

Full Length Research

Nation building Narrations in Ethiopia: Bibliographic Review on Emperor Menelik II

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This document reviews the literature on Emperor Menelik II's role in nation-building in Ethiopia. His influence on modernizing Ethiopia and his significance in African independence, particularly through the battle of Adwa, are discussed, as are the conflicting views of historians on whether he was a nation-builder or an exploiter. Oromo nationalists' perspectives on the relationship between Ethiopian emperors and the Oromo people are also discussed in the paper. According to the nation boulder point of view Menelik II played a significant role in the development of Ethiopia's nation. His efforts contributed to the modernization and expansion of the Ethiopian empire. Modern infrastructure and established public service organizations were among the priorities for Menelik II. During his territorial expansion, he sought to protect the Ethiopian people from the brutal colonial invasion of the Europeans and expand modern technology across the country. On the contrary, the perspective of Oromo nationalists on the relationship between Ethiopian emperors and the Oromo people, particularly regarding Emperor Menelik II, is that the relationship is similar to European African colonialism. They argue that the Amhara-Oromo relationship in the past was one of exploitation and oppression, likening it to colonialism.

Key words: modernization, colonization, nationalists, unification, empire, territory

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INTRODUCTION

This paper aimed to address how writers documented the role of Ethiopian emperors notably Menelik II on nation building. There are two antagonistic points of view concerning the emperors in nation building.¹ These are the nation builders and exploiters. These two opposite views greatly influenced the writing of Ethiopian modern

historiography. The nation builders view is written by a large numbers of Ethiopian and foreign historians.² This point of view is widely accepted not only by Ethiopians but also outsiders. From the second half of the nineteenth century onwards, many parts of the nation began to be exposed to the ideas of modernization. Emperor Tewodros II is often regarded as the beginning of the modernization of the Ethiopian empire. The attempt to modernize the Ethiopian empire continued in the times of

¹Ayele Tariku, "The Annole Monument and Negus Menelik's Expedition towards Arsi," *Journal of Social Science*, Vol. 4, No. 1, (May, 2018), pp.1-2, GebruTareke, *Ethiopia, Power and Protest: Peasant Revolts in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 71-72

²Ayele, p.1

king Menelik II.³ It is obvious that Ethiopia is served as the torch bearer of African independence. This was due to the battle of Adwa, the first black victory against whites under the leadership of Menelik II. Therefore, Menelik became the beacon of dignity for all blacks across the globe.⁴

The second point of view is the narrative that dominates the recent Oromo nationalists who frame the debate as a contest between Ethiopian emperors and the Oromo people. The Oromo nationalists grasp the view that the Amhara-Oromo relationship in the past was a relation of colonialism like the European African colonial relationship. Holcomb and Sisai and their associates argue that Ethiopia colonized Oromia with the help of European capitalist countries.⁵ Asefa, one of the leading proponents of this view contended that until Menelik's territorial expansion, the Oromo region was not a part of Ethiopia. The state was historically and culturally different from the Ethiopians.⁶ In the same vein, Lubie also stated that the Abyssinian colonial occupation of Oromia started with king Tewodros II and was completed by Menelik II by uniting the northern forces and equipped them with some modern European weapons.⁷ Many Ethiopian and expatriate writers have different perspectives on the role of modern Ethiopian emperors in state formation. Almost all of these narrators used the theoretical framework of colonialism vis-à-vis their modernization. The narrations produced misleading discourse among the present-day Oromo people. To break down the long-established coexistence, the ethno-nationalist writers have been spreading falsehoods and fascist propaganda against the Amhara people. Therefore, these narrations served as fundamental reasons for the present severe genocide of the ethnic people of Amhara in Oromia and other regions namely GuraFarada, Dodola, Shashemene, Kofele, Bale, ArsiNegle, Batu, Wollega, Ginche, Harar,

³MulatuWubneh and Yohanis Abate, *Ethiopia: Transition and Development in the Horn of Africa* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1988), pp.12-13, FasilMerawi, "Emperor Tewodros II and the Antithesis Between Modernity and Tradition," *International Journal of European Studies*, vol. 6 no. 1, (2022), P.6, Richard Pankhurst, "Menilek and the Utilisation of Foreign Skills in Ethiopia," *Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, Vol. 5, No. 1, Institute of Ethiopian Studies, (January 1967), p.42

⁴Frances L. Gordon, *Ethiopia, Eritrea and Djibouti* (Melbourne: Lonely planet Publication, November, 2000), P.28, BiniamWolde-Gebriel, "Memories of the Victory of Adwa: A Focus on Its commemoration(1941-1999)" (MA Thesis, Addis Ababa University, 2004), p.11

⁵Bonie K. Holcomb and Sisailbsa, *The invasion of Ethiopia* (Trenton: The Red Sea Press, 1990), P.3, 85

⁶AsefaJalata, "The Struggle for Knowledge: The Case of Emergent Oromo Studies," *African Studies Review*, vol.39, no.2 (Sep., 1996), p.100

⁷LubieBirru, "Abyssinian Colonialism as the Genesis of the Crisis in the Horn: Oromo Resistance (1855-1913)," *Northeast African Studies*, Vol. 2/3, No. 3/1, (1980-81/1981), pp.93-98.

Metekel and Mai-Kadra ever since the 1990s.⁸

The two proponents (colonial and modernization) writers and their contended interpretations still highly affected the historiography of Ethiopia.⁹ Thus, this essay is intended to critically examine how scholars broadly comprehend and indicate the same issue contrarily.

