusses how these policies, which were generally designed disregarding specific contexts of implementation, engendered dynamics of social differentiation, inequalities, and incipient class formation. Local state officials and beneficiaries negotiated, challenged, and manoeuvred these programmes, investing state power with their own meanings, expectations, and aspirations. While these practices often remain under the surface, I maintain that they shape the trajectory of state-society relations, describing the mutual constitution between the state as a conceptual realm and society as an empirical realm (Mitchell, 1991). The book locates trajectories of social change within the mutual constitution of the state as a set of images—the representation of the Ethiopian state emerging in policies and programmes designed by the

EPRDF government—and the material practices through which these policies are negotiated and shaped during implementation (Migdal, 2001).

1.2   Ethiopia under the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front

Ethiopia under EPRDF is arguably one of the most interesting and controversial experiments of state formation in contemporary Africa. The origin of the post-1991 regime can be traced back to various armed ethnonationalist movements that in the aftermath of the 1974 revolution began guerrilla style opposition to the military regime of the Derg. The most prominent of these political organizations, which grew out of the same Marxist student movement that in the late 1960s and early 1970s opposed the Imperial regime, is the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF). In 1988, four of these regional movements[1] created a broader umbrella political organization: the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front.

After taking power, the EPRDF embarked on a political experiment known as Ethnic Federalism, which institutionalized ethnicity as a main principle of state organization. Rejecting ideas of liberal democracy rooted in individual rights, plural representations, and diversity of political views, the political ideology of the EPRDF impinged on the notion of 'revolutionary democracy'. Revolutionary democracy relies on ideas about collective rights, mass political mobilization, and a form of participation forged through consensus led by a vanguard. Anthropologist David Turton has defined ethnic federalism as a radical and pioneering model of political organization with few precedents around the world (Turton, 2006: 1). In elaborating ethnic federalism, the TPLF/EPRDF political leadership was inspired by a Maoist, and later Albanian, model of political organization, drawing on Stalin's theory of the national question, which advocates for a self-reliant development independent of the Soviet Union (Bach, 2011: 642; Tefera Negash, 2019). 'Nation' was defined by Stalin as 'a historically evolved, stable community of language, and territory, economic life and psychological makeup manifested in a community of culture',[2] a definition that for the TPLF epitomized the national question historically faced by Tigray. By granting the right of self-determination to the plurality of 'nations, nationalities and peoples' of Ethiopia up to secession, ethnic federalism was envisioned as a system to neutralize the destabilizing forces of ethno-nationalism (Vaughan and Tronvoll, 2003: 118). This was meant to preserve the territorial integrity of the country—with the notal exception of Eritrea, who seceded in 1991—by recognizing the plurality of people and

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[1] The TPLF, the Amhara National Democratic Movement (ANDM), the Oromo People's Democratic Organization (OPDO), and the Southern Ethiopian People's Democratic Front (SEPDF).

[2] Aregawi Berhe (2008) cited in Tefera Negash (2019: 470).

groups that were subsumed in the process of imperial expansion of the Abyssinian polity initiated under Emperor Menelik II in the course of the nineteenth century.

While ostensibly providing for a radically decentralized system, revolutionary democracy in Ethiopia has in fact relied on hierarchical governance based on 'democratic centralism'. Local level bodies have remained highly dependent on federal decision-making, including financial disbursement, thus reflecting state structures poorly emancipated from the ruling party. The EPRDF inherited the system of the local administrative structure of the Derg based on *woreda* (district) and *kebele* (village) levels, which under the new course continued to perform the same functions of political control and monitoring. The other important element of continuity with the Derg is state ownership of land,[3] although with important transformations in the period under review.

In the course of the 2000s, the EPRDF/TPLF leadership articulated 'revolutionary democracy' along the model of the 'developmental state'. This model emerged in the aftermath of the war with Eritrea (1998–2000), when in 2001 a heated debate about the country's strategic approach to capitalism generated a split in the TPLF's inner circle (discussed in chapter two). The split consolidated the charismatic leadership of the late Prime Minister, and the developmental state's principal ideologue, Meles Zenawi. The contested 2005 national elections (discussed in chapter three), which marked the end of a tepid opening to multiparty democracy, further consolidated the re-orientation of the country's strategic direction towards a model of selective market liberalization heavily managed by the state. The developmental state model advocates for an activist and expansionist state that protects strategic sectors from market forces until their maturity as the fundamental condition to sustain socio-economic transformation in the long run.

As compellingly argued by Meles Zenawi himself (2012), the developmental state stands on the refute of neoliberalism and the 'Washington Consensus', the development doctrine championed by international financial institutions during the 1990s and 2000s which promotes the idea of a minimal state in the economy ('rolling back the state') and macroeconomic reforms ('making the price right'). On the contrary, drawing on 'catch up' theories of late industrializers (Arkebe Oqubay, 2015), the developmental state approach stands on an expansionist role of the state in the economy, drawing on successful experiences of rapid economic transformation in East Asia, and China in particular. The scope of the Ethiopian developmental state reflects the formulation of an ambitious strategy of rapid economic growth and diversification aimed at transforming Ethiopia into a 'middle income country by 2025' (FDRE, 2015). The extent to which the EPRDF government departed from the centralized authoritarian rule of previous regimes, and the

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[3] Land ownership was nationalized in 1975, soon after the Derg junta took power, through a radical land reform which dismantled existing forms of landlordism. See for instance the work of Dessalegn Rahmato (2009), René Lefort (1983), Gebru Tareke (1996), and Christopher Clapham (1988).

scope of ethnic federalism to produce ethnic politics, are issues that remain disputed to this day. This is also what moved my interest in exploring those practices of power that articulate the relation between state formation and social change from the perspective of the everyday.

1.3 Situating the Relation between State Formation and Social Change in EPRDF Ethiopia

The relation between social change and state formation in EPRDF Ethiopia interrogates important questions about the temporality of state formation, the spatial configurations of state-society relations, and the problem of subject formation in relation to state power. In this introduction, I situate the problematics this book seeks to address along the critique to three influential approaches—the centre-periphery, the developmental state, and political culture.

1.3.1 Beyond Centre-periphery Relations: Methodological Nationalism and the Everyday

The centre-periphery framework is one of the most influential approaches that students of Ethiopia have employed to critically scrutinize state formation and nation-building over time. A consolidated historiography identifies the formation of modern Ethiopia in the protracted military expansion of the Abyssinian empire in the nineteenth century in the Southern, Western, and Eastern lowlands of the country.[4] This body of studies can be situated within the Marxist tradition—which was deeply influential in shaping the intellectual trajectory of the student movement inspiring the 1974 and 1991 regime changes (Elleni Centime Zeleke, 2019)—understanding state formation as a set of structural processes. A landmark study here is the book *Ethiopia: The Last Two Frontiers* (2011), in which historian John Markakis contends that the political project of state formation in EPRDF Ethiopia remains fiercely contested today. Markakis locates the centre of power in the 'highland centre', the historical core of Abyssinian society in the Ethiopian highlands, where today the administrative reach of the state is comprehensive. From this centre, the Ethiopian geography of power articulates along the country's 'last two frontiers': the 'highland periphery' and the 'lowland periphery'. Here, Markakis argues that the reach of the state is limited, and efforts of the Ethiopian state builders have intensified only recently.[5] Relying on this approach, a

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[4] See for instance Donham and James (1986), Bahru Zewde (2001), Dessalegn Rahmato (2009), Markakis (1974), Clapham (1988).

[5] In Markakis' terms, the 'highland periphery' includes 'the region that lies roughly below the line that joins the Blue Nile River in the west with Addis Ababa in the east' (12), which constitutes the

growing number of studies have looked at the strategies the Ethiopian government has put in place to economically and politically capture these peripheries (Mosley and Watson, 2016; Fouad Makki, 2012; Lavers, 2012), including through the displacement, cooptation, and sedentarization of politically marginalized groups (Abbink et al., 2014; Gabbert et al., 2021).

For Markakis the distinction between the centre and the periphery is not only about geo-physical characteristics, but more so about the distribution of power.

> What defines the centre is the monopoly of power and the hegemonic position it occupies in the state … What defines the periphery is its marginal position in the power structure of the state, or more precisely, its exclusion from state power … Powerlessness, economic exploitation and cultural discrimination add up to a severe form of marginalization, the defining feature of the periphery.
>
> (2011: 7)

The centre-periphery framework is helpful for elucidating one crucial dimension of social change in relation to state formation: a focus on those histories that in the narration of state formation as a political elite's project remain under the surface. Markakis' endeavour is precisely to narrate the history of state formation in Ethiopia, and its present-day articulations, from the perspective of those people and territories at the frontier, those histories that remain at the margins. By putting into sharp focus the power asymmetries that characterized the formation of modern Ethiopia, Markakis elucidates a perspective of nation-building as the structural outcome of unequal and exploitative centre-periphery relations.

Markakis creates the space to analyse social change when he contends that historically, in the pursuit of centralization, Ethiopian state builders resorted to strategies ranging across two opposites: resorting to force, and designing arrangements to accommodate a vastly heterogenous population within the realm of a broad enough national identity. Over time this translated into policies seeking the assimilation of the peripheries to Abyssinian culture, the construction of the socialist state under the Derg, and then cultural pluralism and federalism under EPRDF. However, 'none of these addressed the fundamental political issue that continues to galvanize resistance: the assumed exclusive right of the Abyssinian elite to rule the state and plot the course leading to national integration' (2011: 5).

