

Rural Governance in Urban Space: A History of the City Management of Addis Ababa (1991-2005)

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Abstract

Urban management in its modern form has been introduced very recently in Ethiopian history. The earliest urban centers in the country were managed as garrisons and market centers. This paper is an attempt to analyze the historical experiences of the Ethiopian government in managing Addis Ababa during its early decade to the national election of 2005. For this purpose, the primary data were obtained through in-depth interviews as the major historical sources. Different documents were also consulted for the analysis. The sources indicate that the managements of the city during those decades were not successful and were characterized by failure to recognize that, “cities are engines of development”, “rural biased” government policies, lack of expertise and experiences in urbanism, and labelling some Ethiopian towns as “colonial”.

Keywords: Addis Ababa, Neftegna, “Rural biased”, Urbanism

1. Introduction

Urban management in its modern sense seems a recent phenomenon in Ethiopian history. The earliest urban centers in the country were more of garrisons and market centers. Their management was also conducted in accordance with those functions. Garrisons were most likely managed by military commanders like military campus and market centers were managed by chief tax collectors commonly known to the

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public as *Negadras*. Addis Ababa was experiencing both types of these historical managements during its early decades since its foundation in 1886 (Garretson 2000: 28-57).

However, after its functions gradually became diversified and multi-faceted, the management also began to be carried out by relatively educated young Ethiopians, mainly engineers. In fact, during the last decade of the imperial regime and almost throughout the whole period of the *Derg*, Addis Ababa was managed by educated mayors; most of them were engineers because of the city's aggressive demand for the development of physical infrastructure. Both the imperial and the *Derg* regimes gave due emphasis for the urban centers in many of their policies. Globally, the end of the 1980s and beginning of the 1990s experienced the end of the Cold War as well as the introduction of Structural Adjustment Programs in Africa that coincided or were coincidental with the coming to the political power of the Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (hereafter the EPRDF) in Ethiopia. Then, it also began to manage the capital, Addis Ababa. That was followed by a fundamental shift from the previous urban emphasis to the rural emphasis in most of the EPRDF policies (Diamantini and Patassini 2023: 16-25).

Scholars from the field of urban studies and other related disciplines defined the concept of urban management in several ways underling some important urban associated issues. These include political, administrative, physical infrastructure, services, social interactions, resources, etc. One of the definitions, for instance, stated that urban management is about how the political and administrative structures of cities work. It is also about the major challenges that could be faced to provide both social services and physical infrastructure to the urban residents. The urban resources to be managed are urban economic resources. The services to be provided may include creation of employment and investment opportunities that could improve the provision of the quality and quantity of goods and service¹.

Conventionally, urban management was considered as primarily the responsibility of the municipal and the central government. This thought is criticized as a largely “supply-driven model” whereby all the responsibilities of managing cities are left to the state and its agencies². As to this model, the provision of services and their maintenance are rights that citizens demand from the state in return for, the taxes they paid, the loyalty they served, and political legitimacy they accepted, to the state. However, in its modern sense, it is said that urban management should be seen within the broader governance perspective and has to be participative, much wider in outlook, transparent, and more flexible (Clarke 1992).

The present discussion is an attempt to analyse the historical experiences of Ethiopian government that was ruled by a political party known to us as the EPRDF during the tenure of its first generation of urban managers, who managed Addis Ababa from May, 1991 to May, 2005. The years 1991 and 2005 were taken as landmarks in this study for understandable reasons. EPRDF came to the political power defeating the *Derg* regime in armed struggle in May, 1991 and made a minor policy shift regarding urban management in 2005. After 2005, it planned to develop cities as “engines of equitable growth”, in support of its long-term rural focus policies. In fact, it was a shift mainly initiated after the national elections of May, 2005, in which the opposition political parties were outshining the ruling party in urban areas, particularly in Addis Ababa in their political debates (Fransen 2008:1).

Therefore, this discussion is intending to answer the following important questions.

- To what extent were the first four consecutive mayors of Addis Ababa capable enough to manage the city?
- How they were working on the complex nature of urban issues and what were the demands of the residents from the government?

- What were their remarkable successes and critical failures?