The Colonial view proponents

As already mentioned, different individuals have different views and interpretations about Menelik's expedition to the south. It's beyond any shadow of a doubt that the Ethiopian identity formations have been shaped by intermarriage, migration, and cultural interaction for more than a thousand years.¹⁰ Yared argued that the earliest records of ethnic history that define the essence of different ethnic identities had been initiated since the 1960s. As of Yared, the Italian Colonial Policy (1936–1941) created a good opportunity for the beginning of ethnic divisions and conflict in Ethiopia. It was also later reinforced by a Marxist-Leninist view of Ethiopian history. The short-lived Italian occupation colonial policy served as the main cause of the politicization of ethnicity in Ethiopia. A harsh colonial strategy was implemented toward the Amhara and the Orthodox Church. Regarding different writers, much damage has been done to the spirit, property, and humanity of the Amhara people. In connection with this, the goal of the Italian colonial program was to provoke inter-tribal conflict and violence against the Amhara by mobilizing the Oromo and other ethnic groups. It was during this time that the idea of expelling Amhara from the "Oromo Sidama" territory started.¹¹ The upshot of ethno nationalist writer's contention is that to destroy Ethiopianism, it is necessary to isolate, expose, and crush the Amhara ethnic group. In line with this, the ethno nationalists notably TPLF and OLF have regarded Ethiopia herself as a colonial power.¹²

Levin argued that, a policy that singles out for destruction the brightest of Amhara was designed by Italian colonialists. It is important to note here the role of Italian colonial policy in the growth of ethno-nationalism in Ethiopia. The idea that Ethiopia was the colony of Amhara has been first articulated by the Italian colonial

⁸YaredDebebe, "Discursive Trajectories in the Making of Amhara Identity in Ethiopia," *Nations and Nationalism*, 28(4) (2022), p.1274

⁹Ayele, p.2

¹⁰Brian. J. Yates, *The Other Abyssinians: The Northern Oromo and the Creation of Modern Ethiopia, 1855–1913* (Vol. 85), (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2020), p.4

¹¹Yared, pp.1268-1272

¹²MaimireMennasemay, "Adwa: A Dialogue between the Past and the Present," *Northeast African Studies, New Series*, Vol. 4, No. 2, (1997), p. 43

agents and scholars during the Italian occupation of the country. Italian social scientist Conti Rossini described Ethiopia as "a museum of peoples." The main premise of this representation is to recognize the various ethnic groups have their own culture and social system.¹³ Nevertheless, the concealed agenda of this view is to undermine the cultural and political interactions of the diverse Ethiopian ethnic groups living together for centuries.¹⁴ One of the proponents of this view, Eskiel Gabisa contended that the Oromos used the Italian Occupation of Ethiopia as a golden opportunity to reclaim their lost freedom. He stated that the Oromo were prepared to take advantage of the Italian invasion to get rid of Abyssinian rule.¹⁵

Yates contended that diverse Ethiopian ethnic groups have shared similar cultural elements, concepts, and forms of expression. These forms of interaction and integration have uniquely shaped the long course of Ethiopian historiography.¹⁶ Thus, Ethiopian society developed a common cultural community and a pan-Ethiopian identity that transcended classified ethnic categories.¹⁷ The Italian fascists denied the existence of any kinds of Ethiopian similar cultural elements. The Italians considered Ethiopia a colonial state formed by the Amhara elites. For instance, Baron Roman Prochazka, a fascist writer viewed Menelik's territorial expansion is similar to White colonialism in Africa.¹⁸ On the contrary, Mohamood stated that interpreting Menelik's territorial expansion as a colonial thesis is unhistorical.¹⁹ To support this view, Yates argued wherever European established colonial administration, they banned interracial marriage to preserve the racial purity of the Whites. In Menelik's system, in contrast, social institutions including marriage and God-parenthood were utilized to incorporate the diverse ethnic groups rather

than maintaining a racial colonial order.²⁰ Political appointments were based on interpersonal relationships that went far beyond ethnicity. Talented individuals who came from various ethnic backgrounds were encouraged to do their utmost duty in different leading positions. Not being Amhara had never been hampered political appointments.²¹ Indeed, in the context of Ethiopia, ethno-nationalist movements and political parties that represent different ethnic groups are a recent phenomenon. In the early 1970s, ethnic liberation movements were established. Their political mobilization strategies were based on the fabricated narratives of Italian colonial rule. Ethnic liberation fronts described Ethiopia as a collection of separate ethnic communities bound together by Amhara colonialism.²²

Regarding Keller's view, since the mid of the 1960s, this view has gained popularity due to the introduction of Marxism and Leninism ideologies in Ethiopia. Leninism claimed that national issues remained crucial to class conflicts, and ethno-nationalist writers became adapted to the requirements of this ideology.²³ Ethno nationalist writers intend to destroy the communal nature of Ethiopian cultural values. They try to realize the Leninist ideology by promoting cultural exclusion and diminishing Ethiopians' perception of their common history. They began to criticize Ethiopianism and considered it imperialism. Walelign, in his work entitled, *On the Question of Nationalities in Ethiopia*, criticized Ethiopian nationhood by arguing that Ethiopia is not one nation. In accordance with his view, Ethiopia is made up of multi nationalities with their language, ways of dressing, history, social organization, and territorial entity. He contended that the so-called Ethiopian nationalism disseminated by the ruling class is factitious because it is simply a cover shade used by the rulers to dominate others. This narrative served as a cornerstone for the development of ethno-nationalism and the gradual degradation of the peaceful coexistence of the country. Yared argued that the intensification of Marxism and Leninism ideologies and the Italian improper understanding of history paved the way for the coming of newly organized ethno-nationalist liberation fronts. The Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) and Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) declared the Amhara a bitter enemy in their political manifesto. The two leading ethno centric liberation fronts have been accepted the fabricated narratives of colonization that designed by the Italian colonizers. Starting from their formation, they

¹³Donald Levine, *Greater Ethiopia: The Evolution of Multiethnic Society* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1974), p.20

¹⁴Alemayehu Fentaw, "Greater Ethiopia: The evolution of a pluralist politico-legal system in a pluralist polity." *Social Science Research Network* (2011), p.1