The centre-periphery framework points to broader discussions in the field of African studies over the nature of state formation in the continent. Scholars conceptualizing the state as a set of historical processes have debated for a long time

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geographical extension of the Ethiopian plateau southwards. The 'lowland periphery' is the vast semi-arid region surrounding the highland plateau on all sides when it drops abruptly from the escarpment, which is characterized by significant differences in terms of climate, density of settlement, and limited suitability for intensive agriculture, factors which historically made mobile pastoralism the main human activity.

the relative weight of colonization and European imperialism in shaping African social formations and political experiences. Some historians regard colonization as the defining moment of state formation, emphasizing how the legacy of colonial structures has significantly constrained post-colonial configurations (Mamdani, 1996; Young, 1994). Other scholars contend that the trajectory of the colonial and postcolonial state in Africa must be inscribed within a broader history of 'extraversion' (Bayart, 1993; 2000), and an approach that scrutinizes the stratified layers of history to capture new openings and possibilities (Cooper, 2002). The role and legacy of colonialism to shape state formation has thus attracted scholars interested in conceptualizing the mismatch between fluid African societies and the classical tools at hand for the study of state power and authority. Normative understandings of state formation rooted in the Weberian ideal type have long dominated conceptualizations of public authority and analyses of power. When such a model was not conforming with complex empirical realities, explanations tended to emphasize the 'exceptionalism' of the African state (Chabal and Daloz, 1999). The debate about exceptionalism was then articulated along the role of formal and informal institutions in determining social and political outcomes. Since the 1980s, a particularly influential body of studies has relied on the notion of 'neo-patrimonialism' to contend that the nation-state model does not capture forms of political authority that are rather imbued within pre-existing social norms and informal political institutions within the realm of 'tradition' (Médard, 1982; Chabal and Daloz, 1999; Chabal, 2008). Contending that formal political institutions have taken little root, this approach privileges a focus on informal politics—for instance emphasizing the role of 'big men' and traditional leaders—to understand African social and political formations. The tendency of this approach to reify the dichotomy between 'modern' and 'tradition', as well as to provide cultural explanations of political processes, has been criticized by new institutional approaches making a case for the role of formal institutions to shape everyday politics (Cheeseman, 2018).

The lack of a protracted colonial experience in Ethiopia—limited to the five years of Italian occupation between 1936 and 1941—marks a partial specificity of the country's historical trajectory when compared to the rest of the continent. However, the debate about exceptionalism in state formation has been no less intense: the lack of a protracted history of European colonization has induced many observers to regard the Ethiopian experience in isolation from the rest of the continent. By extension, the Ethiopian state, and its nature and functioning, has often been constructed as an exceptional object of research.[6] A central question, which remains today, is how to provide complexity to a reading of Ethiopian history beyond the political project of the centre, capturing loose relations that are taking place beyond the nation-state frame. Recent critical contributions have,

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[6] For a discussion about exceptionalism in Ethiopian historiography, see Marzagora (2017) and Fry (2017).

for instance, put into sharp focus the contested nature of Ethiopian history, questioning the largely Eurocentric frame within which representations of state formation have been proposed (Elleni Centime Zeleke, 2019). While resonating with current discussions about the meaning of decolonization, questions about the epistemological frame of reference through which to study the state in Africa, i.e., the problem of methodological nationalism, have taken place over a much longer period.

In recent years an important contribution to tackling the problem of methodological nationalism has emerged from the interdisciplinary field of borderland studies. Borderland studies privilege an analytical perspective grounded on the historical contingency of social phenomena and offer an interdisciplinary perspective to the study of state formation based on the view that social processes are not imbued in space but rather that they actively *generate* space (Lefebvre, 1991). Drawing on these insights, Ulf Engel and Paul Nugent (2010) argue for a spatial turn in African studies, urging a shift in the discipline's focus on dynamics of state formation to how different forms of space are contested by social groups. In Ethiopia, this has led to a wealth of studies on how specific social groups inhabit transnational localities both within and outside the domain of the Ethiopian nation-state (for instance Korf et al., 2015; Emmeneger, 2017). Building on a growing body of literature regarding sovereignty as not necessarily aligned with the territorial nation-state (Hansen and Stepputat, 2005; Mbembe, 2002; Massey, 2005; Agnew, 2005), the spatial turn redefines the empirical realm of state formation to the perspective of how a variety of actors defend or gain sovereignty by contesting the political space. Engel and Nugent contend that this conceptual lens is particularly useful in making intelligible how processes of globalization unfold spatially across Africa. This is an endeavour which, they argue, requires 'a historically informed theory of Africa's place in present political, economic and cultural processes of spatial change' (Engel and Nugent, 2010: 6). The new regimes of territorialization that substantial parts of Africa are witnessing—including 're-ordered states, transnational and sub-national entities, new localities and transborder formation' (6)—requires this spatial thinking to conceptualize ensuing social and political formations.

Although the centre-periphery framework is helpful for narrating those histories that remain under the surface and for retaining a critical stance towards the project of building the Ethiopian nation-state over time, it rests on a rather teleological view of history in which state formation is defined in relation to the project of western political modernity. More specifically, the centre-periphery framework reflects a tendency to understand state power as a singularized time, an all-encompassing force moving unidirectionally from the centre to encompass the periphery, both spatially and temporally. In Ethiopia this coincides with the historical project of the Abyssinian elite, and, in the period under review, by the EPRDF/TPLF leadership more specifically. From a methodological perspective,

this presents the problem of framing fieldwork subjects through the binary distinction between 'powerful' and 'powerless' subjects, between state builders and those resisting integration. As this book demonstrates, this distinction becomes increasingly blurred when we turn our attention to the problematics confronting beneficiaries of state policies and development programmes in their everyday life. Understanding the nuances of how power relations operate in the everyday requires an approach that moves beyond a view of state power as mechanically unfolding from the centre to the periphery. Markakis maintains that 'the elite at the centre makes decisions; the elite in the periphery implement them' (8). While this is certainly true—cooptation has historically played an important role in Ethiopia's state formation—it also presumes that local state institutions and elites mechanically implement decisions taken at the centre. This misses important aspects of how institutions translate and mediate state power into practices, a central problematic that this book seeks to address, and how specific state practices, in turn, shape the state as an abstract representation. The binary distinction between powerful and powerless subjects obscures how reflexive power relations operate in the everyday.

How, then, do we take these problems further? What epistemological clarifications does the problem of methodological nationalism require? In this book I scope the everyday as an analytical concept to study practices of state formation over time.[7] I aim to put into clear focus those practices of institutional mediation that become relevant to definitions of state formation. The urge to complement the centre-periphery conceptualization of state formation stems from practical problems that I encountered during my fieldwork. I always found it difficult to frame any of the five case studies of this book within strict centre-periphery categorization. I felt much was missing in the ways power was at work. I soon realised that while the centre-periphery framework is useful for sketching state formation in broad historical terms, it presents the practical problem of how to make space to describe agency, while maintaining an open-minded view on the movement of structure. The realm of the everyday allows for a characterization of state power as a diffuse, unstable, and evolving field (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987). At an empirical level, I am interested in scoping two complementary perspectives of the everyday state. The first is how state power constrains and shapes social life. The second is how societal subjects navigate constraining structural forces of the state. The five case studies of this book discuss how contestations over public authority during the EPRDF period have taken place across space—from the cities of Addis Ababa and Mekelle, to rural sites in Amhara, Oromia, and Southern Nations, Nationalities, and People's Region (SNNPR)—and mobilize a broad set of narrations of state power that escape the centre-periphery representation of history. The problem this book seeks to address is precisely how to take an analytical

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[7] The work of Daniel Mulugeta (2019; 2020) takes a similar approach to studying the formation of state ideas in Ethiopia as they are rooted into practices of power in specific localities.

perspective that describes how state power constrains social life, while at the same time leaving room to discuss new openings.

A focus on everyday practices of state building requires a perspective on history as an open field that remains up for grab. In this book I grapple with the question of how to write the history of state formation in EPRDF Ethiopia from the perspective of the present. What histories count and are worth of narration is a problem that requires additional methodological clarifications. On the one hand, this is a problem about my positionality as a white-Italian male academic engaging with state formation in Ethiopia as an empirical object. The power field that my positionality mobilized during fieldwork is something that the reader is encouraged to take into consideration when reading my empirical material. On the other hand, writing a history of the present is a problem of definition of those dynamics that are relevant to describing trajectories of state formation. The analytical frame of the everyday, I contend, allows for a pragmatic approach. Methodologically this book explores state formation from the perspective of those contingent histories that have emerged during my encounter with fieldwork subjects. The five empirical chapters explore the contingent histories attached to resettlement, land registration and decentralization, agriculture commercialization, employment creation, and industrialization, from the perspective of the problematics that these policies raised in the specific contexts of implementation. These histories make for a narration of state formation beyond the state as a methodological unit of analysis: they articulate specific concerns of beneficiaries and local officials against broader priorities and themes at regional, national, and global scales.

1.3.2 The Ethiopian Developmental State: Alternatives to Neoliberism and the Problem of Scale

The second approach to state formation is the growing body of literature articulating state-society relations in Ethiopia through a critique of the developmental state. Ethiopia under the EPRDF has been in the spotlight for its remarkable achievements in terms of rapid economic growth. In 2018 the country was Africa's fastest growing economy, following a decade of steady growth averaging 10% a year (IMF, 2018), although starting from a low base. Growth was driven by the expansion of services and infrastructure, and the construction sector in rapidly expanding urban areas, particularly the capital city Addis Ababa. Major investments in large-scale infrastructure projects, including the Grand Renaissance Dam and dedicated industrial parks, became flagship projects of the developmental state. Investments in commercialization of agriculture (discussed in chapters three and four), the sector historically employing a vast majority of people, the promotion of small businesses (chapter five), and manufacturing (chapter six) are all distinctive features of the developmental state approach to selective economic

liberalization. These projects mirror the ambition of the EPRDF elite to nurture the country's influence beyond national borders, for instance by positioning Ethiopia as East Africa's main power supplier. While the government's strategic planning has considerable expectations, projecting a steady growth of these sectors in the period under review, their actual record has been less significant.[8]

The economic achievements experienced in the 2000s and 2010s, which the EPRDF has claimed as a success of the developmental state model, have elicited representations of Ethiopia as a clear example of 'Africa rising'. Continentally the EPRDF has drawn on a political repertoire emphasizing efforts to promote a new African renaissance impinged on the values of pan-African humanism that characterized the heydays of modernization (FDRE, 2015: 13; Arkebe Oqubay, 2015). This reflects efforts to sustain a more integrated continental market through free trade agreements, as well as to leverage the country's privileged position as the host of the African Union. In the period under review, Ethiopia, Africa's second largest country by population, has rapidly expanded its regional influence and ambition. However, the project for economic transformation under the EPRDF has raised questions about the scope of the developmental state model to further democratic rights and the plural representation of the country's diverse groups. Interestingly, the culmination of this project in the late 2010s also marked the end of the control of the TPLF over the EPRDF, and soon after, the end of the EPRDF itself. On 4 April 2018, Abiy Ahmed became the first Prime Minister of Ethiopia from the politically marginalized Oromo group. In September 2019, Abiy Ahmed signed a historical peace deal with Eritrea settling the border dispute that the 1998–2000 war had left open, and creating the conditions for the movements of persons, goods, and services between the two countries for the first time in twenty years. For this achievement, Abiy Ahmed was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize 2019 and celebrated on the covers of major international news outlets.[9] In December 2019 Abiy Ahmed launched his own political platform, the Prosperity Party (PP), which replaced the EPRDF as the ruling party. While Abiy's political ideology emphasizes the construction of a broad Ethiopian national identity, on this departing from the TPLF/EPRDF, it remains committed to an approach to economic development based on the developmental state model.

