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The Battle for The Battle of Adwa: Collective Identity and Nation-Building

Joseph Steward

May 2020

Master's Thesis

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“I beg your majesty to defend me against everyone as I don’t know what European kings will say about this. Let others know that this region is ours.” - Emperor Menelik II

Abstract

On March 1st, 1896, an Ethiopian army lead by Emperor Menelik II dealt a shocking defeat to the invading Italian forces in the Battle of Adwa. In victory, Menelik was able to exert his authority over a vast territory which included both the historical, ancient kingdoms of the northern and central parts of Ethiopia, and also the vast, resource-rich territories in the west and south which he had earlier conquered. The egalitarian nature of the victory united the various peoples of Ethiopia against a common enemy, giving Menelik the opportunity to create a new Ethiopian nation.

The Battle of Adwa represents a pivotal moment in the evolution of the nation of Ethiopia. That evolution stretches back 3,000 years, and through its long history of nation-building, Ethiopian nationalism has evolved along with the nation. Throughout this process, the melding together of various ethnic groups into a singular nation has created a nation with some very serious divisions along ethnic lines. Since the creation of the modern Ethiopian state, these groups have been held together as a nation by use of a wide array of tactics, with none more useful than the collective memory of the Battle of Adwa, and what it means to the Ethiopian people. The argument of this thesis is that Adwa has served the state of Ethiopia, in three different eras of government, with a tool with which it can use in nation-building work, allowing each to shape the country in their own visions, while maintaining the loyalties of the people. A second part of my argument examines the resistance to the national narrative of Adwa, and to general resistance to the rule of the Ethiopian government by periphery groups, many of which had been conquered and incorporated into the Ethiopian state.

The research was organized into three separate sections, each representing an era of a different government type. The first looks at the Imperial era, a vast stretch of time in which many of the foundations of the Ethiopian nation emerged. The second looks at the Derg regime era, which was a Marxist military dictatorship which seized power in 1974. The third section covers the era of the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front, and government formed by a separatist group which managed to overthrow the Derg government in 1991. Each section looks at the important timeline of events during each era, and then connects that to efforts taken by each government type to utilize, tap into, or manipulate the powerful loyalties which Ethiopians feel towards the Battle of Adwa. This thesis seeks to show how each of these government types attempted to use Adwa, or the collective nature of the way it has been remembered, as a tool of nation-building. Adwa has become an essential element of Ethiopian nationalism, and each of the three governments studied realized the unifying power of this event and used that to craft the nation in their respective visions.

Keywords: Ethiopian Nationalism, Nation-Building, The Battle of Adwa, Menelik II, Haile Selassie I, Mengistu Hailemariam, Meles Zenawi, Italy, Nation-Building Tool.

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Introduction

This thesis will examine the case of Ethiopia as a unique example of nation-building and the development of nationalism and national identity. Specifically, the project will study how nationalism has developed in Ethiopia, with a focus on an event of particular significance to the development and evolution of modern Ethiopian nationalism. The event to be considered is the Battle of Adwa, a clash between the Italian military and a collection of different ethnic military forces which, in victory, would eventually come to be known collectively as “Ethiopians.”

Undoubtedly, Ethiopia is a unique nation with a unique history. Located in the horn of Africa, it proudly boasts the distinction of being one of only two African nations to have never been colonized, the other being Liberia. If you pose the question to an Ethiopian, “what makes your country special,” you almost invariably will hear that Ethiopia was never colonized. While almost every territory on the African continent had succumbed to European colonial domination, determined Ethiopians had managed to retain their independence. If you ask how this was, you can expect a one-word answer: Adwa. The Battle of Adwa, fought between the Italian army and a consolidated Ethiopian force led by King Menelik II, took place on March 1, 1896 at Adwa, a significant trading town in the northern province of Tigray. The Ethiopians routed the Italians, defeating them soundly and forced them into a peace treaty which sent shockwaves throughout the world. The significance of this victory has been written on extensively, as have the tactical and political maneuvers of the events leading up to the battle and the battle itself. My interest in the subject is to seek answers to questions concerning the legacy of this battle, and how this event has been framed and celebrated by the state as a tool of state building. Specifically, I ask why the

Battle of Adwa was so useful as a state-building tool to the Ethiopian state in forging a national identity. Additionally, I ask why has the narrative surrounding Adwa, and more specifically, being “Ethiopian,” has been a source of resistance to certain groups, and how has this challenge to Ethiopian unity has called into question the legacy of Adwa? In asking these questions, I will examine the uniqueness which the case of Ethiopia represents in the broader theoretical work on nationalism, as well as the simultaneous duality of how this event has impacted Ethiopian nationalism. My research question seeks answers to questions involving the creation of a new state. Like many newly formed states, the ability to develop some unifying feature is a useful tool in state building. Successful wars and revolutions have often served as that rallying point around which unity has been developed and around which legitimacy of a new government has come to be recognized, or at least accepted, by those under their control.