2. Methods

To answer the above questions, almost all of available documents which were produced during those decades were analyzed. The documents were obtained in the form of archives, newspapers, magazines, memoirs and literature in the form of books and journal articles. Primary data were also obtained through in-depth interviews as the major source for this analysis. Long in-depth interviews were conducted for hours with the consecutive mayors of the city administration during the period under investigation. Of the four mayors, three of them were alive during the time of data collection, in 2023 and 2024. The obtained sources were analyzed thematically.

3. Results and Discussions

The historical sources mentioned above indicate that, the governance of the city during those decades were not successful in addressing the demands of the city residents, as will be discussed in detail below. Even, their style of governance was branded as “Managing the City in Rural ways” (Ermiyas 2014 EC: 30, 131).

The present discussion found out that this strange identification of the management system, during those particular decades, was not only because of their failure to address the demands of the urban residents but also because of their rural oriented management style. The entire poor performances of the city administration during those specific decades had associations with several historical backgrounds.

3.1 Failure to recognize that, “Cities are Engines of Development”

It is said that cities were engines of economic growth, centers of modern political thought and practices and dynamic social interactions which led to comprehensive development. They are tended to be densely

populated and heterogynous in contrast to their rural counter parts. Conventionally, it is believed that the level of density and heterogeneity of urban population are used as a sort of indicators to examine the nature of relationship between citizens and state. That is because of the fact that, density may accelerate the rate of interactions and integrations of peoples whereas heterogeneity in cities would lead to more democratic demand, overlooking particularistic identities, in turn, leads to more tolerance. Moreover, that national identification would lead to more conventional politics. In accordance with this, educated and formally employed urban residents are much more likely to identify themselves with their national identity than those without formal education living in a rural area³.

There are also, similar correlation between urbanization and social development. As far as the available literature is concerned, social development in a city manifests itself in the form of higher literacy rate, adaptation to science and technology, enlightenment of the mind, a better understanding of man and nature, better living environment with better health facilities, better quality of life with social justice, social security, good social relations and cooperation, strengthening of social institutions, and so on (Mylonas 2012: 21-23).

So, from this combined socio-political development point of view, cities particularly capital cities were the heart as well as the model of nation building. Moreover, urban residents are more politically conscious than rural folks. It appears that this is because of exposures to relatively better services and close relations with the government as citizens. In fact, cities are inhabited by relatively educated, conscious and organized members of the citizens. Thus, urban residents are consciously leading their day to day lives toward building common national identity and working for common national interests. Urban centers are model of national development. The symbols of “main-stream” cultural settings are designed or built first in urban centers, mainly capital cities. Most of the nation-building processes carried out

in capital cities include the creation of national symbols like national flags, national anthems, national holidays, national stadiums, national airlines, national languages, and national myths⁴.

Similar to the above global historical experiences, Ethiopian cities and towns had been the centers of nation building efforts by promoting national heroes through erecting their monuments, identifying roads and many institutions like schools, hospitals and the like after their names (Zewudie 2003). Contrary to that experiences of Ethiopian urban centers, rural villages or peasants inhabited areas were not supplied with institutions of such type, even the provided institutions were named after the village or parishes they were founded in⁵.

Knowingly or unknowingly, the Tigray People Liberation Front (hereafter the TPLF) that dominated the EPRDF was working aggressively against this common thought and historical experiences since its assumption of political power. It labelled Ethiopian monarchs and national heroes who were symbols of nation-building as “slave dealers”, “blood thirsty human-butchers”, “dictators” and “treasonous”. Moreover, the EPRDF’s activity was against institutions which had uniting role and “ethnic blind” by labelling them as “inherently ethnic” as if they were working for the benefit of one ethnic group at the expense of the others. It also mostly depended on the new arrivals, unemployed and school dropouts as well as political cadres with rural experiences for its shaky political system at that early stage (Mesfin 1996 EC; Tesfayie 2008).

These EPRDF’s supporters and political cadres were not capable enough to mobilize the majority of the city’s residents for the common interest. These newly arrived or appointed political practitioners understood that the residents of Addis Ababa had been already supplied with every service⁶. It took some of them years to familiarize themselves with the city. It is commonly joked that some of the TPLF fighters and political cadres were wondering or questioning “why they

were paid a monthly salary” and they asked “did we fight to get monthly salary?” They were extremely rural, not in a position to understand global dynamics, read and understand literature on their respective assignments or appointments. Rather, they were good at narrating their battlefield experiences and considered that as the top of all the achievements (Tesfayie 2008: 166).