The origin and nature of the political transition—which many identify in the nationwide anti-government protests sparked by Oromia, the country's most populous region, since the mid-2010s—have revamped discussions about the relation between the developmental state and authoritarianism under EPRDF.[10] While one way to read the project for economic development under the developmental state

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[8] See for instance Mulu Gebreeyesus et al., 2018.

[9] See https://time.com/collection/100-most-influential-people-2019/5567759/abiy-ahmed/ [accessed on 22 June 2020].

[10] On the relationship between development and authoritarianism, see the edited book by Hagmann and Abbink (2013). For a contextualization of the relationship between aid and authoritarianism in

is through James Scott's lens of high modernism,[11] the 2018 transition and the ensuing ethnic tensions that have culminated in a tragic conflict between the central government and the TPLF in Tigray since November 2020, require a more detailed investigation of the nature of social and political transformations that took place during EPRDF. The case studies of this book show how the social and political tensions that have come to the surface in recent years have in fact simmered for a much longer period and require a critical focus on the developmental state experiment in its everyday articulations. This book brings into focus a trend of growing inequalities and unfulfilled expectations that have over time resulted in an increased disconnect between the EPRDF and its historical constituencies, and between the developmental state as a set of ideas, policies, and principles, and the actual practices that articulated state-society relations in the period under review.

The elaboration of the developmental state in the 2000s intersects with important questions about how scholarship constructs this model as a research object. Discussions about the developmental state are well articulated in the field of African studies, and they are not exclusively confined to Ethiopia.[12] As the model is derived from experiences of socio-economic transformation in East Asia (Hayashi, 2010), its applicability to African cases is disputed (Kanyenze et al., 2016; Mkandawire, 2001; Leftwich, 2000).[13] In the course of the 2000s, discussions about the developmental state emerged parallel to a growing critique of the effects of neoliberal policies of structural adjustment, market liberalization, and political conditionality sponsored by international financial institutions that African countries widely adopted in the 1980s and 1990s. From this perspective, the developmental state reflects a wide set of aspirations that political elites across the continent have framed through ambitious political agendas, generally rejecting the 'minimal state' recipe, of finding alternatives to neoliberalism (Radice, 2008). More controversial is the extent to which the developmental state model is useful for capturing actual patterns of political and socio-economic transformation in Africa. Key questions include the relationship between the private sector and state bureaucracy, the scope of industrial strategies to support import-substitution as a step on the road to export orientations, and the nexus between political legitimacy and socio-economic development. In Ethiopian studies literature, discussions have revolved around the applicability of the concept of developmental state to the country's structural conditions, particularly the evolution of the ideological

Africa, see the edited book by Hagmann and Reyntjens (2016), which includes a chapter on Ethiopia by Emanuele Fantini and Luca Puddu.

[11] See Scott (1998) for the notion of high modernism.

[12] Studies have engaged with this question in the cases of South Africa and Ghana (Ayee, 2013), Botswana (Hillbom, 2011), Botswana and Zimbabwe (Maundeni, 2001), Botswana and Uganda (Mbabazi and Taylor, 2005), Mauritius (Meisenhelder, 1997), and Rwanda (Booth and Golooba-Mutebi, 2012).

[13] Critical studies also question the applicability of a pre-packed notion of the developmental state to contemporary experiences in Asia (see, for instance, Liow, 2011; Kim, 1999).

trajectory of the TPLF/EPRDF and the legacy of the country's experience of state formation (De Waal, 2013; Lefort, 2013; Melisew Dejene and Cochrane, 2019). For instance, studies have characterized the Ethiopian model in terms of an aspirational developmental state (Bach and Nallet, 2018; Lavers, 2019), developmental patrimonialism (Clapham, 2018), neo-developmentalism (Goodfellow, 2017), and political marketplace (De Waal, 2018).

As I stressed earlier, the origin of the developmental state in Ethiopia needs to be situated in the early 2000s, when a political crisis in the TPLF's inner circle in the aftermath of the war with Eritrea resulted in the consolidation of the leadership and strategic vision over the country's future of the late prime minister, Meles Zenawi (discussed in chapter two). In the mind of the TPLF/EPRDF political leadership, the self-declared developmental state was meant to achieve rapid economic growth as a way to keep the country together against the centrifugal forces of ethnonationalism. As contended by Meles himself, 'I am convinced that we will cease to exist as a nation unless we grow fast and share our growth'.[14] The imperative of economic growth to address the question of nationalities[15] is therefore one of the most important themes interweaving discussions about the developmental state and ethnic federalism, a topic which the case studies of this book dissect through the lens of the everyday.

One influential contribution to the developmental state literature is the book *Made in Africa* by the former mayor of Addis Ababa and prominent member of the EPRDF intelligentsia, Arkebe Oqubay (2015). Drawing on theories about late industrializers and import-substitution, Arkebe reviews key sectors of Ethiopia's industrial policy such as construction, floriculture, and the leather sector. The book makes a strong case for the adoption of developmental state policies in Africa, identifying in embedded autonomy (Evans, 1995) the most salient feature of the Ethiopian experiment.[16] Arkebe acknowledges that the road to the transformation of the economy is dense with obstacles and that the developmental state approach has been successful in sectors such as construction and floriculture but less so in others, such as the leather industry (Brautigam, Weis and Tang, 2016). While Arkebe's work is useful for mapping the strategic vision behind the developmental state project and its macro-economic and sectoral articulations, it is imbued with a teleology of progress, understanding transformation as a singularized time on the way to modernization. This reflects a perspective on the developmental state as a set of ideas and abstract representations as they are produced by the EPRDF/TPLF political leadership. In this

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[14] Quoted in De Waal (2013: 154).

[15] For an early formulation of the question of nationalities, refer to Walleligne Mekonnen (1969).

[16] Arkebe Oqubay (2015: 37) characterizes the developmental state in relation to embedded autonomy as a set of structural features: a development obsessed political elite; a strategic and goal oriented approach to the economy; the mobilization of societal subjects around key national goals and hegemonic purpose; a bureaucracy embedded in society; the ability to take decisive political actions; and the capacity to channel developmental rents from less productive activities to more developmental ones.

book I am concerned to unpack how these ideas informing the formulation of the developmental state model produce real life effects through practices of institutional mediation by a wide variety of political subjects, including the ultimate beneficiaries of state policies and programmes. The case studies of this book show that the modernization vision underlying the developmental state project has not only been fiercely contested, but that the developmental state itself took on a variety of meanings depending on material specificities, histories, and contingencies of life. By exploring the tensions and contradictions of the developmental state project in this book, I seek for a less-than-certain and less-than-stable interpretation of the relationship between state formation and social change in EPRDF Ethiopia.

In the course of the 2000s, the institutionalization of the Ethiopian developmental state underscored a strategy of selective liberalization of the economy which departed from the planned model of the Derg. While strategic sectors, such as banking and telecommunication, have remained under tight state control, after 2006–2007 the Ethiopian government opened the economy to foreign investments, thus uncapping international capital and technologies aimed at capturing export markets to sustain the developmental state's effort at economic development. Macro-economic instability driven by rapidly growing imports of finished goods to sustain urban development made export orientation even more crucial to counter a swiftly deteriorating balance of payments. Another important objective of this strategy was addressing youth unemployment and landlessness in rapidly transforming urban and rural areas (Di Nunzio, 2019). It is thus important to note that the application of this strategy has not been uniform. While the centre-periphery reading emphasizes a geographically differentiated scope of the developmental state policies, in this book I emphasize the scalar dynamics within which state-driven economic liberalization is enmeshed. This is crucial to critically scrutinize how state-society relations under EPRDF Ethiopia intersects with processes of globalization which unfold through contingent histories. I contend that the Ethiopian developmental state approach to selective economic liberalization should first be understood as a scalar project. Two examples that illustrate the scalar scope of the developmental state are the relations between smallholder and commercial agriculture, and between small businesses and manufacturing industry.

Drawing on two case studies from Oromia and SNNPR, chapters three and four review key transformations in the agriculture sector. After a largely unsuccessful strategy aimed at leveraging capital from smallholder agriculture to diversify the economy, known as Agriculture Development Led Industrialization (ADLI) (discussed in chapter two), since the mid-2000s the government's strategic planning started prioritizing the commercialization of agriculture through the injection of foreign corporate capital. Rooting agro-industry was meant to exploit international agricultural commodity markets of niche products such as floriculture and

biofuels (the latter is discussed in chapter four). Agriculture commercialization generated the significant rescaling of land and labour relations, this reflecting the attempt of the EPRDF government to pursue different, and often irreconcilable, objectives. For example, the problem of reconciling state ownership of land with measures prioritizing the capitalization of agriculture generated the problem of how to keep together two contradictory elements of land policy, namely, limiting land dispossession and unleashing the potential of agriculture for economic growth.

In scalar terms, agriculture commercialization under the developmental state was characterized by three trends. First, important initiatives, including land titling and decentralization of land administration (discussed in chapter three), have targeted smallholder farmers in an effort to boost productivity and their integration to the local market. Schemes of smallholder commercialization have been particularly prominent where historically peasant farmers had direct access to land and population pressure is higher. Prioritizing the smallholder model was meant to jointly sustain food security, while engendering micro-dynamics of capital accumulation to boost productivity. Second, large-scale commercialization schemes via foreign investments and entailing the dispossession and displacement of smallholders and pastoral groups have selectively targeted vast areas of the country's lowlands where population pressure was historically less prevalent, and have relied on a political repertoire about putting into productive use otherwise underexploited resources (Fouad Makki, 2012; 2014). A third model (discussed in chapter four) is the commercialization of smallholder agriculture through contract farming arrangements in which farmers are integrated into global value chains but retain formal control of the land. Following Fouad Makki (2014: 80), the 'effect of these contrasting patterns of agrarian transformations is the asymmetrical integration of the mass of Ethiopia's farmers into a hierarchically structured global agroindustrial complex'.