¹⁵Ezekiel Gebissa, "The Italian Invasion, the Ethiopian Empire, and Oromo Nationalism: The Significance of the Western Oromo Confederation of 1936," *Northeast African Studies*, New Series, Vol. 9, No. 3, (2002), P.76

¹⁶Tadesse Tamirat, "Ethnic Interaction and Integration in Ethiopian History: the Case of the Gafat." *Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, 21: (1988), pp. 121–122

¹⁷Brian J. Yates, "Invisible Actors: The Oromo and the Creation of Modern Ethiopia (1855-1913)" (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Illinois: Champaign printing press, 2009), p.1

¹⁸Roman B. Prochazka, *Abyssinia: The Powder Barrel* (London: British International News Agency, 1935), p. 54

¹⁹Mamdani Mahmood, *Neither Settler Nor Native: The Making and Unmaking of Permanent Boundaries* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2020), p.197

²⁰Brian J. Yates, "Acculturation in the Däga: Local Negotiations in Amhara/Oromo Relations," *International Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (Fall/Winter 2010-2011), P.102

²¹Harold G. Marcus, "The End of the Reign of Menilek II," *The Journal of African History*, vol. 11, no. 4 (1970), pp. 572-73

²²Yared, p.1272

²³Edmond J. Keller, "Ethiopia: Revolution, Class, and the National Question," *African Affairs*, vol. 80, no. 321 (1981), p.519

spent great efforts for the disintegration of Ethiopian unity and the creation of their own independent nation. The TPLF and OLF politicians intended to degrade the long-coexistence solidarity of Ethiopians.²⁴ Even though TPLF and OLF disseminated similar anti-Amhara propaganda, the people of Oromo have been greatly ignored by TPLF in the past three decades.²⁵

Additionally, Yared noted that TPLF's systematic policy of humiliating and marginalizing resulted in the psychological frustration and humiliation of the Amhara. The historical and ancestral lands of Amhara including Wolkaite, Raya, Metekel and Dera/Shoa had been taken away forcefully. The Amhara land along the Ethio-Sudan border was also given or sold to Sudan. This may be connected to the mistaken idea of TPLF establishing "Greater Tigray" in the Horn of Africa. The 1975 TPLF manifesto took the anti-Amhara ideology, and made the Amhara people its primary enemy. Per different writer's views, like the Italian colonizers, the ethno-centric liberation fronts considered Amhara as their historic enemy. In their political programs, they openly exercised on the enmity between Amhara, Tigray and Oromo. Like the Italians, the TPLF has formulated anti-Amhara national oppression as one of its objectives in their motto.²⁶ Based on Aregawi, former leader of the TPLF, throughout the armed struggle, anti-Amhara propaganda was greatly disseminated within the movement. TPLF taught its members, saying that Amhara has hijacked the history of Aksum from us. In line with their view, therefore, the goal of their struggle is to bring back Tigray's splendid history. Aregawi viewed that cultural events, theatrical presentations as well as jokes and derogatory interpretations were used to spread this poisonous attitude.²⁷ Donal Crummy highly opposed the anti-Amhara propaganda particularly the representation that Amhara was a beneficiary of the imperial system. In accordance with his view the Amharas were poor and voiceless like any other ethnic groups. He explained the living conditions of Amhara during the imperial times. He writes,

Most of the Amhara, the farming populations of Gojjam, of Begemder, of Wallo, and even of Northern Shewa, received few favors from Addis Ababa. They benefited much less from the regime than did Western Wallaga, and had poor access to modern education or medicine,

²⁴Yared, pp.1272-1268

²⁵John Sorenson, *Imagining Ethiopia, Struggle for History and Identity in the Horn of Africa* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University press,1993),p.3

²⁶Yared,pp.272-273

²⁷AregawiBerhe, "A Political History of the Tigray People's Liberation Front(1975-1991):Revolt, Ideology and Mobilisation in Ethiopia" (Ph.D. Dissertation: VrijeUniversiteit, Amsterdam, 2008),p.201

*or a per capita basis, than did the population of Eritrea.*²⁸

Even though the condition of Amhara was similar to that of other Ethiopian ethnic groups, ethno nationalist fronts were unwilling to distinguish the masses from some privileged ruling elites. When they took over the power in 1991, TPLF and its proponents granted constitutional recognition to the narratives created by the Italian colonizers. The preamble of the 1994 constitution states that correcting historically unfair relationships that occurred between ethnic groups is one of its pillar values. This was supposed to be realized by the formation of ethnic-based administrative units, a state rearrangement model that made the elected natives exclusive owners of ethnic based regions.²⁹ Due to the continuous anti-Amhara propaganda, Amhara referred settlers and nonnatives were subjected to recurrent killing and eviction from the newly established ethnic constituents.³⁰ Jalata's claimed that the Oromo ethnic group has been under settler colonial occupation. Despite his narration, however, it has no theoretical or historical basis. Based on the Oromo nationalist writers, the majority of Oromo resistance movements have always aimed to liberate Oromia from the Amhara rule. Their objectives ran counter to the political ambitions of the Ethiopianist scholars to keep Ethiopia together.³¹ One of the leading hate mongers named Asafa asserted that the Oromo national movement has been opposed by successive Amhara, Tigray and Somali elites to keep the Oromo in a subordinate position and confiscate their lands and other resources from all directions.³² The Oromo ethnocentric writers criticized different Ethiopian writers including Aleqa Taye. It is because they considered them as a center to disseminate antipathy against the Oromos. Wolyie stated that Alaqa Taye wrote about the Oromo migration from Asia and Madagascar and reached the region through Mombassa.³³ In line with this point of view, Asefa contended that the Ethiopian studies focused on the history of Amhara and Tigray by ignoring the history of Oromo.³⁴ But in reality, members of