Most of the political cadres were promoting specific ethnic political interests which was aligned with the interests of urban residents. They could not adhere themselves to that political ideology. As a result, they became losers in the political business of the time. Accordingly, the majority of the residents of Addis Ababa became strangers to the offices of the *kebeles*, *woredas* and sub-cities which were “over flooded” by the new arrivals and school dropouts. They adopted the system similar to that of rural Ethiopian in their structure and working style as well as in their staff composition. The offices were staffed with those new arrivals who could not even communicate with the residents. They were not ready to improve their working language; instead, they were rather proud of their dialect and accent and were trying to shamed others who did not took part in the struggle to defeat the *Derg* regime (Tesfayie 2008: 85-93).

They even intentionally spoke Amharic with Tigrigna tone and accent, which was appreciated or more accepted implicitly, sometimes even explicitly, by that time. Addis Ababa could not obtain appropriate budget, considering it as a place where the residents were enjoying luxurious life⁷.

Generally, it seems that they did not have much concern on the role of urban centers, mainly capital cities, for nation building. Even the concept itself was misinterpreted as if it was the process of cleansing one to replace with the other, instead of as the process of integrating all to one common identity. It is believed that cities act as engines of national economic development because strong urban economies are

essential for poverty reduction and the provision of adequate housing, infrastructure, education, health, safety, and basic services (Stockmans and Buscher 2017: 79-104).

Scholars on urban studies underline that the city is not only the place where economic growth occurs; it is also the engine of economic growth itself. Particularly, they asserted that large cities like capital cities are important sources of economic growth (Duranton 2000: 291-292; Quigley 1998: 137). Some of them identified cities as "engine of national prosperity"⁸ because of different reasons. One of the reasons is that cities, especially bigger cities, are characterized by higher productivity and higher per capita incomes. That means they are known for their agglomeration economies, i.e., the productivity gains derived from the geographical clustering of firms and people. Agglomeration economies are much diversified, and their appropriate mix resulted in fast economic growth in different firms at different spots in the city. Scholars on urban studies asserted that cities have been considered in history as fountainheads of civilization, social transformation and ultimately economic growth⁹.

3.2 “Rural biased” Government Policies

The basic rationale behind these government policies is an attempt to correlate demography with geography for sole political purposes. In many African countries, the previous post-colonial “urban biased” government policies began to lose their importance because of mainly external factors. Post-colonial dictators in Africa tried to appease urban residents at the cost of rural residents to minimize organized opposition in urban centers. However, after the initiation of Structural Adjustment Program, Africa was forced to adapt economic liberalization and political democratization. In this democratization process the sole means of assuming and maintaining political power is going to be election. To win in election, majority vote is the necessary requirement. When the majority of the African people are rural residents, it follows that the organized, politically conscious and vocal

urban residents are in the minority. So, the government began to be confident in overlooking urban interest and became relatively devoted to address the interest of rural residents. In fact, in this process, it was also less expensive to address the demands of numerous rural residents in contrast to that of a smaller number of urban residents¹⁰.

Although, there were multiple variables in this case, the same external factor pushed the Ethiopian government to be “rural biased” in its several policies during the decades under investigation. The EPRDF that assumed political power through armed struggle, was plainly claiming that its supporters were rural Ethiopians or peasants, not only during the period under discussion but also during their lengthy armed struggle while the urban centers were supporting the *Derg* government by providing different form of supplies. As it has been mentioned above, this “rural biased” policy that greatly affected Addis Ababa was the result of combined international and local political dynamics of the time. Internationally, Structural Adjustment Program, which was characterized by political democratization and economic liberalization pushed the then government directly from the “urban biased” political economy to the “rural biased” one. Secondly, from the local point of view, the TPLF-dominated EPRDF had its long years of experiences and backgrounds in rural Ethiopia. Almost all its core party members and the then main actors of the government had spent the decades of the 1970s and 80s as guerrilla fighters in rural Ethiopia (Bereket 2003).