Similarly, important scalar dynamics can be depicted in the strategy targeting business promotion in services and manufacturing. The small/large-scale dichotomy in the ways the government designed and implemented policies and programmes is perhaps even more striking here. On the one hand, as discussed in chapter five, the promotion of micro-entrepreneurship schemes is an important aspect of the developmental state approach to business development. Engineering the creation of small groups to establish business activities in pre-established segments of the service sector, and injecting them with state-sponsored financial arrangements and a strong emphasis on saving, has been a distinctive feature of the developmental state approach to address unemployment, and particularly the threat of unrest that a rapidly growing mass of disenfranchised urban youth posed to political stability. On the other hand, the promotion of manufacturing via foreign investments in large-scale corporations, for instance in the textile sector (chapter six), mirrored the developmental state ambition to promote an

export-oriented strategy of industrialization. As the Ethiopian government has been successful in attracting foreign capital by setting in place fiscal incentives and an ambitious infrastructural plan of dedicated industrial districts, the delocalization of international corporations was meant to create the technical and technological spill-overs necessary for rooting domestic manufacturing in the long run.

Emphasizing the scalar scope of the strategy for selective economic liberalization under the Ethiopian developmental state elucidates important themes that expound the relation between social change and state formation. First, changing land and labour relations constitute an important entry point to scope the significant social and economic transformations that took place under the developmental state project. By rearticulating global configurations of capital in specific localities, the developmental state strategy generated a wide set of conflicts, claims to recognition, and patterns of social differentiation. The empirical chapters of this book discuss how these dynamics, which were filtered through localized histories, proved central to the formation and contestation of public authority in a variety of contexts. Second, Ethiopia under the developmental state, while relying on a discourse about state-managed capitalism to sustain socio-economic development, has been characterized by a trend of growing inequalities, the dispossession and displacement of people and groups, and new rural-urban interactions. The developmental state has thus subsumed discussions around social and political rights, and plural representation, within the priority of economic growth and modernization. Social differentiation and incipient class formation in both urban and rural areas raised the problem for the EPRDF about the changing nature of its main political constituency, historically based on smallholder farmers. This problematic is particularly relevant considering that a rapidly transforming and diversified society exacerbated existing trends towards ethnic identification in the ways people engaged and conceptualized the state, and its developmental ambitions.

A growing body of critical literature emphasizes how the policies set in motion through the developmental state are in fact a key mechanism upon which the EPRDF has relied to project central state authority over diverse groups, justifying this through a progressive discourse about economic modernization. The developmental state is mobilized here to discuss the projection of federal state power in specific localities. This critical literature puts into sharp focus the distinction between the developmental state as a set of more or less coherent state policies designed by the EPRDF government and their actual configuration as a set of contradictory practices reproducing social and political inclusion and exclusion (Vaughan, 2011), marginality (Di Nunzio, 2017), ethnic conflict and violence (Mecklenburg, 2019), interaction with the peasantry (Dessalegn Rahmato, 2014; Lefort, 2012; Planel, 2014), corruption and political patronage (Daniel Mulugeta, 2020), land dispossession (Korf et al., 2015; Gabbert et al., 2021), land rights and

democratization (Tusa Husen Ahmed, 2018), class formation (Bach and Nallet, 2018), and social conflict (Andreas Admasie, 2018).

In the 2000s, the design and implementation of policies drawing on the developmentalist ambition of the EPRDF went side by side with an increasing institutionalization of grassroot state and party structures. While the EPRDF inherited the local administrative structures of the Derg, based on *kebele* and *woreda* level units, the period under review records a sharp expansion in the scope and penetration of local bureaucracy to virtually encompass all aspects of social, economic, and political life. The modernization impetus dictated by the developmental state justified growing state intrusion on the grounds of improving the efficiency of local institutions in delivering rapid socio-economic development. The reconfiguration of local administrative structures is an important entry point through which to discuss the trajectory of state-society relations under EPRDF, which intersects with at least two important themes addressed by this book.

The first is decentralization. Policies and development programmes under EPRDF Ethiopia cannot be read in isolation from broader institutional arrangements regulating ethnic federalism. Article 39(1) of the 1995 Constitution outlines a radically decentralized system of state administration, providing that 'Every Nation, Nationality and People in Ethiopia has an unconditional right to self-determination, including the right to secession'. The Constitution does not specify the conditions and precise arrangements for ethnic groups to secede the federation, this arguably being one of the most controversial aspects of ethnic federalism as a political experiment. In the period under review, the roles and relations between the federal state, the regional states, and the lower-level administrative units have been the object of important policy reforms under the framework of decentralization. In the 1990s, reforms focused on fiscal decentralization and the repartition of prerogatives between the federal government and the nine regional states (Keller, 2002; Keller and Smith, 2005). The 2000s, during which the developmental state model emerged as a main trademark of the country's strategy for economic transformation, were characterized by an ambitious plan known as *woreda*-level decentralization, establishing a system of 'block grants' transfers from the federal government to district level units (Dom and Lister, 2010). The scope of decentralization reforms is important for understanding key trends of policymaking in EPRDF Ethiopia, which are explored in chapter three in relation to land administration. Rather than a genuine devolution of powers, decentralization reforms should be regarded in terms of the deconcentration of prerogatives to regional and lower-level bodies, with accountability directed upward to the federal government. In fact, decentralization proved central to the territorialization of federal state power and the centralization of political authority (Chinigò, 2015). Rather than expanding the democratic scope of ethnic federalism, decentralization was more effective in strengthening the efficiency of local level institutions to

mobilize people around development. For this reason, decentralization constitutes one of the institutional backbones of the developmental state model. Top-down policy implementation and strong upward accountability of local institutions to the federal government reflected an aesthetic of state efficiency which the EPRDF government considered a key feature for a successful developmentalist strategy.

A second theme is the blurring of political and administrative functions, roles, and prerogatives between the local state and party structures. Especially after the controversial 2005 elections, which for the first time incited visible questions about the legitimacy of the EPRDF political project, the political leadership embarked on a campaign to expand the party membership centred on the objective to mobilize Ethiopians around its developmental efforts. Mass political mobilization was then furthered by the introduction of additional sub-village structures such as *development groups, one-to-five networks,* and a system of development facilitators known as *models* (in the rural areas, *model farmers*). These institutional structures, although not entirely formalized, operate at the intersection between the party and the state, performing both political and developmental functions, including connection to state-sponsored finance. Understanding the role and functions of these micro-institutional structures, which were found both in rural (chapters three and four) and urban areas (chapter five), is key to recognizing how the developmental state operated in the everyday. They represent the local interface within which representations of the developmental state as a set of ideas and political priorities were mediated, and they produced real life effects for beneficiaries of state policies and development programmes.

The sectoral and institutional transformations that took place in the 2000s and 2010s require a perspective on the developmental state as a scalar project, an approach that allows inscribing the scope of state policies and development programmes, and their imbrication with globalized discourses, within micro-institutional configurations. This is a methodological angle that describes the movement of structure, while maintaining an open-ended view on agency. The challenge of studying the Ethiopian developmental state is precisely a problem of how to characterize the scalar dynamics that subsume broad social and political phenomena within specific social formations. In this book, I mobilize the category of the everyday, which I contend offers the opportunity to inscribe trajectories of state formation over time within the nuances of micro-empirical realities. The case studies of this book pin an empirical focus on institutions, and their articulation between the formal and the informal, on the practices of institutional mediation of state policies and development programmes in specific contexts.

An analytical perspective on the everyday elucidates the scalar scope of the developmental state from two complementary perspectives. First, the developmental state refers to the institutional configuration of the Ethiopian state as a set of abstract images and representations—reflecting the evolution of the EPRDF's political ideology over time—that define the broad scope of the application of

specific state policies during the period under review. Second, it identifies the set of largely incoherent, contradictory, and uneven material practices that configure public authority through conflict in society. Through the conceptual framework of the everyday, I aim to shed light on those practices of institutional mediation that remain marginalized and defy dominant narrations of the state. My goal is to challenge those representations of Ethiopian state formation as a stabilized, coherent, and ahistorical process, while avoiding the reification of specific realities. Drawing on Deleuzian philosophy, this approach builds on a view of time as an emerging and unfinished field (Biehl and Locke, 2017), which is meant to restore movement to the subjects of fieldwork and their becomings. It is an empirical perspective based on the indeterminacies that keep history open, and a future that is yet to be written. This approach allows us to capture what happens as human struggles unfold in daily life, pinning a focus on social change as the ultimate driver of state formation.

Taking the broader scalar dynamics outlined above as a background, each of the case studies of this book then discuss how beneficiaries and local state officials negotiated, manoeuvred, and contested the state policies and development programmes set in motion by the developmental state. Here I aim to illustrate how the apparatus of power displayed through the developmental state constrained social life, while at the same time it created the conditions of possibility for new openings and social formations. This is a focus on the developmental state from the perspective of its becomings, on how conflicts in society become a productive force of social change.

1.3.3 Beyond Culturalist Explanations of State Power

The third approach to state formation resorts to the notion of 'political culture' and to the study of relations and structures of power. One important reference is the book by Sarah Vaughan and Kjetil Tronvoll (2003), *The Culture of Power in Contemporary Ethiopian Political Life*. This approach relies on a consolidated historiographical tradition in Ethiopia that can be traced back to the classic work of Donald Levine (1965) and his widely cited metaphor of the 'wax and gold', pointing at the distinction between an aesthetic form of power manifesting through formal institutions, and the underlying relations and systems along which power is organized, which he contends is grounded in the Abyssinian political culture.

Focusing on the first decade of EPRDF rule, Vaughan and Tronvoll's concern is to articulate a definition of state power beyond its institutional manifestation and formal structures. Their task is to study the relations and conventions which underpin and give meaning to formal political institutions. This approach is grounded on a view of power as a system of knowledge which is rooted in society

rather than specific institutions. It is an analytical focus on how the distribution of power configures institutions, conventions, and structures: institutions do not operate in isolation from society, they are imbued in social relations. This approach, the authors contend, is meant to broaden the scope of debates about democratization, egalitarian justice, and social transformation away from the exclusive domain of the EPRDF/TPLF political leadership, to encompass the social and political relations and views of 'each and all of its citizens; the state as it is experienced and shaped from below, as well as how it is shaped and experienced from above' (2003: 31). Vaughan and Tronvoll view state power as a diffuse field that forms 'points of relay or co-ordination and multiplication of power relations' (2003: 34), on this departing from Markakis.