²⁸Donald Crummy, "The Horn of Africa: Between History, and Politics," *Northeast African Studies*, Vol. 10, No. 3, (2003), p. 128

²⁹KjetilTronvoll, *War and the Politics: Making Enemies & Allies in the Horn of Africa* (Cambria: James Currey, 2009),P.26

³⁰KetemawMuluye, "The Formation of Ethiopia's Federation and its Implications for the Amharas' Quest for Recognition and Boundary Demarcations," *Modern Africa: Politics, History and Society*, Volume 8, Issue 1,University of Gondar, Ethiopia, (2020), pp.52-53

³¹Hizkael, p.77

³²AsafaJalata, *The Oromo Movement and Imperial Politics: Culture and Ideology inOromia and Ethiopia* (The Rowman& Littlefield Publishing Group, Inc., 2000), p. x

³³JeylanWolyie, "A Critical Review of the Political and Stereotypical Portrayals of the Oromo in the Ethiopian Historiography." *Nordic Journal of African Studies*, 15(3), (2006),p.262

³⁴Asefa, *The Struggle for Knowledge....*, p.95

the Ethiopian studies have made tireless efforts to start the Oromo studies.

In addition to some Oromo ethnocentric narratives, foreign writers including Markakis and Harold Marcus exaggerated the involvement of Menelik II in slave trade practice. According to Marcus, Menelik is renowned in history as "Ethiopia's greatest slave entrepreneur."³⁵ Markakis also claimed that Menelik and his wife reportedly owned 70,000 slaves.³⁶ On the contrary, he cited one historian that Menelik was strongly opposed to the slave trade.³⁷ These foreign writers' intentionally criticized Menelik II to ignite conflict between different ethnics of Ethiopia.

Aims of Ethno nationalist writers

The principal motive of the ethno-nationalist writers is to undermine the Ethiopians long history of peaceful coexistence. They have been done either by degrading the history of some communities, or glorifying the history of others. Ethno nationalists divided the people based on their ethnic background.³⁸ The leading proponents of this view named Asefa contended that the Oromo have been treated as a colonial subjects and second-class citizens. In line with his view, the Amhara and Tigray have shared similar attitudes towards the Oromo subjugated people. In the same vein, he also considered the early and contemporary scholars of Ethiopia including Aba Bahrey as a distorter of the history of Oromo. The work of Baherey entitled *Zenahule Galla* is written in the 16th century, but they read it in the 21st century. Asefa criticized that they erased the name Oromo and replaced with Galla which connoted barbaric, savage, inferior and ignorant. He narrated that the Amara elites classified themselves as white and superior to the Oromos.³⁹ On the contrary, Tesema Te'a contended that different writers work including Bahrey's document contributed a lot to the history of Oromo.⁴⁰ Another writer named Getachew Haile considers *Zenahule Galla* as a significant work, a vital source and a great legacy of an anthropological review of the Oromo people in Ge'ez

language.⁴¹ The Oromo scholars who promoted the idea of Amhara-Oromo relationship in the past represented the experience of the colonial relationship between Europeans and Africans. They claimed that the only difference between the European colonization of Africa and the Amhara conquest of Oromo land is that the Europeans were white and originated from Europe, whereas the Amhara are Africans. Based on their point of view, the supremacy of the Amhara over Oromo is an example of one African people dominating another under colonial rule. Another angle of their argument is that the Amhara's influence on the Oromo is similar to the Europeans' influence on black African politics, culture, and consciousness.⁴²

One thing the readers should be aware of the Amhara ruling system is that the Oromo notably the Oromo elites were involved in the establishment of nation building. Gobena Dache, who is frequently referenced as the right-wing of Menelik II's administration was one of the leading person who accelerated the subjugation of the Oromo and southern nations and nationalities. Without Gobena's tireless effort, Menelik would not have established the Ethiopian Empire.⁴³ To support this event, Merrara also stated that the Oromo elites including Fitawrari Habte-Giorgis, Ras Gobana, Fitawrari Gebeyehu, Ras Mekonnen, and Dajach Balcha played a pivotal role in the accomplishment Menelik's hegemony over the Oromos.⁴⁴

To aggravate their sense of historical oppression, Asafa wrote on class structure, the Oromos have been placed as the second-class citizens.⁴⁵ However, different writers including Ayele claimed that such generalizations have been fabricated by individual writers and generalized as the whole Oromo people were oppressed during the nation-building process.⁴⁶ In connection to this, what is the most shocking point of view is the extent to which the Oromo's historical subjugation was exaggerated by comparing the situation of African Americans' triangular slave trade inhumanity.⁴⁷

The Oromo nationalist writers claimed that the Oromo National Movement was started in the early 1960s to fight against Ethiopian settler colonialism. Initially, the

³⁵Harold G. Marcus, *The Life and Times of Menelik II: Ethiopia 1844-1913*. (Lawrenceville, N.J: Red Sea Press, 1995),p.73

³⁶John Markakis, *Ethiopia: The Last Two Frontiers* (Woodbridge, Suffolk, UK: James Currey, 2011), p.97

³⁷*Ibid*, p.98

³⁸MesayKebede, "From Marxism-Leninism to Ethnicity: The Sideslips of Ethiopian Elitism," *Northeast African Studies*, 10, (2) (2003), pp.183-185

³⁹*Ibid*, pp.96-98 Asefa, *The Struggle for Knowledge...*, pp.95-99

⁴⁰TesemaTe'a, "The Place of the Oromo in Ethiopian History: 2003 OSA Conference Keynote Address" *Journal of Oromo Studies*, vol. 11, no. 1-2 (2004), P.3

⁴¹Getachew Haile, *Writings of Abba Bahrey (in Amharic) የአበበገረደደርስቶች*(Collegeville: Minnesota, 2002), pp. 56-57