In the case of Ethiopia, it is undeniable that the Battle of Adwa has served that function. In recent years, however, cracks in that foundation of unity have begun to appear. Aside from the legacy of Adwa, the legacy of Menelik II also looms large in the national consciousness of Ethiopia. He is a figure who in every imaginable way occupies a similar stratum as George Washington does in US history. He is considered by many to be the father of modern Ethiopia, and no debate about Ethiopia’s greatest leaders would exclude him from the conversation. Like Washington or other founding fathers of the United States, his legacy is also being re-examined by current scholars interested in understanding and in some cases, setting the record straight, on the political and social legacy of the Menelik II and his famous victory at Adwa, and what it has meant for the diverse communities of Ethiopia.

An important aspect of my research will be the examination of three distinct time periods of Ethiopian history, and how each has added to the evolving nationalism in Ethiopia throughout

history. First, the imperial history will be examined, up to and including the reign and fall of the last Emperor of Ethiopia, Haile Selassie. The next time period will look at the Derg regime, led by Colonel Mengistu Hailemariam, which overthrew and deposed Haile Selassie in 1974. The Derg remained in power until 1991, when they were themselves overthrown by the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front. Each time period represents very different forms of government, and so it is worth examining them independently. It is also a worthy research approach as each form of government grappled with the notion of cultivating and maintaining a unified Ethiopian identity as a way of maintaining compliance and retaining legitimacy in the eyes of Ethiopian citizens.

As this is a project on nationalism and nation-building at its core, the literature review will include three seminal works on the subject to lay the ground work and provide a baseline range of theory where the case of Ethiopia will be placed into. I will begin with Reinhardt Bendix's classic, *Nation-Building and Citizenship: Studies of our Changing Social Order*.¹ Next, I will look at what is the seminal work in the series I have chosen, Benedict Anderson's immensely important *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*.² Finally, I will bookend the series on nationalism with Lisa Wedeen's refreshing update on nationalism, *Peripheral Visions: Publics, Power, and Performance in Yemen*.³

Ethiopia now sits at a crossroads, potentially. They elected a new prime minister in a procedural vote named Dr. Abiy Ahmed Ali to replace Hailemariam Desalegn, who stepped down in February of 2018. Dr. Abiy has a difficult task ahead of him. Ethiopia has been in a state of

¹ Bendix, Richard. *Nation-Building and Citizenship: Studies of Our Changing Social Order*. Doubleday, 1964.

² Anderson, Benedict R. O.G. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. Verso, 2016

³ Wedeen, Lisa. *Peripheral Visions: Publics, Power, and Performance in Yemen*. University of Chicago Press, 2008.

turmoil for roughly eight years now, with protest groups demanding that the government recognize their rights and their autonomy, and even their right to independence in some cases.⁴ Ethnic violence has flared, and clashes with government forces have resulted in the deaths of many protesters, many of them students. These protests have been led primarily by ethnic Oromos, the largest single ethnic group in all of East Africa, but other ethnic groups have also pressed their own claims. The social fissures and political cleavages occurring now are a source of great concern, as the prospect of multi-sided civil war heightens.

It is in this political environment that I hope my research will provide answers to understanding how the state was socially constructed, and how Adwa, as unifying point of pride, has connected the various peoples of Ethiopia and served as a backbone of social cohesion over the years. Additionally, I hope that my research will provide answers for why this narrative surrounding a unifying “Ethiopian” identity has been resisted by various groups on the periphery of the state, and how resistance has been undertaken. Ultimately, my project will explore these broad questions about nation and state building – and subsequent resistance to these processes – through the specific case of Ethiopia, a multiethnic country that simultaneously takes pride in its never having been colonized yet has seen constant ethnic tensions that have threatened to pull the country apart.

⁴ See Allo, Awol for an overview on the Oromo protests.

Literature Review

This project, while focused specifically on the case of Ethiopia, is at its core a project on nationalism. As stated in the introduction, my interest is, after careful study on how the legacy of the Battle of Adwa has been an integral part of solidifying a unified, Ethiopian identity, and to foment loyalty among the citizenry to the state. Theories of nation-building and the development of nationalism are wide-ranging and diverse. I have chosen three authors whose works on the subject each represent an evolution of thought as a theoretical basis on the development of nationalism. I begin with Reinhardt Bendix's *Nation-Building and Citizenship: Studies of our Changing Social Order*. Next, I consider what is the seminal work in the series I have chosen, Benedict Anderson's immensely important *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. Finally, I bookend the series with Lisa Wedeen's refreshing update on nationalism, *Peripheral Visions: Publics, Power, and Performance in Yemen*. Taken as a series, these three works represent a dialogue which increasingly expands our understanding as each build upon past theories with more nuanced research. Each is concerned with the ways in which nationalism develops during the processes of nation-building, and how this enhances loyalties to a state. My research, using Ethiopia as a case study, aspires to add to this dialogue, noting how, as an individual case, the development of its national identity fits into the theories put forth by these three authors. The unique history and circumstances which have led to the current nationalist sentiment in Ethiopia, whatever it may be, adds to the overall understanding of the subject, so it is my hope that this research might contribute some valuable insight to the field.