To secure their political power through election at least after the end of the tenure of the transitional government, the EPRDF became a rural-dependent political party. This was apparently so because the majority of its voters were from rural Ethiopia. In fact, all the political parties need to secure the loyalty of rural Ethiopia to win the election since the absolute majority of Ethiopians are rural. As a result, the EPRDF was apparently ready to react to the need and interest of that rural majority. The national policies were designed after the interest of that majority (Bereket 2003).

Subsequently, Addis Ababa became the victim (i.e., was forgotten) of these policies and began to be considered implicitly as one of the rural areas of Ethiopia. Surprisingly, in most of the policy discussion pertaining to infrastructural development and provision of social services, EPRDF overlooked Addis Ababa as if it had been already supplied with all the demands of the rural Ethiopia. Accordingly, Addis Ababa had to wait for the promotion of rural Ethiopia to the status or standard it was in¹¹.

Consequently, Addis Ababa became the host of the opposition political parties which had strong support in urban areas but could not secure political power for they were minorities. Of course, they could air their interest probably in the national parliament but could not influence the political decisions or policy directions. Besides factors listed above, there were other factors that forced opposition political parties to be confined in the urban areas. Some of these included: that rural people were affected less by the previously mentioned Structural Adjustment Program; that rural people were less exposed to opposition party campaigns; that rural people were easily abused or manipulated by the incumbent political party; and that rural people were less demanding and less autonomous¹².

So, “rural biased” policies and programs were issued and special attention was given to rural Ethiopia during these decade in contrast to Addis Ababa, which was suffering from multiple scarcity of supplies and services. Still in relative terms, different rural Ethiopian regions were provided with primary education, health services, water supplies, electricity, roads, etc. while Addis Ababa was almost denied, to the status of even those blinded could easily have identified the difference between the rural roads and that of Addis Ababa, while traveling by bus¹³.

The same is true for primary schools which were massively opened in different parts of Ethiopia while students in Addis Ababa were learning

in a very crowded classrooms consisting of large numbers of students in a single room in extremely deteriorated buildings. Water supply was also carried out with hand-pumps in many villages of rural Ethiopia while Addis Ababa and its environs were suffering from a serious scarcity. The dramatic shift of food prices was also one of the manifestations. The policy support for the producers against the interest of the consumers resulted in the suffering of the latter from sky rocketing food prices in urban areas. This was a direct shift from the Derg's *Market Board* (Ethiopian Grain Board) which forced the peasants to sell their agricultural produce at cheap prices for the benefit of the urban residents. Even the taxation system was significantly different between the rural and the urban residents. A civil servant whose monthly salary could not purchase a quintal of *Teff* paid a monthly tax that had not been paid by a peasant who could produce hundreds of quintals of crops annually¹⁴.

The EPRDF considered the period after the fall of the *Derg* as a post-war period and gave due emphasis for pacification and rehabilitation. Although Addis Ababa was not in a war zone during the war and was occupied without any confrontations between the *Derg* force and EPRDF force, the EPRDF took it as a war zone and applied all the pacification and rehabilitation as well as administrative techniques and methods they applied to the war zones.¹⁵

Tefera Waliwa was the chair of the national committee which was working on pacification and rehabilitation of post-war Ethiopia. He claimed that there were principles that could not be compromised by that moment whether for urban or rural Ethiopia including Addis Ababa. One of them was "partisanship for the majority"¹⁶. He claims that, as much as they could, they were trying to address or be answerable to the demand of that majority. In the case of Ethiopia, the majority of its people were (and still are) rural residents, in contrast to the minority urban residents. So, EPRDF was pro-rural in their policies and implementations. To worsen the matter the active participants in

the process were school dropouts, unemployed or underemployed, those who had minor or major discontents with the *Derg*, new arrivals or demobilized TPLF fighters etc (Ermiyas 2014).