What I share with Vaughan and Tronvoll is an empirical approach to the study of state power in Ethiopia—the state as a set of practices of institutional mediation imbued with social relations rather than as a set of institutions immune to diverse social forces. A further conceptualization of thinking has been proposed in a recent book by Daniel Mulugeta (2020). This approach reflects a growing trend in African studies literature of characterizing state-society relations through a sociological reading of the state. The sociological reading problematizes state formation, shifting the empirical focus from a narrow analysis of the functioning of structures to the more diffuse field of power relations (Bierschenk and Olivier de Sardan, 2015; 2014; 1997; Krohn-Hansen and Nustad, 2005), and the constitution of fragmented public authority (Lund, 2006; 2016).

A main reference of the sociological reading is Joel Migdal's book *State in Society* (2001). Unsatisfied with conceptualizations of domination and change based on structuralist explanation, for instance Talcott Parsons's social systems theory (Parsons, 1951), the state-in-society approach rejects the view that the state constitutes a coherent, unitary, and goal-oriented actor. Migdal proposes an understanding of the state as a field of power constituted by two mutually reinforcing elements: the image and practices of the state (Migdal, 2001: 16). The image is a representation of the state as a unified and clearly bounded organization in a territory that can be referred to in singular terms. Ideology and morality are two key constitutive elements of the image of the state. Migdal contends that a mere focus on the image of the state misses important parts of how the state functions in society; it is a static representation which at best describes what the state should be in relation to the Weberian ideal type.

Migdal suggests that one should rather focus on actual state practices to study change and domination in society. A focus on practices relies on a conceptualization of the state as a network of semi-autonomous organizations informed by overlapping and often incoherent goals, and in constant competition with other organizations in society. Conflict, he contends, occurs along two axes. The first is between different state organizations—for instance the High Court, the President's office, and a local state officer—because they each have their own goals,

rationality, and specific interests, and respond to specific hierarchical dynamics and processes of subordination, and in so doing they compete for shares of state power. Conflict also takes place between state organizations and other interests organized in society, around the construction of social categories such as race, ethnicity, class, and gender. State formation is the result of the ongoing competition between different state organizations and interests in society in the process of pursuing objectives that are incompatible or not so neatly aligned with each other. By mapping these contradictory practices, Migdal's approach has opened a new field for investigating social conflict as arising from the mismatch between policy and practice.

In African studies, the sociological reading of the state has been employed by a growing body of research in the field of legal anthropology and political geography interested in looking at the discrepancy between official norms and actual practices in the everyday (Olivier de Sardan, 2015; Blundo and Olivier de Sardan, 2006; Blundo and Le Meur, 2009). This literature draws on a Foucauldian understanding of how practices, what Foucault calls tactics of governmentality, produce and reinforce the state as an all-encompassing power and mythicized abstraction, meaning a discourse about what the state can and should do. Based on these insights, de Herdt and Olivier de Sardan (2015) have introduced the notion of *real governance* to understand how socially accepted divisions between the public and the private, the legal and the illegal, and the formal and the informal emerge alongside the official rules of the state.

Where this body of studies differs from Migdal's is in the ways we can make room to write the unintended outcome of conflict. Although Migdal acknowledges that the contestation of rules reflects ongoing struggles over systems of meaning and territorial and social divisions, the state-in-society approach relies on a rather mechanistic division between organizations of the state and of society. Migdal, who is ultimately interested in providing an accurate definition of the state, maintains that '[t]he notion of the state rests on the notion of two stable boundaries, territorial borders and the separation between state and other social actors' (26). However, African studies literature has demonstrated that the actual distinction between organizations of the state and of society is much more blurred in reality. Diverging interests are for instance determined by practical norms, which refer to those latent rules state officials reproduce that do not comply with official norms (de Herdt and Olivier de Sardan, 2015: 2). Civil servants' aspirations, expectations, and histories traverse organizations of the state and society, making the attempt to demarcate their boundaries analytically difficult. Sharing this concern, in this book I am less interested in demarcating the boundary between state and society; rather my goal is to embrace their mutual constitution to move beyond a view of state formation as a singularized power field. This requires an empirical focus on the singular and the partial as a driver of social change, on the entanglement

of formal and informal social formations, and on those instances of everyday life that describe the social production of difference in the world.

To study state power beyond its formal and institutional manifestations—i.e. looking at how power is impinged in patterns of knowledge, belief, and convention—Vaughan and Tronvoll resort to the notion of political culture. Here they argue that the Abyssinian tradition has historically provided the dominant trends of Ethiopia's contemporary political culture. This tradition reflects a pattern of social interaction which 'sustains a strictly hierarchical stratification of society, where one is constrained, by a largely invisible but rigid system of collective sanctions, to obey the "orders from above" (*yebalal akal*)' (2003: 34). This 'culture of power' creates various mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion framed along a political discourse dictated by the central government and reflecting a top-down approach to policy implementation and the functioning of state institutions. It is through this lens that Vaughan and Tronvoll conceptualize the political experiment of ethnic federalism under EPRDF as a set of tensions between two contradictory elements.

> The first is the (laudable, and demonstrably true) notion that a community can be mobilized better in its own language, using its own culture, by its own people—effectively 'from within'. The second is the (more problematic) view that the criteria for the establishment of 'nations, nationalities, and peoples' are objectively and externally identifiable, and verifiable by a vanguard organization independently of the views of the groups' members—effectively 'from above'.
>
> (2003: 15)

The scope of authoritarian governance under EPRDF is a particularly important theme that interrogates patterns of continuity and change in state formation within the Imperial and Derg periods. Although ethnic federalism marks a qualitative shift away from an approach to nation building based on the construction of an Ethiopian national identity, the centralization of political power under EPRDF has continued through a variety of means, including the cooptation of sub-national elites and the expansion of the party structure to singularize significant aspects of social, economic, and political life. A vast body of critical scholarship convincingly demonstrates that the EPRDF period has been characterized by a centralized and authoritarian system of state governance operating side by side the formal aspects of federalism and the self-determination of ethno-national groups (Aalen, 2011; Hagmann and Abbink, 2013; Aalen, Tronvoll, 2009a; Lefort, 2012; Keller, 2002). More controversial is the extent to which authoritarian rule can be ascribed to a culture of centralist decision-making that impinges on an Abyssinian 'tradition' of state power. This debate is particularly relevant as it intersects broader historiographical discussions about change and continuity in the state building experiment across the Imperial regime, the Derg, and EPRDF (Dessalegn Rahmato,

2009; Gebru Tareke, 1996; Clapham, 1988; 2017; Elleni Centime Zeleke, 2019; Markakis, Schlee, and Young, 2021). Supporters of the culturalist thesis such as anthropologist Jon Abbink (2002; 2006; 2011a) tend to have a view of Ethiopian history of state formation that emphasizes continuity over rupture.[17]

While the contemporary Ethiopian nation-state has indeed been shaped along the imperialist ambitions of Abyssinian state builders, reducing this deeply contradictory historical experience to the notion of a single Abyssinian culture of power, and the historic continuity of political authoritarianism, presents a number of problems. First, a notion of political culture that ostensibly keeps reproducing the very same mechanics of power raises the question about its historicity. When applied to state formation, the concept of political culture tends to reproduce a teleological view of history that obscures, rather than unpacks, the ways in which state power articulates social relations. Is a given culture of power immune to change? How do we provide an operational definition to the Abyssinian culture of power? How do we account for other 'cultures of power' that, in heterogenous contexts such as Ethiopia, characterized by significant social, economic, ethnic, and religious diversity, shape state formation? While attempting to provide a more nuanced definition of the Ethiopian state, the political culture thesis incurs the problem of how to draw the changing spatial and temporal coordinates of such culture. At best, it is useful for illustrating a view of state formation as a set of images and representations from the perspective of the political elite. However, political culture tells us little of how these images and representations articulate practices of institutional mediation of state formation in specific contexts.

The second problem is about how to conceptualize state power in relation to social and political change. Cultural approaches to state power significantly reduce the analytical scope to capture empirically how social and political change unfolds. Subsuming social relations within a static picture of how power is organized at a certain moment in time presents the practical problem of how to capture their movement. This raises the problem of how to elaborate a critique of state formation from the perspective of social change, mapping those relations of causality that capture the constitution and dissolution of state power. To culturalize power is to limit our possibility of seeing how alternative sources of legitimacy emerge in the everyday. For the perspective of this book this is a central concern: resorting to culture overlooks the working of power in the everyday.

The third problem has to do with the logical connection between political culture and authoritarianism. Ascribing authoritarian governance to an Abyssinian culture of power that is singularly responsible for the lack of democratization reflects a narration of state formation from the perspective of what is lacking in relation to an ostensibly superior western model. We again incur the problem

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[17] See also the response by Tobias Hagmann to Jon Abbink over the problem of how to read the 2005 elections through the lens of political culture (Hagmann, 2006).

of methodological nationalism, i.e., how to describe social and political change without resorting to models formulated elsewhere. A fourth problem is the tendency of the political culture thesis to frame social identities as stable and ahistorical categories. Political culture lends itself to framing identity formation through questions about belonging, as opposed to becoming, which make for a static picture of how fluid identification dynamics are stabilized through power relations. This perspective fails to capture the movement of identity formation which is inherent in processes of social and political change. This is a particularly important problem for reading Ethiopia under EPRDF considering that ethnic federalism institutionalized ethnicity as the main mechanism of state organization.

Then, what kind of epistemological commitment do we need to discuss the predominance of authoritarian politics under EPRDF without resorting to the notion of political culture? In this book I contend that such an endeavour requires an empirical approach that privileges the mutual constitution of state-society relations. An important point of departure here is the work of Timothy Mitchell (1991). Based on a Foucauldian reading of the state as unfolding through governmental practices, Mitchell's (1991: 78) starting point is that it is unproductive to focus on the boundary between a conceptual realm (the state) and an empirical realm (the society). Mitchell understands the state as a structural effect and not as an actual structure. The state, he contends, is 'the powerful metaphysical effect of practices that make such structures appear to exist. In fact, the nation state is arguably the paramount structural effect of the modern social world' (1991: 94). I share with Mitchell the insight that the boundaries between state and society are elusive and indeterminate but, at the same time, that seeking a sharper definition does not necessarily help us to conceptualize social change and state power in a more succinct way. State-society boundaries reflect complex power relations at play. For this reason, '[t]he elusiveness of the state-society boundary needs to be taken seriously … we need to examine the detailed political processes through which the uncertain yet powerful distinction between state and society is produced' (1991: 78).