Reinhardt Bendix's book was first published in 1964, just on the heels of the decolonization period. As such, there were quite a few countries in both Asia and Africa which faced the task of

building states and crafting national identities. *Nation-Building and Citizenship* took a historical view of how nationalism had developed in Western Europe, and then tested his concepts against several contemporary cases at the time. Bendix argues that nationalism was an outcome of the process of state formation. As states developed, citizens' feelings of national belonging grew as an inherent by-product. This is a key point to his theory, the notion of citizenship. From the perspective of examining how nationalism developed in Western Europe, the status of citizenship is the fundamental transformation in society from feudal systems to nation-states. Bendix notes, "Therefore, a core element of nation-building is the codification of the rights and duties of all adults who are classified as citizens. The question is how exclusively or inclusively citizenship is defined."⁵ For Bendix, the development of nationalism hinged on a more inclusive relationship between citizens and the state, which would have the effect of binding citizens to the state by offering more of a stake in the state's success. This early theory on nationalism has stood as a key work in the field, having been by now cited in countless other works, and having been used as a steppingstone to furthering other theories. For my project, Bendix's assessment on the development of nationalism in the nation-building process offers an elemental starting point. The rough processes he describes can be applied to the case of Ethiopia but lack the required nuance to fully explain the development of nationalism there. His work was centered around events and processes as they occurred in Europe, which could be a limitation when examining a case like Ethiopia, with its different cultural and historical experiences to weigh in. The primary point, however, which links the development of nationalism to the degree which one feels connected to the state, certainly hold relevance to the Ethiopian case.

⁵ Bendix, Richard. *Nation-Building and Citizenship: Studies of Our Changing Social Order*. Doubleday, 1964. Pg. 7

Benedict Anderson, in his now widely acclaimed classic, *Imagined Communities*, builds out on the theories proposed by Reinhardt Bendix exploring variables which he identified as having specifically aided in the development on nationalism during nation-building processes which Bendix proposed. First published in 1983, *Imagined Communities* has become one of if not the most influential books on nationalism. His premise was that nations are social constructs, that they exist in the minds of men and women as a nexus of psychology and culture. Benedict proposed the definition of a nation to be “an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign.”⁶ These two characteristics have important implications for the development and spread of nationalism. That a nation is limited speaks to the finite nature of nations. They end somewhere, and other nations exist outside the ‘borders’ of any nation. A nation, as an imagined political community, sees itself as such, and recognizes something as having an effect of creating a commonality among its members, distinct from others outside of its ‘nation.’ “It is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion.”⁷

Anderson’s central theory on nationalism lays the groundwork for how he says nationalism develops and has developed historically. Like Reinhardt Bendix, Anderson saw the development of nationalism as a linear process which takes place over time. Just as Bendix had done, Benedict Anderson tracked the progression of nationalism through a European contextual experience. As a

⁶ Anderson, Benedict R. OG. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. Verso, 2016. Pg. 6

⁷ Anderson, Benedict R. OG. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. Verso, 2016. Pg. 6

part of his theory, he proposed that the emergence of nationalism in Europe could be attributed in large part to the development of the print capitalism, which was then linked to the Protestant Revolution. The Protestant Revolution pushed forward demands for religious materials, the Bible, in particular, to be printed in languages other than the elite Latin version. This became possible with the invention of the printing press. Increasing literacy rates across Western Europe followed, which allowed for the ideas of being a part of some nation, solidified by cultural links including distinct languages, to take root. The religious bonds which had formerly connected disparate populations was slowly replaced by communities of culturally similar peoples who were now sharing ideas and experiences in languages which had a more intimate feel than the language of the church. Benedict's theories on the importance of events or periods of transformation more closely apply to the case of Ethiopia than Bendix work. He digs more deeply into the specific issues involved. Ethiopia has experienced over time a development of nationalism through transformative processes, and those processes, and the catalysts for those processes, are at the heart of Anderson's work. The final point of interest for my project is Anderson's position that nationalism emerges in an environment where the state is strong enough to be an attractive force that will draw people to it, politically and ideologically. This is a similar position to Bendix's assertion of the crucial nature of citizenship in the emergence of nationalism and is again an important aspect in considering the case for my research.

Lisa Wedeen expounds on previous theories, while also breaking new ground in her book, *Peripheral Visions*, published in 2008. It is based on an ethnographic study conducted in Yemen. Her book breaks with past theories on nationalism in ways which broaden our overall understanding of the topic, but also contextually layers past theories. First and foremost, her theories come out of studies which do not have a Euro-centric foundation. For my project on

Ethiopia, this is a key feature which makes her work especially relevant to me. Much of the literature on nation-building and the development of nationalism implies that a theory which might apply to a specific case in Europe should apply universally, disregarding the variances in culture, historical experience, or circumstances specific to a particular case, country or region. Wedeen's work examining nation-building processes in Yemen provides a useful perspective to a study on Ethiopia. It should be noted that the cultural linkage between Yemen and Ethiopia, which share regional and historical cultural ties, further supports the use of Wedeen's work for my project. With this distinction established, her theories on nationalism show a pattern which diverges in important ways from that of Bendix and Anderson. While she agrees that nationalism develops over time, she upends the conventional theory that it does so in a linear fashion. She shows that major or dramatic events during a nations' history can have a profound impact on the development of nationalism.