⁴²Hussein, A Critical Review of the Political and Stereotypical..., p. 268

⁴³*Ibid*, p. 268

⁴⁴MereraGudina, "The Elite and the Quest for Peace, Democracy and Development in Ethiopian: Lessons to be Learnt," *International Conference on African Development Archives*, 6, (2001), p.1

⁴⁵AsafaJalata, "Ethno-nationalism and the Global 'Modernising' Project," *Nations and nationalism*, vol. 7, no. 3 (2001), p.392

⁴⁶Ayele,pp.1-3

⁴⁷AsefaJalata, *Fighting Against the Injustice of the State and Globalization: Comparing the African American and Oromo Movements* (New York: Palgrave, 2001b), p.2

movement was ineffective due to the insufficiency of a modern educational establishment, the absence of transport and communication systems and mass media, and the lack of written literature in the Oromo language.⁴⁸

The Oromo ethno-nationalist writers attempted to deconstruct the country's long existence solidarity. They claimed that the establishment of settler colonialism in Oromia was accomplished in collaboration with the European powers and Ethiopia. Asefa narrated that Oromo nationalism took longer to grow due to the denial of education, land grab, cultural assimilation and strict political persecution.⁴⁹ Connecting with his view, the opposition of Somalia to the Oromo interest also served as a factor to the Oromo slow development.⁵⁰ In addition to ethno-nationalist narrations, there are legal issues that restricted the economic, political, and social rights of the people. The Amhara who have lived outside of their ethnic region are the major target. It is also greatly contributed to the erosion of peaceful coexistence of the Ethiopian people. The EPDRF higher officials opposed Ethiopians right to settle from any part of the nation during the debate over rebuilding the nation's administration based on ethnicity. Various ethno-politicians have supported these ethnic politics. It aggravated the conflict between different ethnic groups and religions in the nation.⁵¹ The anti-Amhara sentiments are greatly implanted outside the present Amhara region.⁵² The TPLF anti Amhara propaganda has been highly widespread by undermining the legacy of emperor Menelik II. Mennasemay explains as follows:

*The TPLF and its organic intellectuals present Adwa as a victory of Tigreans over Italians, minimizing the role played by Menelik, and undermining Adwa's symbolism as an Ethiopian victory over a colonial power. In addition, they tie the part that Menelik played in the campaign to the logic of what they describe as "Amhara colonialism," questioning the existence of a nation called Ethiopia at the time.*⁵³

The daily mass killings, displacements, and the alleged forced sterilizations of Amhara who live in different parts of the nation are linked with these ethnically based administrative regions. By accepting the native and

settler discourse as gospel, even the Habasha blackness is denied. Mesfin Woldemariam strongly contended that there is no ethnic group known as the Amhara.⁵⁴ Additionally, Gebru made an effort to create past intrigues focused on the Shewa-Amhara to raise suspicions among other Ethiopians, including the Amhara themselves. Of course Gebru's goal is to minimize Shewa Amhara's historical contributions.⁵⁵

Another motive of ethno nationalist's inclination is to ignore the Oromos' contribution to Ethiopia's historical events. It has been done deliberately to undermine Ethiopianism among the Oromos.⁵⁶ One of the leading proponents of this view named Asafa claimed that "We are Oromians not Ethiopians, which sums up the plot to destroy Ethiopians peaceful coexistence."⁵⁷ The Ethno-nationalists are accused of being Ethiopianized and abuse to their people who participated in the establishment of the Ethiopian nation building. They contended that the integration of Oromo with Ethiopians experienced in the past is now viewed as cultural racism. They intentionally killed the significance of cross-cultural communication. According to Asafa's point of view, the Habashas and Oromos cannot live peacefully under the same state structure. It is a sign of the critical stage of ethnicization and secessionism that threatened Ethiopians norms to live in harmony.⁵⁸ Ethno-nationalist writers have fabricated a variety of narrations to undermine the long-standing integrity of the country. They have been mocking and distorting the history of Amhara as well as negatively constructing the history of Oromo against the Amhara. Besides this, they claimed that due to the flexibility and adaptability of Oromos social structure, the population movement and wars of the Oromos against other peoples are seen as normal historical context, nondestructive or mostly peaceful movements. There for, their interaction with others as peaceful in the 16th and 17th centuries. According to their claims, the Oromo Gada system is perfectly made up of democratic, fair and elaborated egalitarian components.⁵⁹ On the contrary to this view, Irvin Kaplan stated that the population movement of Oromo was greatly depressed and isolated the Ethiopian society. He writes;

⁵⁴Moges Zewiddu, "Management of Ethnic Conflict in Ethiopia: The Case of Amhara and Oromo Ethnic Groups," *Journal of Law and Conflict Resolution*, vol. 12, no. 2 (2021), pp.27-28

⁵⁵GebruTareke, *Ethiopia: Power and Protest: Peasant Revolts in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 71-72

⁵⁶Asefa, *The Oromo Movement and Imperial Politics*..... p.37

⁵⁷AsefaJalata, *Ethiopia and Oromia: State Formation and Ethnonational Conflict, 1868-1992* (Boulder and London: Lynne Rienner, 1993), p.6

⁵⁸Asefa, *Fighting Against the Injustice of the Sate*, pp. 3, 149, 96

⁵⁹Abbas, *Conquest and Resistance*....., pp. 84-85, 120-124

⁴⁸AsefaJalata, *The Oromo Movement and Imperial Politics: Culture and Identity in Oromia and Ethiopia* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2020),p.3

⁴⁹Asefa, *Ethno-nationalism*, p.393

⁵⁰*Ibid*, p.394

⁵¹Siegfried Pausewang, "The Two-faced Amhara Identity," *Scrinium*, vol. 1, no. 1 (2005), p.275

⁵²Abbas H. Gnamo, *Conquest and Resistance in the Ethiopian Empire, 1880-1974: The Case of Arsi Oromo* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), pp. 111-136