Moreover, it is possible to say that expertise was marginalized, and more emphasis was given to political returns. An individual member could not be purged or fired from his/her position because of any capacity or expertise related problems as long as he/she is capable enough in supporting the political benefits of the EPRDF. Group leadership (collective leadership) was also the major characteristics of the EPRDF in the country including Addis Ababa (Tesfayie 2008: 18-32). Addis Ababa was governed by a committee of five members chaired implicitly by Tefera himself from two different wings; the government and the party¹⁷. In fact, their main responsibility during this time was not as such development or other related policies but rather normalization. As a result, the committee was called after this, peace and security (rehabilitation) committee at every level of the administration from each village to the top of city administration¹⁸.

Their infrastructural development activities during those years were also typically rural; they tried to implement what they were doing in the course of their armed struggle in many rural areas of the Amhara and Tigray regions. Tefera remembered that they launched a local development plan by the support of an NGO called GTZ¹⁹. As to his information, they also reformed the working days and hours of the *Kebele* offices which were working in the same days and hours with other government offices. They extended the working hours of the *kebele* offices to the evening justifying that the public were in their routine activities and regular works during the day hours. Similarly, they also changed the working days of the *kebele* by extending from Wednesdays to Sundays so that the public could get their services in those days because other government offices and related businesses were already closed on those days. The *kebele* offices became closed on Mondays and Tuesdays in place of Saturdays and Sundays, i.e.,

similar to what they were doing in the course of armed struggle in rural Ethiopia²⁰.

The successor of Tefera, Ali Abdo commented that the pro rural EPRDF policy affected urban centers of the country in general and Addis Ababa in particular. It could not get budget subsidy from the federal government claiming that Addis Ababa should not expect subsidy from the federal government, instead it should be subsidizing the federal government to cover its expenses on rural Ethiopia. The top and core personnel of the EPRDF both as a party and government body perused the pro rural policy marginalizing Addis Ababa, even to the extent of refusing discussions on the agenda pertaining to the city as to the oral information obtained from Ali Abdo²¹.

The city administration was well aware of the problems, but it was in a position of “do-nothing” because of the above mentioned political ideology and government policy. Surprisingly, Ali mentioned that he was criticized or politically harassed because of the legal and moral support his office provided to the project of sanitation by Artist Sileshi Demissie nick-named *Gashie Aberra Mola*, to clean Addis Ababa from its over-flooded waste disposals²².

3.3 Lack of Expertise and Experiences in Urbanism

It is well understood that managing modern urban centers requires good knowledge of their basic characteristics as well as ample experiences in that area. Scholars from the field called the process of attaining that knowledge and experiences as urbanism. It is the study about urban areas. The main component of the expertise in that area includes urban structure and urban sociology. These two are said to be the basics of urban knowledge. Specialists like architects, planners and sociologists who could explore how people live in densely populated urban areas need to be employed in order to manage urban centers. Urban centers of the 20th century were highly associated with industrialization as the basic factor for their emergence²³. But many of

the urban centers in Ethiopia including Addis Ababa emerged not as industrial towns rather as military garrisons or market places²⁴. So, the knowledge and skills or expertise that is important to manage these towns might be slightly different from that of administering or managing industrial towns.

It is said that having good knowledge of urbanism and their proper implementation while managing or administering modern cities has multi-faceted benefits for residents, investors and business men²⁵.

Unfortunately, the reality in the case of Addis Ababa during the period under investigation was contradicted with that. Let alone having good knowledge of urbanism, the core EPRDF members left their respective schools, colleges and urban centers at their ages of 17, 18, 19 or early 20s and experienced almost nothing in managing urban centers, even managing families in urban centers. They spent much of their time for two decades being guerrilla fighters. Probably that is why they contrasted Addis Ababa with the rural areas they knew that were suffering from lack of every service. The majority of them were born in rural areas, brought up there and became the core members of their respective political party²⁶. Here, the politics and political movements had their long experiences in rural Ethiopia and converge at the capital of the country rather than radiating from urban centers to rural areas.

The political elites of the decade under discussion who were leaders and members of the guerilla fighters were in their 30s and early 40s by the time they assumed the political power but spent much of their formative years not in high schools and universities or urban centers but in the bush as fighters. The founding members of the TPLF were either first or second year university students or secondary school students when they left for the bush; that of the Amhara Nation Democratic Movement were either in the early secondary school or late primary school and surprisingly that of the Oromo People Democratic Organization were below that. What these top members of the EPRDF knew was the

political programs of their respective political party. Even, it was doubtful that only a very few of them clearly understood the then international political dynamics that brought them to political power. Probably that was why they confidently and proudly narrated their battlefield achievements as the sole reason that brought them to political power without mentioning the international political dynamics that helped them significantly (Akele 2006 EC).