As evidence, she highlights three events in recent Yemeni history which have had a unifying effect on the citizenry. The presidential elections of 1999, the ten-year anniversary celebration of Yemen's unification, and the collective reaction to a serial killer, and the government's response. Much like Anderson's proposed link of nationalism to print capitalism, Wedeen highlights the role in print and radio media, especially on these three events, in forming a sort of national unity. "...The various practices that exemplify and produce specific assemblages of fellow readers and listeners who, whatever the content of their discourses, nevertheless have come to share (or be perceived to share) the everyday experiences of others within a limited, territorially sovereign space"⁸ She also breaks with past theory in showing that nationalism can

⁸ Wedeen, Lisa. *Peripheral Visions: Publics, Power, and Performance in Yemen*. University of Chicago Press, 2008. Pg. 7

emerge in the absence of strong government or institutions. Both Bendix and Anderson, using European examples from history, made claims that a strong and stable political structure was a necessary element for the emergence of nationalism. Using Yemen as a case study, Wedeen was able to show as evidence an example of an emerging nationalism in a political environment where the government had very little capacity, and few resources with which to promote a unified nationalism.

A third break in past theory, which I anticipate will be very relevant to my project, is Wedeen's claim that nationalism can emerge and co-exist in an environment where there exists strong religious identity. Anderson and Bendix, as central parts to their theories, put forth the notion that in order for nationalism to emerge around the idea of some nation, the religious ties to identity needed to be eliminated or severely scaled back. Nationalism and religious identity were to be thought of as competing entities, at odds with one another for the identities of the citizenry of a nation. In the case of Yemen, Wedeen showed that the two could, in fact, operate together simultaneously. For my project, this is an important point of distinction to consider given the importance of the church in Ethiopian society.

The author's chosen for this literature review each have added to a more complete understanding of nationalism and the process of nation-building. The books chosen are classics in their field. My research will add to this body of thought by considering a variable which is not considered in the three literature selections. The development of nationalism through the nation-building process in Ethiopia required that the state be able to forge a great number of separate identities into a citizenry which would feel some kind of loyalty to the modern state of Ethiopia.

Past research, including the authors chosen for this review, examined societies at times when they were mostly homogenous, sharing common language and other cultural linkages, and guided by a dominant religion. While some of this holds true in the Ethiopian case, there were and still are significant obstacles to social cohesion in Ethiopia which mark it as a unique case to study.

Argument

The victory at Adwa of the Ethiopian forces over the Italian invaders is looked back upon as a key starting point in the creation of the modern Ethiopian state. In victory, a process of consolidation and unification began to take place which would lead to the eventual state of Ethiopia as it exists today. Menelik was not the first to dream of a unified Ethiopian state under a strong, centralized government, but he was the first to fully succeed in making this vision come about in the modern, nation-state era. He did this through a combination of crafty diplomacy, brutal ambition, and clever statesmanship. Under his reign, the Ethiopian state set its international borders through a series of treaties and folded into his empire vast lands in the south and the west, while at the same time absorbing the peoples of those conquered lands. In doing so, the ethnic diversity of peoples under the control of Menelik's government expanded dramatically, presenting a new challenge to this fledgling nation-state. In a singular political unit ruling over a population with such a range of ethnic diversity, particularly in an area of the world where the histories of those various peoples stretch back so far in time, how could this government bring about a sense of unity and instill a sense of Ethiopian identity which would supersede previously existing ethnic identities and loyalties?

I argue that the victory at the Battle of Adwa has served this nation-building function, and provided the state, through successive governments and government types, a useful tool in establishing and maintaining an identity for the people which would encourage loyalty to the state. The Battle of Adwa performs this nation-building work because it has taken on an almost mythical status in the collective psyche of Ethiopia, and it cuts across ethnic lines in ways which no other event in Ethiopia's history does. The sense of pride which Ethiopians feel about this event, and

their history within the African colonial context, is a core element of Ethiopian nationalism. In brief, being a multi-ethnic state which was created in part by the conquer and incorporation into the state of periphery groups, resistance to the narrative of Adwa being a foundational event in creating “Ethiopian” identity has and continues to challenge what it is to be Ethiopian for many people who find themselves under the control of the Ethiopian state. Very few people in Ethiopia would challenge the validity of the actual events which occurred during the run-up and execution of the battle. Indeed, almost every ethnic group expresses their pride in having been a part of the battle, and what it meant for the peoples of Ethiopia to remain free from European colonization and domination.