A further articulation of this thinking came from the work of Tobias Hagmann and Didier Péclard (2010), who have introduced the notion of *negotiating statehood.* This concept is meant to study the 'dynamic and partly undetermined processes of state formation and failure by a multitude of social actors who compete over the institutionalization of power relations' (539). This framework, which the authors contend serves to investigate past and ongoing dynamics of state domination, provides a fairly sophisticated explanation of how a variety of actors across local, national, and transnational scales remake the state through 'processes of negotiation, contestation, and bricolage' (see also Cleaver, 2012). Grounded on an institutional conceptualization of the state, this approach is useful for moving beyond discussions about political culture from two perspectives.

First, the negotiating statehood approach proposes a methodological approach that privileges processes over conclusive outcomes. It is premised by an understanding of state institutions as never definitively formed, on this point borrowing from Christian Lund's 'Twilight Institutions' (Lund, 2006). Refocusing the empirical object of the state in the process of interaction between different groups competing for control, influence, and the rules of daily behaviour, Hagmann and Péclard make space for a theory of the state that privileges empirical description over meta-explanation. In the process of interaction, groups change their goals, rules, and tactics, making new alliances and dissolving themselves into new entities which reflect new state-society configurations. Like in the state-in-society approach, negotiating statehood allows for a characterization of how states and societies structure and reproduce rules and social norms beyond culturalist explanations, as well as explanations of how patterns of domination and subordination change and are challenged. In so doing, Hagmann and Péclard make space for writing the elusive, the ambivalent, and the unstable in daily life—what they refer to as 'the partial "undeterminedness" of state domination' (545). The underlying conceptualization of power, which I profoundly share and apply to my analysis of the everyday state in Ethiopia, is that while being shaped by techniques of government, people themselves shape, reproduce, and challenge state power and practices of government. In other words, state power is co-constituted and the institutionalization of public authority is never a linear and coherent process.

Second, the negotiating statehood approach privileges a focus on micro-conflicts over general patterns of stability. This highlights the contested nature of the state in the everyday. The negotiation of state power takes place along political struggles, a concern similar to Migdal's focus on unintended outcomes of multiple conflicts in society, as a more productive explanation of domination and change. Conflict and political struggles require an approach to fieldwork privileging empiricism and the description of how people negotiate state practices beyond an understanding of societal actors as 'those acted upon', the subjects of state control, or the passive recipients of rules created elsewhere. This empirical, rather than judicial, understanding of the state is also meant to study how state power is reproduced, as well as how other forms of non-state power and sub-national entities engage with actual state structures (Swyngedouw, 2005; Raeymaekers et. al., 2008). For Hagman and Péclard, conflicts for political power open-up and take place in *arenas of negotiation*, which represent the broader political space in which public authority is constituted. The everyday state emerges out of these arenas through complex power negotiations at the interface between the formal and informal, the private and the public, the legal and the illegal.

Building on these insights, in this book I am concerned with the problem of how to characterize state power from the perspective of social change. I contend that the analytical lens of the everyday allows capturing loose dynamics of state power's institutionalization, while maintaining an open-ended perspective

on the movement of agency. Empirically, I am particularly interested to depict how, alongside historically contingent institutional configuration, beneficiaries of state policies and development programmes live through and alongside the constraining forces of state power. The Ethiopian case is an extraordinarily productive ground on which to study these dynamics, considering the significant power field mobilized by the EPRDF in the period under review to pursue its developmental ambition and singularize life through ethnic identification. The empirical chapters of this book pay particular attention to the material and representational problems that confronting state power raise for my fieldwork subjects. This is a perspective that studies state power from the margins and is concerned with articulating the tensions and contradictions intrinsic to the Ethiopian project of state formation under EPRDF. With this I hope to make room for a theory of the state taking a less-than-certain and less-than-stable interpretations of social change. From different perspectives, the chapters of this book reconstruct how categorizations of state-society relations that articulate global-national-local scales, and that describe the loose boundaries between the formal and the informal, the legal and illegal, the private and public, become meaningful and are made visible by my fieldwork subjects. As noted by Migdal (2001: 25), '[c]ountries' stories do not end with the original sin or the critical juncture where there is the imposition of a powerful normative force; they only begin, for those forces call into being resistance and struggle, cooperation and coalitions, that transform the original impulse'.

1.3.4 The State-Society Interface: Performativity and the Problem of Subject Formation

The main finding of this book is that the political project of state formation under EPRDF has been a fiercely contested one. The five case studies discuss how, in different ways and resorting to a wide range of political repertoires, beneficiaries of state policies and development programmes creatively negotiated, manoeuvred, and contested from below the political project set in motion by the EPRDF political elite from above. This puts under critical scrutiny the scope of the developmental state experiment to deliver significant expectations about socio-economic development, thus raising important interrogative questions about how to characterize this wide range of state-society interactions. From an analytical perspective, contestations illustrate the tension between the state as a set of images and representations, and the actual material practices of institutional mediation of state-society relations over time. They thus raise questions about how to conceptualize state power from the perspective of the everyday. In previous sections I have elaborated on why I refrain from suggesting a characterization of state power as a linear process that unfolds temporally and spatially from the centre to the periphery, as well as that a narrowing political space to questions around democratic

rights and governance should be ascribed to an Abyssinian culture of authoritarian rule. In the final part of this introduction, I contend that a more productive way to study state-society relations requires shifting discussions about state power from the level of political culture to the formation of the political subject. Revisiting discussions about state power and the problem of subject formation illustrates a perspective on state formation as a largely uncoherent and unfinished process, one that requires constant reiteration of institutional practices. A focus on the political subject provides a more nuanced understanding of state power as not only *acting* on the subject but, at the same time, *enacting* the subject into being.

The formation of the political subject produces questions about the mutual constitution of structure and agency in state formation. Subject formation is a perspective that allows the movement of structure to be captured, while maintaining an open perspective on agency. Drawing on post-structural theories, I take a perspective on state power as both forming the subject and creating the conditions of possibility for a radically conditioned agency. I find this is a productive avenue through which to provide a less than deterministic reading of the wide range of negotiations and contestations within which the political project of state formation under EPRDF is enmeshed. Digging into the problem of subject formation elucidates how conflicts in society reflect a wide range of processes of identification, claims to legitimacy, and dynamics of inclusion and exclusion as the most defining features of state-society relations. This has important implications for how to read ethnic identification under EPRDF, as well as for how to revisit discussions about authoritarian governance under the developmental state without resorting to culturalist interpretations of state power.

The problem of subject formation when invested by power is one of the most widely debated topics in social and political theory, alongside another of the cornerstone discussions regarding the question of violence in political philosophy.[18] I situate my approach within post-structuralist and feminist theories engaging with the problem of subjection through the lens of performativity, meaning how power invests the subject through the reiteration of practices. I draw on Judith Butler's theory of discursive-based performativity (1993; 1997; 2015), which reconceptualizes the problem of subject formation within the realm of reiteration. Performativity elucidates a perspective on state-society relations in which state power acts and enacts the political subject into being through discursive and material practices. I read the complex web of negotiations, contestations, and identifications that I

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[18] This classical question has been debated for a long time in political philosophy, following Spinoza, Sieyès, and Schmitt. More recently it was articulated in the work of Antonio Negri, Andreas Kalyvas, and Ernesto Laclau, among others. In particular, situating subject formation in relation to state power is a question about the nature of sovereignty, and the relationship between its two, mutually reinforcing dimensions: *constituent* power—defined as the force of legitimacy—and *constituted* power—the institutional configuration of sovereign power in terms of authority. Also relevant here is the work of James C. Scott and his studies on domination and resistance (1985; 1990).

have depicted through fieldwork as significant, and yet ambivalent, expressions of how beneficiaries of state policies and development programmes have navigated constraining material and representational forces of state power under EPRDF.

Judith Butler's influential theory of performativity (1990; 1993; 1997; 2015) stands on the philosophical view that what we know about the world, in both material and immaterial forms, is always mediated by practices generating 'knowable effects'. The implication is that entities do not exist in isolation, but that we produce our reality through experiential practices. Examples of knowable effects discussed by Butler include sex, gender, work, and organizations. Knowable effects are performative in that they are constituted through regulatory frames that are reproduced through power relations, routines, and norms. As far as our discussion is concerned, one could say that the developmental state is the knowable effect of practices, routines, and norms as they have been performed in Ethiopia in the 2000s and 2010s, rather as an entity per se. Butler's work emphasizes the role of reiteration to understand how these knowable effects articulate socially. Performativity 'must be understood not as a singular or deliberate "act", but, rather, as the reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects that it names' (Butler, 1993: 2). With performativity, Butler interrogates the relation between power and the subject within the realm of reiteration.

More specifically, Butler reflects on the notion of 'subjection' (1997; 2015) to explore the social nature of performativity, which describes the ways in which subjects are constituted through processes of recognition. Subjection, she contends, 'signifies the process of becoming subordinated by power as well as the process of becoming a subject' (1997: 2). Power, as subordination, is a 'constitutive outside' (Butler, 1997: 129) in that it sets the conditions of possibility that precede the subject, forming the subject from the outside through recognition. At the same time, power enacts the subject into being because there is no subject that is prior to the effect of power as a form of subordination. In this sense power is what makes the subject possible, and what is reiterated by the subject in its own acting: 'power is both external to the subject and the very venue of the subject' (1997: 15). Butler distinguishes two mutually constituting forms of power in subject formation: power as subordination sets the conditions of the subject's existence; power as agency defines the conditions of possibility for the constitution of identity. For Butler, the notion of power that subjection mobilizes confronts us with a paradox: 'If there is no formation of the subject without a passionate attachment to those by whom she or he is subordinated, then subordination proves central to the becoming of the subject' (1997: 7). What I take from Butler is the centrality of reiteration to characterize power relations. Power requires constant reiteration to produce the effects that it names. Revisiting the debate about authoritarianism away from political culture requires an empirical focus on those practices of state power that name the political subject in the everyday.