⁵³Mennasemay, "*Adwa: A Dialogue*, p. 43

*At the time of their early invasions, the Galla were a tribal people, agricultural in good part but with a strong pastoral tradition and adhering to local tribal religions. They contributed little in the way of material arts to the Ethiopian society of which they gradually became a part. They did, however, modify the Amhara population. Many became Christians and later participated in the imperial government, but they did not quite lose their identity as Galla. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, their continuing conflict with the Amhara Tigre peoples contributed to the isolation and depression that marked Ethiopian society in that period.*⁶⁰

Another great intention of ethno-nationalist writers is coinciding Oromia with the 19th century Ethiopian settler colonial empire. They considered the nation-building process similar to the European scramble for Africa. Based on these writers, modern Ethiopia is formed by colonizing and exploiting Oromos in collaboration with Abyssinians or Habshas and foreign powers.⁶¹ The Oromo ethno nationalist writers linked Emperor Menelik's territorial expansion with the scramble of Africa. They argued that the expedition and peacemaking procedures and the interaction between the newly occupied areas and Menelik's army are similar to racist policies of oppressive European colonial action in Africa.⁶²

The modernization and nation building process is highly politicized and ethnicized by challenging expressions such as genocide, colonialism, terrorism and ethnic cleansing assumed inflicted upon the Oromo people.⁶³ However, different writers including Donald Levin contended that Menelik's territorial occupation protected the Oromo people from the invasion of European colonizers.⁶⁴ Emperor Menelik served as the architect of Adwa victory and the pride of all blacks across the globe. Despite his great debt, ethno nationalist writers and colonial agents have been cast him a black imperialist and domestic colonialist. Paulos and Getachew highly criticized the ethno-nationalist point of view on Menelik's

territorial expansion.⁶⁵ Among the Oromo ethno nationalist writers Merara wrote about Menelik's modernization derived in the post nation building period.⁶⁶

The statues have been constructed in Ethiopia since ancient times. The ancient Ethiopians built the statue to represent their civilization and spiritual practice.⁶⁷ On the contrary, TPLF built statues to provoke hatred, animosity and resentment in the young generation against the Amhara. In line with Menelik's nation building and modernization, some Oromo ethnonationalists publicize less constructive, no evidenced and paradoxical past events as common facts. For instance, the territorial expansion towards the Arsi people is obviously subjected for misunderstood.⁶⁸ Like any other conflict in the world, human causalities and economic disintegration is expected on both sides. This human causality appeared at Azule. Nonetheless, the event is politicized and new story narration is shaped connecting with a place named Anole in Arsi. In the 1990s, the politicization of this fictional event paved the way for the built of the statue of cutting off hands and breasts came to represent the symbol of Oromos subjugation.⁶⁹

To keep the psychological blow of the Amhara, TPLF built a fault statue in Bahr Dar town to commemorate members of the Amhara National Democratic Movement (ANDM). The statue is a symbolic misrepresentation of a historic Amhara courage. In this sculpture, an elderly man is shown with his arm downwards and standing in shame. This is meant to represent the death and humiliation of Amharan monarchy and *neftega*. After the downfall of EPRDF/TPLF regime, the statue has to pull downed and demolished in 2020. Until recent times, ethno governmental officials used public cultural events or festivals as a forum for political propaganda to recount false narratives about the country's past, particularly its nation building process. Shimels Abdisa, the president of the Oromia Region, delivered a controversial speech in public during the celebration of *Erecha* two which was celebrated for the first time in Addis Ababa on October 4, 2019, due to political motivations. He mistakenly recounted how Oromo youths were broken and humiliated in Addis Ababa before 150 years.⁷⁰

Reunification

⁶⁰Irving Kaplan, *Area of Hand Book For Ethiopia* (Washington: DA Pam 550-28, August 31, 1970),p.42

⁶¹AsafaJalata, "Ethiopia and Ethnic Politics: the Case of Oromo Nationalism," *Dialectical Anthropology*, Vol. 18, No. 3/4 (December, 1993), p.382

⁶²Asefa, *The Oromo Movement*,p.1

⁶³Mohammed Hassen, "Tyanny and Ethnocide against the Oromo: A Historical Assessment of Human Rights Conditions in Ethiopia, ca. 1880s-2002," *Northeast African Studies*, New Series, Vol. 9, No. 3, (2002), pp. 17-19,Lubie, p.93.

⁶⁴Donald Levin, *Wax and Gold: Tradition and Innovation in Ethiopian Culture*(Chicago: the University of Chicago press, 1965), p.4

⁶⁵PaulosMilkias and GetachewMetaferia (Eds.), *The Battle of Adwa: Reflections on Ethiopia's Historic Victory against European Colonialism* (New York: Algora Publishing, 2005), p.170

⁶⁶Merara, p.4

⁶⁷MulualemDaba, "The Political and Historical Representation of Statues in three Ethiopian Consecutive Regimes (1889 - Present)," *Journal of Social Sciences*, Vol. 6, No. 2, (2017), p. 36

⁶⁸Yared, p.274

⁶⁹Mulualem, p.16

⁷⁰Yared, p.1274

Under the proponents of modernization and reunification view, Emperor Menelik's territorial expansion to the southern, southwest and southeast parts of the nation was different from the European colonial scramble in Africa. Regarding their argument, the territorial expansion of emperor Menelik to the southern parts of the nation was aimed to expand modern technology and protect the Ethiopian people from the harsh colonial invasion of Europeans. In addition, his motive was also to reoccupy the lands that had been grabbed in the earlier centuries. Accordingly, Menelik reincorporated into the lands that have been invaded by the Oromos during medieval times. Donald Levin claimed;

*The Amhara were to some extent merely reconquering lands that had been taken from them in earlier centuries. Furthermore, they needed additional strength to help withstand threats to their own independence. Finally, it can also be argued that if the Amhara had not conquered the other peoples now within the Ethiopian boundaries some European power might have colonized them instead.*⁷¹