The first four mayors of Addis Ababa during that decade were very young and with an educational level little more than junior secondary school. Their maximum educational level of successful completion was 9th grade and admission to the 10th grade. To worsen the matter, none of them was born and brought up in Addis Ababa that could have helped them to experience just some characteristics of urban environment and society (Akele 2006 EC).

Mulu Alem Abebe, the first in the list of those four mayors of Addis Ababa successfully completed his 8th grade and was admitted to the 9th grade educational level by the time he joined the armed struggle. He was from a rural village in the then province of Gonder, now Amhara Regional State. He was very young even in contrast to his comrades in the course of the armed struggle where he spent his formative 17 years, instead of having them spent in schools and universities. Tefera Waliwa, the second in the list of the mayors was in his 10th grade technical school education by time he joined the armed struggle. He was from a rural village in the then Sidamo province, now Sidama regional state. Then, he spent one and half decades of his formative years not in schools or universities but in the bush being member of guerrilla fighters in the northern region of Ethiopia (Akele 2006 EC).

The third mayor in the list was Ali Abdo who had a slightly different background but was made impotent during his tenure as mayor of the city because of that background. Ali was born in Arsi Dhera and became a primary school teacher after completing his tenth grade secondary

school education. He was a primary school teacher for more than 15 years before he joined the EPRDF in 1991, at the time they entered Addis Ababa. He spent his early career in teaching at primary school at a rural village in the then Kafa province which is now South West Regional State. After that he joined Nazareth girls' school in Addis Ababa, again as a teacher. While teaching in that school he was studying for his bachelor degree in the extension program of Addis Ababa University. He told the present researcher that he had already completed his education for bachelor degree in Addis Ababa University in the extension program by the time the EPRDF assumed political power. As mentioned above, those members who did not take part in the armed struggle were forced to be dictated by those who took part in the struggle regardless of their knowledge and management skills. Ali who studied management in the Addis Ababa University but was chained under the strict control of TPLF's "notorious" political cadre and he became a "do-nothing" mayor of Addis Ababa. On top of that these cadres were active enough in depicting him on the mass media as if he was "the most hated and ever disorganized mayor" in the history of the city²⁷.

The fourth Mayor in the list, Arkebe Equbay who was born in Adwa Tigray, joined TPLF guerrilla fighters before he could advance in his secondary education. He was brought to the position of mayor of Addis before he had familiarity or experience with the city (Ermiyas 2014).

Generally, the core members of the EPRDF in general and these mayors in particular were not ready to recognize nor in a position to understand the role of urban centers, particularly the capital city in nation building from the socio-political point of view and development of mainly commerce and industrialization from the economic point of view. They thought that mass support, which is very important to maintain the political power, could be obtained from the rural Ethiopia where the majority of the population of the country lived. For instance, Tefera was talking about this during his long interview with the present researcher.

All his examples and explanations were rural village based, whether economic, political or social issues. He was proudly talking about safety-net they introduced in the capital city and also about detailed information gathering project regarding the social or ethnic identity of the residents of the city he had planned to gather but failed, probably because of the complex nature of urban residents unlike rural residents²⁸.

3.4 Labelling some Ethiopian Towns as “Colonial”

Post-colonial African states were directly or indirectly forced to inherit all state related political, economic and social makings of European powers on the continent. One of these inheritances was their capital cities, which were founded to serve the purposes of the colonial powers. A number of them were located in the coastal areas of the respective states for economic and administrative reasons. For instance, many of them were seaports located on the seashore of the respective state and others were located near the boundary of two neighboring states to administer two or more states from a single capital. Their internal settlement patterns were also characterized by social segregations²⁹.

Therefore, from the theoretical or ideological point of view, the first or second generations of post-colonial African leaders could not be comfortable with this reality. They planned to replace these colonial capital cities with the new ones that would be characterized by African realities. Of course, some of them became prime centers of opposition political elites and parties against the ruling ones. In such cases, the ruling elites were to give special financial support or development projects to the cities in their birth places. At least, they were to discourage the development of those cities that became centers of opposition groups even sometimes secession groups. However, only about seven states out of more than 50 states could manage the process of replacing the colonial capitals with the new ones because of financial or resource reasons³⁰.