The first part of Butler's argument—how power acts on the subject—points at a view in which the reiteration of power practices, rather than structures per se, is key to understanding subjection. The five case studies of this book discuss how state policies and development initiatives under EPRDF mobilized a wide range of institutional practices in which reiteration is key to understanding the working of power in the everyday. One example common to all chapters is about the political mobilization of small groups as the basis of development implementation. This reflects a notion of collective, rather than individual, participation to development as being the key logic informing the EPRDF understanding of the developmental state's scope. Policies of resettlement, land registration, agriculture commercialization, small business development and industrialization all had the mobilization of groups of people at their centre. This comes out clearly in chapter five, when discussing the creation of small enterprises in peri-urban Addis Ababa. The notions of *group collateral* and *compulsory saving* to establish and pay back loans contracted by a small enterprise elucidate this well. The key logic of group mobilization for business development is that beneficiaries share both developmental and political responsibilities.[19]

The emphasis on the mobilization of groups is also evident in the two chapters discussing land policy and agriculture commercialization. Here the creation of *development groups, one to five networks* and other institutional clusters to streamline agricultural initiatives was a key practice of power describing the capillary reach of the developmental state experiment. The mobilization of people to be targeted for resettlement and industrial employment follows a similar logic. The compilation of beneficiary lists was largely planned and implemented by local state offices, at the level of *kebele* and *woreda*. The mutually reinforcing developmental and political scope of development initiatives emerges clearly when looking at the system of *models* (model farmers, model workers, etc.) and other figures such as the *development agents* deployed in both urban and rural areas to streamline development implementation. The political mobilization of people around development is a distinguishing characteristic of the developmental state in Ethiopia, which relied on the significant reiteration of power practices at the level of the everyday state.

Other examples of institutional practices mobilized through development implementation include the particular emphasis the EPRDF has put into the organization of political, party, and development meetings to engage the public around the project for the country's socio-economic transformation. These include, as discussed in chapter two, cyclical party evaluation sessions known as *gingema*. In chapters three and four, I consider how specific power routines, such as land measurement and the distribution of agricultural inputs, assume

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[19] The blurring of political and developmental priorities in development implementation is a theme that this book shares with recent scholarship. See for instance Lefort (2012), Mehdi Labzaé and Planel (2021), and Daniel Mulugeta (2019).

both developmental and political roles. In chapter five, I discuss how the repeated organization of technical and vocational trainings to instil a culture of saving, group work, and entrepreneurship is a distinctive characteristic of the performance of power mobilized by the EPRDF to pursue small business development.

The concept of *graduation* from development initiatives, something that beneficiaries were expected to achieve within specific timeframes (usually three to five years), elucidates further the temporal scope of reiterative practices of power. Performativity explains why development policies assumed a particularly important role in producing the state-making effects the political leadership intended to pursue. It points to a view of the developmental state as a social engineering project of state-building which has required violent enforcement, the repetition of stylized acts, routines, and norms. Authoritarian governance under EPRDF needs to be understood in terms of the reiteration of historically contingent practices of power in specific localities. From this perspective, state policies and development programmes reflected the largely unfinished attempt of the EPRDF political elite at institutionalizing state power through the political vision on state managed capitalism that emerged in the 2000s. Performativity provides an explanation as to why the mobilization of people around development under EPRDF cannot be read in isolation from the extension of mechanisms to further political control and monitoring, without resorting to culturalist explanation of state power.

In a recent book analysing marginality in urban Ethiopia, anthropologist Marco Di Nunzio (2019) engages with the problem of how to characterize power relations in EPRDF Ethiopia. He locates the experience of marginality in Addis Ababa's inner city under the developmental state in the tension between action and living. He contends that the experience of the urban poor can be best described as the search for open-endedness in a context of enduring subjugation and exclusion. The *act of living* marks the attempt of marginalized urban subjects to become something else, 'living meaningfully through marginality and exclusion', and provides a powerful explanation of why authoritarian politics in Ethiopia 'need[s] to be constantly reiterated, reworked, recrafted, improved, expanded, and … violently enforced' (5). Di Nunzio's analytical focus on the 'long and undocumented history of endurance' of urban poor hinges on the problem about how to characterize power relations, and he firmly positions *the act of living* as the attempt to go beyond the 'temptation to understand agency as made of an act of resistance' (27).

This brings me to the second part of Butler's argument about subject formation. This is about how to conceptualize not only how state power forms the subject, but also how, at the same time, it enacts the subject into being. Di Nunzio points to a broader problem in Ethiopian studies literature, which is about how to unpack power relations in EPRDF Ethiopia beyond a view of state power as an all-encompassing force. This is about how to characterize the wide range of state-society interactions with the significant power mobilized under the developmental state aimed at singularizing social, political, and economic life. The work

of Butler is again helpful to frame this problem. On the one hand she contends that subjection defines the subject's condition of possibility; power forms the subject. But if subordination defines the conditions for formation, how is it then possible that it is also central to definition of agency? Or, as put by Butler, '[i]f subordination is the condition of possibility for agency, how might agency be thought in opposition to the forces of subordination?' (1997: 10). Here Butler grapples with the familiar problem of how to escape, from an analytical perspective, the ubiquity of power relations. This is a particularly important question for discussions about authoritarianism in Ethiopia: if the EPRDF period has marked a new high in the way state power penetrated society, then how do we re-inscribe social change within state power without resorting to culturalist explanations, or, as put by Di Nunzio, to a generalized notion of resistance? For Butler, the problem of how to characterize agency is about how to address the circularity of power relations in which the subject reiterates the norms and practices of its subjection. Butler engages with this problem by arguing that, in relation to the subject, power serves two functions:

> Power not only *acts* on a subject but, in a transitive sense, *enacts* the subject into being. As a condition, power precedes the subject. Power loses its appearance of priority, however, when it is wielded by the subject, a situation that gives rise to the reverse perspective that power is the effect of the subject, and that power is what subjects effect
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> (Butler, 1997: 13).

For Butler, how power acts and enacts the subject at the same time constitutes the 'bind of agency' (1997: 13). This is also a paradox because the very conditions of subjection set, at the same time, the conditions of possibility for agency. Key to understanding why this is the case is the concept of recognition, and the lack thereof, that subjection mobilizes. 'If conditions of power are to persist, they must be reiterated; the subject is precisely the site of such reiteration, a repetition that is never merely mechanical' (1997: 16). The bind of agency points to a view of identity formation as both retaining and resisting subordination, one that requires a detailed empirical focus on the reiteration and discontinuity of power practices.

Here, the key insight that I take from Butler is that reiteration provides a framework within which to understand subordination as a dynamic condition, which is transient, unstable, and less than certain. Butler calls for the temporalization of the conditions of subordination, which cannot be found in static structures. At the heart of agency, she contends, there is a reiterated ambivalence between the 'already-there and the yet-to-come' (1997: 18). I take that the temporalization of the conditions of subjection is a perspective that emphasizes state-society relations as an emerging field. This points to a view of identity formation in which questions about *becoming* assume a central role. Understanding the nuances of

power relations in the everyday require a temporal focus on the becoming subject, on the human potential that emerges in the process of being acted and enacted by power. Capturing empirically the bind of agency, i.e. how to account for the movement of agency within structure, requires a focus on recognition. The second form of power discussed by Butler, how power enacts the subject, is key for conceptualizing identity formation.

Drawing on these insights in this book, I discuss how state power enacts the political subject by attending empirically those mundane practices that describe how people live alongside and despite the constraining power of the state, when their claims to legitimacy are dismissed or remain unacknowledged. The five empirical chapters of this book discuss a wide range of situations in which, against the normative frame of the developmental state, policies and development programmes failed beneficiaries. In these instances of everyday life, which are central to identity formation, state power enacts the subject into being, liberating its political potential and creativity. The experience of failure among my fieldwork subjects is the entry point I use to characterize agency within the movement of structure. Generally, government programmes failed beneficiaries due to organizational and planning issues resulting from top-down implementation, and the difficulties connected with translating ambitious policy objectives into actual practices. The development programmes analysed—resettlement, land registration, agriculture commercialization, entrepreneurship development, and industrialization—largely ignored specific contextual conditions and disregarded the contingent histories within which interventions were enmeshed. Confronted with failure and unfulfilled expectations, beneficiaries and local state officials employed a wide variety of strategies and political repertoires to make the most of limited opportunities and, more often, to minimize risk and consequences threatening their social, economic, and political reproduction. Although open dissent remained rare throughout the period under review, only to manifest abruptly with the set of events that led to the regime change in 2018, strategies that I depict through fieldwork include diversion, manoeuvring, false compliance, and occasionally more overt forms of open contestation. These practices of power describe how the discontinuity of recognition enacts the subject as a political subject in the everyday.

The case studies of this book show how implementation of development initiatives generated profound societal transformations, including the restructuring of land and labour relations, growing inequalities and social differentiation in both urban and rural areas, and dynamics of incipient class formation. These transformations are the background against which significant conflicts, contestations, and reconfiguration of everyday politics took place. Tensions over the EPRDF political project have not only simmered in society for a very long time, but they are also central to understanding how state power invested the political

subject through the reiteration of practices, setting the parameters within which public authority was produced and contested in the period under review.

A focus on the political subject provides an entry point for discussing identity formation while avoiding culturalist interpretations of state power. Performativity allows for a perspective on identity formation moving on from questions about belonging to questions about becoming. It locates identification within the indeterminate constitution of the subject in the process of becoming acted and enacted by state power. The case studies of this book discuss a wide set of identifications and claims to recognition in the period under review. Navigating ambitious and yet poorly designed development programmes, beneficiaries reconstituted themselves, and their means of social and economic reproduction, in a variety of ways. First, they attached new meanings to land, place, and home. Confronted with land policy initiatives threatening their socio-economic reproduction, Arsi and Wolaita farmers (chapters three and four) reconstituted land as the backbone of their identity. Social differentiation and incipient class formation between a minority of farmers exploiting the opportunities of land registration and agriculture commercialization contributed to further politicize the ways farmers identified with land. This highlights the inherent contradiction of a land policy attempting to preserve the smallholder model to sustain national food self-sufficiency and to limit mass rural-out migration, and, at the same time, to induce dynamics of rural capital accumulation via selected commercialization and enclosure schemes. Beneficiaries reconstituted their place of origin as the stronghold of their identity when, as discussed in chapters two, five, and six, they had to deal with exploitative and poorly designed resettlement, entrepreneurship, and industrialization initiatives. Particularly important here is the material dimension of these initiatives in reproducing marginality and exclusion. These case studies show that while beneficiaries initially embraced the socio-economic upliftment prospected by these initiatives, they then faced the problem of how to find different avenues to cope with economic uncertainty, the lack of opportunities to make a living, and wages below the cost of reproduction.