Yet, even as Ethiopia represents a unique case within Africa and the recognition which was afforded to Ethiopia after the battle is a source of pride for Ethiopians, Adwa did not happen in a vacuum. Almost simultaneously to the conflict with Italy, Menelik II was establishing an empire within the borders of what is now the state of Ethiopia by conquering weaker groups. In fact, the forces which successfully defeated the Italians were partially created by conquered peoples who were pressed into military service by force, and many other soldiers were committed to Menelik’s army by leaders who felt compelled to acquiesce to Menelik’s demands for both fighters and allegiance to his burgeoning empire. After the battle, Menelik established Ethiopia as a unified state, whose borders were set by agreements with all the surrounding colonial powers in the region. By this sort of international recognition and agreement, his position as the undisputed highest source of political power in Ethiopia allowed him to take the title of Negus, the Emperor of all of Ethiopia.

For many of the peoples who now found themselves incorporated into the state, but certainly not extended the rights of full citizens, this situation was tantamount to being colonized. Many of the periphery groups, especially the Oromos and the Gambellans, have experienced being “Ethiopian” as subjects rather than citizens, which has led to the rejection of being “Ethiopian”. As Wedeen (2008) pointed out about Yemen, there have been and continue to be different layers of loyalty in terms of identity. Many of the conquered peoples, while “Ethiopian” to the international world, have always maintained closer ties to their ethnic identities. Combined with the state’s historic inability to spread the benefits of being a part of the state to much of the areas under their control, internal resistance to the notion of “Ethiopian” identity has been constant since the establishment of the state. In the past five to ten years, this type of conflict of identity, coupled with opposition to government policies regarding land use, has led to an explosion of protests and vocal opposition to what many groups consider ongoing oppression.

As a case study, Ethiopia adds to the theoretical literature on the spectrum of nationalism theories, lying somewhere in between Anderson and Wedeen’s theories, and leaning more closely to Wedeen. Parts of the timeline about how Ethiopian nationalism has developed over time will align with Anderson’s theories, especially the concept of an imagined community existing among a population which is approaching 100 million people, and spread out over vast and disparate geography. Also, contemporary Ethiopian nationalism was not an overnight phenomenon. It has taken the state many centuries to establish themselves as the legitimate guardian of Ethiopian identity. Despite this relationship between ongoing processes of state formation and national identity, the Battle of Adwa served as an initial event that put Ethiopia on a trajectory which served as a disruption to other identities, and was useful in forging a new identity for the citizens of the fledgling, yet ancient state.

Research Design

Ethiopian nationalism is a phenomenon which has developed over thousands of years. From a theoretical perspective, the Ethiopian nation has developed in a linear fashion, as Reinhart Bendix proposed in *Nation-Building and Citizenship: Studies of our Changing Social Order*. The development of an essential Ethiopian identity has been the result of several thousand years, highlighted by events which have had a bonding effect on the various peoples of the region. In this sense, Lisa Wedeen's *Peripheral Visions*, is supported by the case of Ethiopia. This theory is buttressed significantly by analyzing how the Battle of Adwa has been folded into the nationalism of Ethiopia, and how this singular event has been used as a tool of nation-building and maintenance of the nation-state since the battle was won.

This analysis is broken down into three logical, separate parts. The first section examines the historical roots of an Ethiopian nation, including the Battle of Adwa, and extending up until the deposition of the last of the Solomonic Emperors, His Imperial Majesty Haile Selassie I. This period covers the foundations of the Ethiopian nation, the impactful events and developments, the facts and significance of the Battle of Adwa, and the early markers of the Battle as a nation-building tool. This section encompasses a vast portion of the historical timeline and has been grouped this way to differentiate itself from the following two sections, which each cover a more modern time period with distinct forms of government. As this section covers such an expansive time period both in terms of time and historical substance, much of the background given will be brief, but also thorough. An understanding of how nationalism has evolved in Ethiopia requires quite a bit of background, but there is enough information there to write an infinite number of theses. For this thesis, a timeline of the important events and how they've shaped Ethiopian nationalism will suffice. This thesis is a historical research project meant to produce suggestive

findings, particularly in relation to how Adwa has imprinted itself, and been purposely imprinted onto the collective psyche of Ethiopians. Upon completing the background analysis, the evidence used to support my hypothesizes examines historical records on how the state marked the occasion of the Battle of Adwa; the messaging, commemorations and celebrations of the battle, and examine the erection of statues and other monuments dedicated to either the Battle or to King Menelik II.

The second section of analysis focuses on the Marxist Revolutionary Derg regime, which ruled the country from 1974 to 1987, after deposing Haile Selassie I and seizing power in a military coup. The Derg then morphed into the People's Democratic Republic of Ethiopia after a referendum in 1987. Here, the thesis is more sharply focused on how the modern, post-Imperial state of Ethiopia observed, celebrated, and projected onto its citizens the memory of the Battle of Adwa, and how these tactics helped to tighten the notion of citizenship, and allegiance to the state. Resistance to the state and to Ethiopian nationalism by periphery groups will also be examined in this section, as resistance and the governments' reaction to resistance adds to the understanding of nationalism in this era. This section also relies on historical records relating to national celebrations, commemorative holidays, and public square commemorations.