Taking this general framework into considerations, some of the ethnic liberation fronts of Ethiopian political parties including the TPLF put Addis Ababa in that frame, i.e., an imposition of “black colonialism” on the nations, nationalities and peoples. Addis Ababa was not a colonial city but had evolved locally. Here the issue is not to what extent Addis Ababa fulfilled the criteria of colonial cities, but the outcome of this assumption on the overall development and management of the city. In fact, none of the criteria fit into the reality of Addis Ababa. From the geographical location point of view, it was located in the center of the country, the ideal location which other post-colonial African states aspired to establish a new capital took it as a model. From the socio-cultural point of view, Addis Ababa was not the center of segregated settlements or discriminations, rather it was a center for strong interactions and integrations. Free inter-marriages in Addis Ababa resulted in people not purely from the northern half or purely from the southern half of the country but considered themselves as only “Ethiopians”. This historical reality directly contradicts with the manifestation of colonial cities in Africa. Of course, internal ethnic labelling was very common but not barrier to inter-marriages and other forms of interactions (Andargachew 2018: 71-98).

Economically too, Addis Ababa and other southern towns of Ethiopia were founded not to serve the European intention to extract and export African resources but they were founded at least to serve local purposes; not to develop one metropolitan state at the expenses of Ethiopia or its different ethnic groups. Still, it is understood that local extraction and consumption or export of resources by Ethiopian elites having their seats in Addis Ababa may lead to the assumption that Addis Ababa was “developed” at the expenses of other localities in the country³¹. It seems that from this last assumption, the “Ethnic Liberation Fronts” who came from the countryside through fighting apparently considered Addis Ababa as a “colonial city” (Ermiyas 2014: 248-255).

Even if it was from the northern half of Ethiopian people, the TPLF came to power with the political rhetoric fit to the historical experiences of the southern half of Ethiopia. It considered almost all the urban centers of the southern half of Ethiopia founded in the late 19th and early 20th centuries as garrisons and Amhara towns to subjugate all the nations and nationalities³².

Accordingly, these towns were considered as not only the site of exploitation, oppression and consumption from the political economy point of view but also as centers where the main-stream culture, Amhara and Orthodox Christianity, were promoted. Thus, promoting those urban centers means strengthening all the “evils” against which the EPRDF struggled for decades. As a result, it was at least implicitly working for their decline or substitution by other vibrant urban centers fit to the political ideology of the EPRDF. Replacing garrison towns by others as an administrative (political) and business (economic) centers at regional, zonal and district levels throughout the country became the major motto of the EPRDF government at this early stage. In case that could not be affordable because of different reasons, it was recommended that modifying (revising) them in the way they could fit into the new political ideology was another option. That revision began from renaming them in local languages under the pretext of restoring their pre-*nefetegna* names; and renaming their streets, quarters, sub-cities, roads and buildings etc. still under the same justifications³³.

Consequently, Addis Ababa became the victim of both measures but mainly that of the second one for it could not be affordable to replace that capital city with another one. The government of EPRDF initially discouraged the development of Addis Ababa as much as it could. The name change could not be implemented at the national and international level probably because of political reasons at both levels. But at the local level, mainly the Oromia regional state in which the city itself was located, implemented the name change. It also attempted to change names of sub-cities, districts, quarters and streets at the informal outlets.

Some localities were renamed only on the OLF affiliated literature, media, music and similar forums not on the official government documents³⁴.

In the midst of all these, the TPLF and some of the Tigrigna speakers could not be confident enough to live in the city without arms in the post-1991 decades. The majority of the demobilized TPLF fighters became residents of Addis Ababa being armed. These demobilized fighters were not as such passive members of the city residents; rather they were acting as “Omni potent” and “Omni present” in the city with their rural and guerrilla fighters’ mindset. Even they began to be role models for the new arrival migrants from any Tigrigna speaking localities and families. Assuming office equal in a status with that of Tigrigna speaker did not mean equal in decision making power, even being above any Tigrigna speaker in appointment or office holding did not mean as such. They were more powerful than the higher office holder. Tigrigna speaking office directors were more powerful than ministers and the like³⁵.