Lewis and Jewell clearly stated that the Oromo began their enormous invasion of Ethiopia in the sixteenth century. Particularly they controlled large areas of the northern parts.⁷² This view refers to the Oromos invaded an extensive areas of territories forcefully. This historical event served as a fundamental reason why the proponents of the reunification view seriously contended that Menelik reoccupied the lands which were historically under a similar political entity.⁷³

Paulos Milkias also briefly explained that,

*Throughout the next decade, Menelik engineered Ethiopia's return into the southern and western regions that had been abandoned in the 17th century when the kingdoms of Ifat, Dawaro, Fatagar, and Damot were swept away by the swift tide of Oromo warrior-age groups known as Lubas.*⁷⁴

Before the expedition, there was fierce tribal conflict among the Oromo's several clans over matters of honour and social necessity. Therefore, Arsi and its surroundings have experienced some degree of peace as a result of the incorporation. He tolerated Muslim subjects during his rule. To handle disputes occurring among Ethiopia's

Muslim community, he established special courts. He liberalized the country's stance on religion and showed Muslims respect in the Ethiopian Empire.⁷⁵

Crumey argued that Menelik II served as the founding father of the modern Ethiopian empire. He demarcated the present boundaries of the nation.⁷⁶ Several expeditions were led by Menelik and his generals to conquer Somalia, Kefa, Gurage, Welamo, Kembata, Borena, and Harerge. In many parts of his expedition, Menelik and his generals' utilized force to enlarge the empire. However, some local rulers were offered the option to submit peacefully. For instance, Aba Jifar of Jima prevented Menelik's army from crossing his territory by submitting and agreeing to pay an annual tribute and actively supporting the emperor's efforts to control Kefa. As a result, Aba Jifar was given local autonomy. Arsi and Welega also submitted peacefully, realizing that facing Menelik's superior army was futile. However, Welamo was devastated. King Tona was captured after Welamo refused to submit. Menelik appointed his trusted commanders to serve as governors, ensuring complete control over the occupied territories. The majority of the army who took part in the conquest of the south and east settled in newly established garrison cities. Significant land redistribution and serf (or gebbar) allotment took place to assist Menelik's troops in establishing long term settlements. Menelik started his expansionist strategy, when he was the king of Shewa. His objectives looked to be both strategic and financial. To finance his modernization efforts and to purchase modern European armaments, Menelik needs access to the rich regions of the south and east, which are renowned for their coffee, ivory, gold, and civet gum. A major concern of Menelik was the security of his kingdom. He felt that he should establish a buffer zone between the highland regions and the territories occupied by the Europeans including the British, French, and Italians were around him. Additionally, he desired safe sea access for trade through Zeila, Aseb, and Obock.⁷⁷

Modernization

The proponents of modernization and reunification view enthusiastically argued that Menelik enlarged his territory to expand modernization across the nation. They contended that during the times of Zemene Mesafint, Ethiopia has gradually been demolished by the rise of local lords, princes and kings, joined in fierce rivalry for

⁷¹Levin, *Wax and Gold*..., p.4

⁷²I. M. and P. A. Jewell, "The Peoples and Cultures of Ethiopia [and Discussion]" *Proceedings of the Royal Society of London, Series B, Biological Sciences*, Vol. 194, No.1114 (1976), p. 8

⁷³Ayele, p.4

⁷⁴Paulos, p.51

⁷⁵Mulatu and Yohannes, p.14

⁷⁶Donald Crummey, *Land and Society in the Christian Kingdom of Ethiopia: From the Thirteenth to the Twentieth Century*(Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000), P.205

⁷⁷Mulatu and Yohanis, pp.13-14, Paulos, p.51

power supremacy.⁷⁸ The powerful Emperor Tewodros II, nevertheless, realized the dream of a unified and modern Ethiopia. Menelik developed an understanding of Tewodros' fascination with foreign technology and the consequences of the empire's fragmentation.⁷⁹ Tewodros set up a salaried army and administration, judicial and civil service contingents.⁸⁰ Emperor Menelik II was an expansionist and modernizer. He increased the size of the empire by three times by integrating the surrounding populations.⁸¹ Menelik therefore diligently concentrated on maintaining sovereignty through military skill and national unity.⁸² Ethiopian victory at the Battle of Adwa in 1896 put an end to the Italians' attack attempt. Menelik protected Ethiopia's sovereignty based on his foreign strategy following Adwa's triumph.⁸³ One of the diplomatic challenges of Menelik was the tripartite treaty between the three imperial powers, France, Britain, and Italy, which was formed in 1906 to protect their conflicting interests over the Nile and the geopolitical strategy in the horn of Africa. This was the major colonial threat to Ethiopia after the battle of Adwa.⁸⁴

The beginning of modern Ethiopian history was marked with the coronation of Emperor Tewodros II in 1855. Ethiopia is viewed as in command of its modernization and development program because it is the only indigenous African nation that avoided colonization. The majority of African nations view modernization and prosperity as byproducts of colonialism.⁸⁵ Tewodros was the main politician who sought to unify Ethiopia under a powerful central authority and put an end to the polarizing politics of the *Zemene Mesafint*. His policy of unification was linked to modernization, another crucial concern. Tewodros also made an effort to implement land and religious reforms.⁸⁶ He also put an end to polygamy, robbery, enslavement, and the slave trade.⁸⁷ He also

developed Amharic literary.⁸⁸ To place Ethiopia on an equal footing with European nations, he specifically tried to import European technology. All of his predecessors followed his aim for the recognition of Ethiopian independence.⁸⁹ Like Emperor Tewodros II, Menelik II prioritized recognizing the value of modern infrastructure. He established public service organizations and begun the construction of Franco-Ethiopian railroad (1897–1917), although it wasn't finished until after his passing.⁹⁰ Modern Ethiopian boundaries were delaminated by Menelik II.⁹¹