Second, the experience of failure reinforced existing dynamics of ethnic identification. Beneficiaries reconstituted themselves as ethnic subjects when the developmental state failed to name the ambitious socio-economic expectations it set. Ethnic identification is one important avenue to which beneficiaries resorted in order to cope with, and make sense of, growing uncertainty and significant economic strains. Poorly designed development initiatives reinforced the ethno-national categories set under ethnic federalism. This finding emerges with most clarity in chapters three and four, where the outcome of policies of land registration and commercialization of agriculture resulted in a sedimentation of an Oromo and Wolaita ethno-national identification channelled through a generalized anti-government sentiment. Chapters two and five highlight how development initiatives often disregarded existing ethnic tensions in the specific

contexts of implementation, the borderland between Amhara, Benishangul-Gumuz regions, and Sudan in the case of resettlement, and the borderland between the metropolitan region of Addis Ababa and the Oromia region in the context of entrepreneurship initiatives. The EPRDF managed to contain the centrifugal forces of ethnonationalism as long as it maintained a strong grip on power through the display of a variety of means of social and political control. The events that led to the political transition to Abiy Ahmed in 2018, and later to the tragic escalation of conflict in different parts of the country, including the open confrontation between the Federal government and the TPLF in Tigray that has been ongoing since November 2020, appear to have let the genie of ethnonationalism out of the bottle. Whether this is an inevitable outcome of ethnic federalism is a difficult question to address, and I will try to unpack it in the conclusion. What my fieldwork findings suggest is that tensions and conflicts have simmered in the Ethiopian society for most part of the EPRDF period, and that rather than seeking an explanation to the current crisis on the model of ethnic federalism per se, one should look at the dramatic socio-economic transformation, including the impact of selective liberalization of the economy, that took place under the developmental state.

A perspective on state power as both acting and enacting the political subject restores an ethical perspective to fieldwork which casts the struggle for open-endedness as a central concern to the study of social change. The stories of beneficiaries and local officials narrated in this book point to the problematics of how to cope with the constraining discursive and material forces of state power. A focus on subject formation enables us to locate these conflicts and struggles within the boundaries between state and society through an empirical focus on their mutual becomings (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987). It is through the experience of failure that people re-enact state power in unexpected ways: they seek new forms of recognition, and imagine and perform alternative futures, even when they fail, as often happens, in their intent.

Providing a characterization of the everyday state through performativity reflects a methodological perspective that privileges a focus on the social production of difference in the world. It emphasizes the contradictory practices of power that escape conventional representations of state formation as a singularized time and suggest open-endedness in the ways the political subject takes shape. A focus on the social production of difference entails departing from a theory reliant on the production of similarity—subsuming social phenomena into aggregates, repetitions, and models—to produce an explanation of the social and the political. An empirical focus on the state-society interface makes visible those practices of the everyday that defy quantification as a dominant way of reading social life and narrating the human. It is a focus on the singular and the partial, on those mundane practices that we tend to discard because they simply do not fit meta-narrations of state formation. This restores a role for qualitative

fieldwork and its indispensability to study state formation as epiphenomenal to social change.

1.4   Structure of the Book

This book reviews three decades of state policies and development programmes in Ethiopia between 1991 and 2018. Empirically, the book draws on five case-studies in the country's four most populous regions—Amhara, Oromia, SNNPR, and Tigray—and the capital city Addis Ababa, through in-depth qualitative field-work that I conducted over the course of twelve years between 2006 and 2018 (see Figure 1.1 for the study area locations pertaining to each chapter). The five case studies can be read as standalone essays in that they present specific arguments and discuss contingent histories that articulate state-society relations from the perspec-tive of the everyday. Each chapter focuses on specific policies—resettlement and humanitarian interventions, decentralization and land registration, agriculture commercialization, job creation, and industrialization—that reflect practices of institutional mediation by a wide set of actors describing the mutual constitution of state and society.

Approached as a collection, the five empirical chapters illustrate the broader argument of the book about the conceptualization of state formation as epiphenomenal to social change, providing a broader perspective on how ethnic federalism and the developmental state paradigm emerged and institutionalized
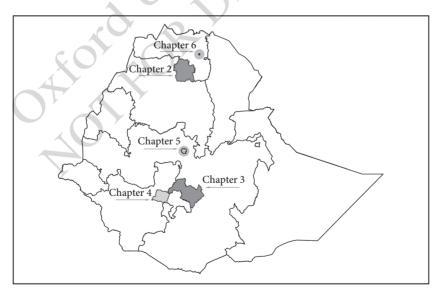

Fig. 1.1   Location of study areas by chapter. Map prepared by the author.

over time. The chapters follow a periodization of the years 1991–2018 within three, largely overlapping, phases. The first (1991–2001) spans from the end of the Derg regime to the 2001 political crisis within the EPRDF/TPLF inner circle, the main outcome of which was the decision to open-up to capitalist development (discussed in chapter two). The second phase (2002–2012) is characterized by the elaboration of the developmental state and had an important moment of acceleration after the contested 2005 elections (discussed in chapters three and four). This phase ends with the premature death of late Prime Minister Meles Zenawi in 2012. The third period (2012–2018) is set during the leadership of Hailemariam Dessalegn and is characterized by a strategy of transformation relying on a more decisive shift to policies of selective liberalization of the economy (discussed in chapters five and six).

In chapter two I discuss the case of a resettlement programme in Waag Himra (Amhara region) that the Ethiopian government implemented in the course of the 2000s. Intended to relocate rural households to less densely populated areas for humanitarian purposes, the programme entailed an increased deployment of the state apparatus in rural areas under a new political impulse on productivism. While the programme generated considerable initial expectations—despite the controversial legacy of resettlement during the Derg—most beneficiaries returned home within months after facing conflict, drought, and a lack of basic infrastructure. The chapter describes the ways in which returnees tried to make the most of limited opportunities, diversify risk, and reconstitute themselves as social, economic, and political subjects. Resettlers tried to navigate the limited opportunities offered by the programme, facing significant strains both in the relocation sites and then when they returned home. The chapter conceptualizes resettlement as a form of development-induced displacement, which is one of the defining features of state-society interactions under EPRDF. By categorizing the rural population in groups based on relative wealth, and hence creating a group of 'chronically food insecure' people to relocate, resettlement generated significant dynamics of rural social differentiation, which contributed to further marginality, inequalities, and socio-economic exclusion.

In chapter three I discuss the implementation of a national programme of rural land registration in Siraro, Oromia region, since the mid 2000s. Motivated by concerns over increasing the productivity of smallholder agriculture, the capitalization of land, and uncapping land rental markets, the programme was implemented as part of an ambitious set of policy reforms providing for the decentralization of service delivery and resource management from central to local government. Empirically the chapter discusses the set of practices and tactics of manoeuvring land registration, which local government officials and farmers performed to tackle insecurity, conflict, uncertainty, and the ensuing threat of dispossession that came with the programme. The chapter discusses the ways in which Oromo farmers, against a long and controversial history of exploitative land

relations, reconstituted material and symbolic values towards the land after land registration threatened their socio-economic reproduction. Land registration generated dynamics of social differentiation, with a minority of entrepreneurial and politically connected farmers making the most from the land rights' formalization, while others experienced social and economic marginalization. An important outcome was the politicization of an Oromo identity in opposition to what was perceived as a top-down, centralizing state policy.

Chapter four addresses the case of a failed commercialization scheme in Wolaita, SNNPR. Under the impulse of global capital to produce fuel from renewable sources, and in the context of a changing government strategy oriented to allow injections of foreign investments in agriculture for the first time since the 1970s, commercialization schemes for the production of biofuel crops were attempted in Wolaita for about a decade from the mid-2000s. Empirically the chapter addresses the practices of subversion, manoeuvring, and differentiation that farmers performed in the context of poorly planned and exploitative commercialization schemes. The chapter discusses the ways Wolaita contract farmers attempted to re-establish and secure access to means of social reproduction, after commercialization proved unsuccessful. Farmers' claims to recognition are expressed here in relation to the symbolic and material values of the land, in a context of profound social and economic uncertainty. Following unsuccessful commercialization, farmers tried alternative avenues to re-constitute themselves as political subjects, sometimes succeeding and most of the time failing to improve their condition.

Chapter five addresses the promotion of entrepreneurship schemes in Kolfe Keranyo, one peri-urban sub-city of Addis Ababa. Against a context in which, towards the end of the 2000s, addressing unemployment in rapidly expanding urban centres became an urgent political and economic priority, the Ethiopian government implemented a comprehensive policy of job creation relying on the promotion of micro and small enterprises. Empirically the chapter discusses the practices through which young entrepreneurs manoeuvred the few opportunities mobilized by these schemes, such as access to credit, to perform other side and informal businesses that allowed them to make up for their social and economic reproduction which state-mandated enterprises were not able to deliver. The political subject is mobilized here through a subtle and quite sophisticated performance of power. Entrepreneurs diverted time and resources from state-mandated enterprises because the formal businesses they were asked to enrol were not productive (in this way contributing to their failure), but without openly dismissing the demand by the state to participate in such development. In the process of enacting themselves as political subjects, aspiring entrepreneurs opened up new opportunities for themselves, without dismissing the policy of job creation, which, because of their informal work, could still be regarded by the Ethiopian government as a success story.

Finally, in chapter six I address the labour dynamics emerging within a global textile value chain in Tigray's capital city Mekelle that has been rapidly growing since the mid-2010s. In the context of an ambitious industrialization policy urged to sustain export-led economic growth, reduce dependency on agriculture and services, and to address pressing political problems such as rising urban unemployment, the Ethiopian government managed to attract global production networks around newly established industrial poles, primarily geared towards manufacturing. Due to a number of historical, political, and geographical factors, by the mid-2010s Tigray was at the forefront of this development. The rapid consolidation of the textile industry in the area around Mekelle generated a new labour question: the coexistence of labour shortage around the textile industrial hub and a large population seeking employment. Empirically the chapter discusses the stories of young workers and trainees navigating textile work against the contrast between significant expectations about industrialization and wages well below reproduction. Workers enacted a number of practices, including absenteeism, turnover, and tardiness when the incomplete transition to industrial labour forced them to seek reproduction through a combination of scarce and poorly remunerated wage employment, self-employment, and other survival activities at the intersection between the formal and informal economy. While some of them managed to make the most of the opportunities generated by industrialization, many others remained dependent on their household of origin for their social and economic reproduction.