Conclusions

Managing a capital city in the modern world is a very complex task that needs diversity of professionals and dedicated political leadership. The pre-EPRDF Addis Ababa had been managed positively with the “urban biased” government policies of the days by a management considering the city as theirs and identifying it in public as “our city”. However, the EPRDF particularly from May, 1991 to May, 2005 was managing the city with negligence and “rural biased” government policies perceiving the city as the center of its opponents. Although the then global dynamics slightly contributed for such government policies, the geographical location of Addis Ababa in the historical southern half of the country and its residents’ opposition to or lack of comfort with the EPRDF ethnic politics contributed significantly to the negative perceptions that considered the city as “alien” to the management. The EPRDF considered Addis Ababa as not only one of the major abodes

of its opponents by then, but also branded it as the model of the “*neftegna* cities”. Consequently, it came up with the idea of, at most, foundation of new capitals at different administrative levels of the country including the national capital city. If that could not be affordable because of both political and financial reasons, the second option it came up with was the revision of those “*neftegna* cities” in many aspects like renaming of the city and its component parts. Ultimately, the EPRDF found out that both measures were impossible in the case of Addis Ababa. So, the city was left in such a state of bad conditions, “managing the city in rural ways” during those decades.

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Conflict of interest

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Research Ethics

The informants were initially informed about the purpose and contents of this article and had their full consent to make all the information they provided me public.

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End notes

¹ David, *An Introduction to Urban Management*.

² Judith Tendler and Rodrigo Serrano, *The Rise of Social Funds*:

³ The World Bank, *Demographic trends*, 24-44.

⁴ T. Goodfellow and D. Jackman, Control the capital:

⁵ Jos Meester and et al, *A clash of nationalisms*, 20.

⁶ Initially it was commonly expressed a public poem or song as such in the rural birth place of the present researcher.

⁷ Informant: Ato Ali Abdo, interviewed in the office of Addis Ababa city administration on October 25, 2023.

⁸ United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, *Cities are the engines of development*.

⁹ Arti Grover and etal, *Agglomeration Economies in Developing Countries: A Meta-Analysis*.

¹⁰ Robin Harding, “Urban-Rural Differences in Support for Incumbents across Africa”.

¹¹ Informant: Ali Abdo.

¹²Robin Harding, “Urban-Rural Differences in Support for Incumbents across Africa”.

¹³ Informant: Ali Abdo.

¹⁴ Karen Wells, “International and Domestic Sources of State Stability and Regime Collapse. 85- 89.

¹⁵ The Government of Ethiopia, *Addis Zemen*, Daily News Paper, 1984 EC, On *Hidar 2*.

¹⁶ Informant: Tefera Waliwa interviewed on December 29, 2023.

¹⁷ *Ibid*.

¹⁸ Informant: Ali Abdo, interviewed in the office of Addis Ababa City Administration on October 25, 2023.

¹⁹ *Ibid*.

²⁰ *Ibid*: on December 29, 2023.

²¹ Informant: Ali Abdo.

²² *Ibid*.

²³ Patrick Brandful Cobbinah (ed.), “City in Africa I”. 297–300.

²⁴ Akalou, “Urban Development in Ethiopia. 1-16.

²⁵ Mitra Ghorbi , Hamid Mohammadi , “A Critical View on New Urbanism.”. 89 – 97.

²⁶ Informant: Tefera Waliwa, Ali Abdo.

²⁷ Informant: Ali Abdo.

²⁸ Informant: Tefera Waliwa.

²⁹ A. J. Christopher, "Continuity and Change of African Capitals". 44-57.

³⁰ Renato Leão Rego, "New capital cities in the Global South".

³¹ Shimelis, "The Historiography of Addis Ababa". 15-51.

³² McClellan, "State Transformation and Social Reconstitution in Ethiopia. 657-675.

³³ Sisay Agena, "The Death of the so called Neftegna/Amhara Cities in Ethiopia".

³⁴ *Hawi*, "Names and Identity".

³⁵ Informant: Ali Abdo.