The third and final section looks at Ethiopian nationalism under the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front. This government came to power in 1991 as a collection of independent, ethnically organized political movements which were engaged in a civil war against the Derg Regime. They succeeded in overthrowing the Derg in 1991 and have remained in power since then. In terms of nationalism, and its link to the Battle of Adwa, this period represents a departure from the past. The analysis of this period demonstrates a willful disengagement of the government to principals of nationalism held and fostered by past governments. While the Battle of Adwa was not overtly downplayed, it was not celebrated, honored, or rallied around in the ways

which past governments had done so. However, discourse around the Battle was taking place, and messaging produced by the government meant to reshape the significance of the event, and to whom it is or should be significant, has and continues to enter the public sphere. While a marked transition in the discourse does occur, the significance and meaningfulness of the Battle crops up in other ways, and this will be the direction of the analysis in this section. In addition to historical records, this section also takes various academic viewpoints into account regarding the evolving, or perhaps devolving, significance of Adwa and the efficacy of Ethiopian nationalism moving forward.

In studying the development of nationalism, Ethiopia represents a fascinating and unique case study. Clearly, the work of important theorists applies to Ethiopia, even if as a case it fails to fit neatly into any one box. By thinking about theories of nationalism as a defined spectrum, this research shows that Ethiopia does indeed fall on that line, leaning somewhere in between what Benedict Anderson theorizes in *Imagined Communities*, and Lisa Wedeen's conclusions. Additionally, Ethiopia as a case study on nationalism offers a chance to research the formation, emergence, and evolution of a nation into a modern nation-state, in a non-European setting, without the interruption of a colonial period. This unbroken, linear view of how nationalism had developed offers a valuable contribution to existing study on the subject.

Evidence. The Imperial Era

D'mt, Aksum, and the Early Imperial Era

The development of Ethiopian nationalism is a process which stretches back into antiquity. The exact origin of an Ethiopian nation is shrouded in mystery, and debates rage to this day on a range of related issues, including when the name 'Ethiopia' entered the lexicon. What is sure is that this is a process which has both slowly developed over the course of at least 3,000 years, and that, like Weeden asserts, dramatic events, including the Battle of Adwa, have played a role in strengthening this process and the bond of citizens to the different iterations of the state. Ethiopia's history is too vast to go into great detail here, but a thorough study of how nationalism has developed in Ethiopia must include some type of chronological ordering of the events and circumstances which have had an impact on this development.

A starting point for examining a nation of Ethiopia is hard to determine because human beings have lived on this land for so long. Some of the earliest skeletal remains of humans, in various stages of evolution, have been discovered in Ethiopia.⁹ It is also thought that the earliest out-of-Africa migrations departed from this area.¹⁰ So, when did the people of this land begin to recognize themselves as distinct and belonging to this land? Although probably somewhat inconclusive, the Kingdom of D'mt has a logical basis as a starting point. D'mt was established in the Tigray region, in the northern highlands of modern-day Ethiopia, sometime between the 10th

⁹ Kimbel, William H., and Lucas K. Delezenne. "'Lucy' Redux: A Review of Research on Australopithecus Afarensis." *Wiley Online Library*, John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, 3 Nov. 2009, <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1002/ajpa.21183>.

¹⁰ Derricourt, Robin. "Getting 'Out of Africa': Sea Crossings, Land Crossings and Culture in the Hominin Migrations." *SpringerLink*, Springer US, 7 July 2006, <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10963-006-9002-z#citeas>.

and 8th Centuries B.C. This kingdom did not leave behind much in the way of written history or archeological sites which could provide insight. For the purpose of this thesis, the development from this time period which holds the greatest significance is the development of the ancient language of Ge'ez. Ge'ez is a language of the Semitic linguistic tree, and its origins are also quite murky. D'mt is thought by some scholars, such as Stuart Munro-Hay, to be a purely indigenous society,¹¹ while others, like Nadia Durrani, claim that D'mt was the result of a mixture of indigenous peoples and Sabaeans, Semitic speakers from the southern part of the Arabian Peninsula.¹² For those that follow the theory that D'mt was an indigenous society, Sabeian influence on the kingdom is thought to have been injected by the economic and political influence which the Sabaeans possessed over the region at the time. This influence, regardless of the true nature, undoubtedly gave rise to the development and use of Ge'ez in Ethiopia and is therefore an important development in understanding Ethiopian nationalism. The importance that Ge'ez has had as a unifying characteristic of an Ethiopian nation cannot be understated.