Sergew argued that Menelik had made several steps to reinforce and modernize his territory. In his work entitled *Dagimawi Menelik Ya Adisy Silitane Mesrach* stated the major modernization activities of emperor Menelik. The first Menelik coin (Grish) was minted in Paris in 1894, and the second one was minted in 1897, ushering in the use of the money for commercial transactions. He introduced health post, drug stores, modern schools, electric, telegraph, car, bicycle, minted currency, banks, corrugated iron, beer factory and others.⁹² He had recognized his capital in Addis Ababa. As a result, a genuine urban center emerged throughout the nation. Additionally, he had contracted with a French business to construct the Addis Ababa to Djibouti railroad, which was finished in 1917. Menelik made an effort to abolish the slave trade and put an end to feudal aristocracy during his reign.⁹³ Tekletsadik argued that his tireless effort was spent on the construction of numerous roads and bridges, such as the Abay (Blue Nile) Bridge and tar roads connecting Addis Ababa with the other regional towns. Telephone, telegraph, car, and electricity lines were introduced between 1897 and 1908.⁹⁴ The first national bank was founded in 1905 and operated by the Egyptian government as the Bank of Abyssinia.⁹⁵

To sum up, the proponents of the modernization thesis contended that Emperor Tewodros II was a pioneer in voluntarily promoting modernization, but the British colonial power sabotaged his efforts. King Menelik carried on the modernization agenda of Tewodros II. Emperor Haile Selassie I also expanded the

⁷⁸E.A Wallis Budge, *A History of Ethiopia: Nubia and Abyssinia*, Volume two(London: Methuen& CO. LTD,1928), pp.483-488

⁷⁹BerhanuAbegaz, *A Tributary Model of State Formation, Ethiopia 1600-2015* (Williamsburg: Springer International Publishing, 2018), P.ix, Christopher Clapham, *Transformation and Continuity in Revolutionary Ethiopia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University press, 1988), p.27

⁸⁰PaulosMilkias, *Ethiopia* (Santa Barabara: ABC-CLIO, 2011), P.48

⁸¹Ben Panker and AbarahamWoldeGiorgis, *Ethiopia* (UK: Oxfam,1995), P.10

⁸²Thomas P. Ofcansky and LaVerleBer, *Ethiopia: A Country Study* (Washington: Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data, July, 1991),p.29

⁸³Paulos, p.51

⁸⁴Kaplan, p.52, Paulos, p.52, Marcus, p. 571

⁸⁵Ben Panker and AbarahamWoldeGiorgis, P.11

⁸⁶Ofcansky and LaVerleBer, *Ethiopia: A Country Study*.....pp.27-28

⁸⁷Kaplan, P.45

⁸⁸BahruZewude, *A History of Modern Ethiopia*...., pp.33-34

⁸⁹*Ibid*, p.12

⁹⁰Gordon, p.28, Ofcansky and LaVerleBer, *Ethiopia*.....p.30, p.52

⁹¹Irving Kaplan, *Area of Hand Book For Ethiopia* (Washington: DA Pam, August 31, 1970),P.24

⁹²SergewHablesilassie, *DagimawiMenelikYaAdisySilitaneMesrach*, (Guetenburg: Guttenberg Printing press, 2003), pp.303-431

⁹³Carol Ann Gillespie, *Ethiopia* (Chelsea: Infobase Publishing, 2003),P.52

⁹⁴TeketsadikMekuria, *AtseMenelikenaYa Ethiopia Andenet*(Addis Ababa: Kuraz Printing press, 1983) p.593, Peter P. Garretson, "Ethiopia's Telephone and Telegraph System, 1897-1935,"*Northeast African Studies*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (Spring 1980), pp. 59-60

⁹⁵Bahru, *A History of Modern Ethiopia*....., p.102

modernization goal, embraced Western educational systems, and institutionalized bureaucracy to solidify Ethiopia's independence and his power.⁹⁶

CONCLUSION

In this part of the paper, it is essential to examine the contending views regarding Emperor Menelik's expedition towards different parts of the nation. For instance, it is obvious that despite contending issues, the existence of this literature played a pivotal role to fill the gap in Ethiopian historiography.

The first view is the nation builders view which is written by a large number of Ethiopian and foreign historians. Under the proponents of modernization and reunification view, Emperor Menelik's territorial expansion to the southern, southwest and southeast parts of the nation was different from the European colonial scramble in Africa. Based on their argument, the territorial expansion of emperor Menelik to the southern parts of the nation was aimed to expand modern technology and protect the Ethiopian people from the harsh colonial invasion of Europeans. By and large, their works are used by researchers as a background for further study either in the same issue or related topics to fill the existing gap of historiography.

The second point of view is the narrative that dominates by recent Oromo nationalists. The Oromo nationalists argued that the Amhara-Oromo relationship in the past was similar to the European African colonial relationship. Many of Oromo extremist's false narrations are against the truth and not supported by historical facts and evidences. One thing the readers should be aware on the Amhara ruling system is the Oromo notably the Oromo elites were involved in the establishment of nation building. Ethno-nationalist writers have fabricated a variety of narrations to undermine the long-standing integrity of the country. It has been done deliberately to undermine Ethiopianism among the Oromos. There are now several Oromo extremist politicians and writers who are active hatemongers of these false narrations and spreading toxic propaganda to shape the current Oromo generation, with opposing outcomes on the integrity of modern Ethiopia. The Oromo ethno-centric writers should be aware that economic disintegration and human causalities that reached during internal conflicts are also common histories. In spite of some variations in its degree, all Ethiopians paid cost. At last, the two proponent scholars and their contended interpretations still highly affected the historiography of Ethiopia.

⁹⁶*Ibid*, p.14

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