A second event from this time period which has greatly impacted the development of Ethiopian nationalism is the legendary tale of the Queen of Sheba. This legend has been and continues to be hotly debated, but its importance to the development of Ethiopia over time is undeniable. The legend goes that a beautiful and equally cunning queen from Ethiopia became enamored with tales of the legendary wisdom of King Solomon of Israel. She journeyed to meet with him, lavishing gifts and praise upon him. Aside from being mystically beautiful, she was also incredibly charming, and soon had the king of Israel captivated. They became lovers, and she bore him a child who was named was Menelik. She also converted to his religion, Judaism. Eventually,

¹¹ Stuart Munro-Hay. *Ethiopia: The Unknown Land*. I.B. Taurus. 2002 pg. 18.

¹² Nadia Durrani, *The Tihamah Coastal Plain of South-West Arabia in its Regional context c. 6000 BC - AD 600* (Society for Arabian Studies Monographs No. 4). Oxford: Archaeopress, 2005, p. 121.

she and her son made the decision to return home. Different versions of the legend have her returning home to different locations, either in southern Arabia (Saba) or to Ethiopia (D'mt).

This legend was included in such important works as the Bible, in the Book of Kings, the Quran, an Aramaic translation of the Book of Ester called the Targum Sheni, and the Kebra Negast, a 14th Century work of history produced by the Ethiopian Orthodox Church which chronicled the lineage of the Solomonic Dynasty in Ethiopia. Like many tales or fables, there is no definitive proof that the legendary Queen of the South, as she is referred to in the Biblical books of Matthew and Luke, ever existed. However, this legend has served as the starting point for the Solomonic line of Kings in Ethiopia, which saw two separate epochs during which Ethiopia was ruled by successions of Kings who claimed a direct blood-line lineage to Menelik and his father, King Solomon. Additionally, the mythical status as home to the Arc of the Covenant, purported to have been brought to Ethiopia by Menelik, has played a significant role in establishing and maintaining a connection of citizens to the Ethiopian state and Church.

The Kingdom of D'mt fell sometime in the 4th Century B.C., though its demise is not entirely clear. After its fall, the area experienced a time period where politics were dominated by a collection of small, interdependent kingdoms. One of those small kingdoms grew in power and economic stature, and by the 1st Century, A.D. was the preeminent power in the region. This kingdom would be known as the Aksumite Kingdom, and its role in contributing to what would become Ethiopian nationalism is immeasurable. The Kingdom of Aksum was based around Semetic, Ge'ez speakers, who had by then pushed out many of the indigenous speakers, those who

spoke either Cushitic or Omotic languages. According to Ofcansky and LaVerle, Ge'ez speakers "slowly built a distinctive civilization centered at Aksum beginning about the first century A.D."¹³

The Aksum kingdom lasted until almost 1000 A.D. and at its height, covered a vast territory stretching from Somalia in the east, all the way across the northern portion of modern-day Ethiopia and Eritrea, into what is now Sudan and southern Egypt. It also controlled territory in Arabia, including most of what is now Yemen, and even parts of Saudi Arabia. As Jeffrey Hoover shows, one of the keys to its success was its geographical position, and how they leveraged this position to become a major player in international trade. Their trade network extended from Rome to India, and they also minted their own coins which could be used to buy and sell trade goods. The town of Aksum grew into a major trading town, and the largest ivory market in the world. By the 3rd Century A.D., Aksum was one of the four most powerful empires on earth, along with Persia, China, and Rome.¹⁴ Its naval capabilities allowed it to control trade through the Indian Ocean, the Red Sea, and even parts of the Mediterranean Sea. Aksum was indeed a world power.

Regarding the development of nationalism in Ethiopia, events and processes which occurred during the time period of the Aksumite Empire in many ways represent the cornerstone for what it is to be Ethiopian today. Aksum was ruled by a succession of kings who all traced their lineage back to Solomon. Of those Aksumite kings, one stands out as particularly important for the development of Ethiopia.

King Ezana's reign, from 320 to 360 A.D., is marked by a few actions which altered the course of Ethiopia's history, and played pivotal roles in the establishment of an Ethiopian nation.

¹³ Ofcansky, Thomas P., and LaVerle Bennette Berry. *Ethiopia: A Country Study*. Kessinger Pub., 2007.

¹⁴ Hoover, J. Jeffrey, et al. "General History of Africa, Vol. II: Ancient Civilizations of Africa." *African Studies Review*, vol. 24, no. 4, 1981, p. 135., doi:10.2307/524343. Pg. 411

In 328, Ezana decreed that the Aksumite kingdom be converted to Christianity. This came about through the teachings of Frementius, a somewhat mysterious figure of Lebanese origin. He and his brother had been captured as boys and were kept as slaves by the Aksumite Kingdom. They earned the trust of the King, who enlisted them to educate his son, Ezana, the young heir to the throne. Part of that education included the teachings of Christianity, and Ezana personally converted at a young age.¹⁵ When the decision was made to convert all of Aksum, it did not come as completely foreign. Prior to Christianity, Aksumites followed a polytheistic religion which was very similar to the religion of Arabia.¹⁶ However, the related customs and ideas of Judaism had existed to some degree in the empire since the Queen of Sheba and her son, Menelik I. Although not widespread, there had been a tradition of Judaism within the empire for several centuries, so conversion to Christianity was not the replacing of familiar customs with unknown, completely foreign customs. Shortly thereafter, Aksum changed the inscription on its coins to bear a cross, which stamped the nation as a Christian nation, and the first in the world to do so.

The conversion provided a unifying effect for the nation, which is still quite evident in Ethiopia today. Since its establishment, the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church has stood as a pillar of the Ethiopian nation. Much like the Catholic Church, the Ethiopian Church grew powerful alongside the growth of the nation. Its presence and proximity to the state has connected citizens to the state, even those who do not follow Orthodox Christianity. In Ethiopia, life revolves around the calendar of the Church. It is impossible to ignore the connection of the people to the Church,

¹⁵ Hoover, J. Jeffrey, et al. "General History of Africa, Vol. II: Ancient Civilizations of Africa." *African Studies Review*, vol. 24, no. 4, 1981, p. 135., doi:10.2307/524343. Pg. 403

¹⁶ Hoover, J. Jeffrey, et al. "General History of Africa, Vol. II: Ancient Civilizations of Africa." *African Studies Review*, vol. 24, no. 4, 1981, p. 135., doi:10.2307/524343. Pg. 411

and the Church to the state. This relationship is the greatest contribution to the development of Ethiopian nationalism to come out of the Aksum Empire.

King Ezana had an eye on maintaining and growing a unified Empire. He wanted to make his subjects feel connected to the Empire, and part of a nation. Author and noted scholar Stuart Munro-Hay's research indicates that it was during his time that the name "Ethiopia" was first used by the kingdom to describe itself.¹⁷ The origin of this name is also unclear, but there are several theories which generally point to either a Greek origin, or an Ethiopian origin. The Greek historian Herodotus used the name to describe the land south of Egypt. Other theories with Greek origins hold that the name came from a conjoined word, 'Aitho-ops', which translated to 'burnt face', and this theory has been widely accepted by European scholars for more than one thousand years.¹⁸ Yet another theory, this one with an Ethiopian source of origin, claims that the word was used to describe the nation in homage to a Son of Cush who did not appear in the Bible, whose name was Ityop'is, and is credited with building the first capital of the Aksum Empire.¹⁹ Regardless of where the name originates, its use by the Empire to describe itself and its people is an early example of nation-building, and meant to differentiate and define who they were. Ezana's efforts to establish cohesion within his empire can also be seen on some of the coins which were minted during his reign. Several coins have been found bearing the inscription in Greek letters, TOYTOAPECHTHXWPA, which translates to "May this please the people." Stuart Munro-Hay

¹⁷ Munro-Hay, Stuart C. *Aksum: an African Civilization of Late Antiquity*. Alden, 1991. Pg. 57.

¹⁸ Bekerie, Ayele. "Ethiopia: Some Historical Reflections on the Origin of the Word Ethiopia." *International Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, vol. 1, no. 2, 2004, pp. 110–121. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/27828841. Accessed 28 Jan. 2020

¹⁹ Bekerie, Ayele. "Ethiopia: Some Historical Reflections on the Origin of the Word Ethiopia." *International Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, vol. 1, no. 2, 2004, pp. 110–121. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/27828841. Accessed 28 Jan. 2020.

describes this inscription as "a rather attractive peculiarity of Aksumite coinage, giving a feeling of royal concern and responsibility towards the people's wishes and contentment".²⁰ Aside from a feeling of royal concern, this also shows that Ezana was keen on bonding the citizens of the Empire to a nation, of being an attracting force which subjects would willingly gravitate to. This effect clearly falls in line with what Reinhardt Bendix proposed, that citizenship and belonging to a nation plays a strong part in developing a national identity.

Although the Kingdom would stand until around 950 A.D., it's decline began in the later part of the 7th Century. Several factors contributed to this decline. Tekeste Negash notes that the decline of Aksum coincides with the rise of Islam, which increasingly came to control trade routes throughout the region.²¹ Aksum, maintaining its Christian identity, became economically isolated from its familiar trade locales, and experienced economic depression. Although Arab traders would continue to travel to Aksum for business, the Empire was by and large routed out of the major trade routes, replaced by ports and trading towns that had come under Islamic control. Climate change was also a contributing factor, as lands once fertile enough to feed the empire showed the effects of soil degradation, failing to produce the grains essential to feed the empire and as an export commodity. The Empire fell in 960 A.D., defeated by a non-Christian queen of a small kingdom situated in the far south of modern-day Ethiopia. The legend of Gudit, as relayed by the Dictionary of Ethiopian Biography, tells of a fierce, warrior queen who sacked the declining empire, attempted to kill off the royal family, and set fire to the churches.²²

²⁰ Munro-Hay, Stuart C. *Aksum: an African Civilization of Late Antiquity*. Alden, 1991. pg. 192.

²¹ Negash, Tekeste. "The Zagwe Period Re-interpreted: Post-Aksumite Ethiopian Urban Culture." *Uppsala: Uppsala Universitet, The Development of Urbanism from a Global Perspective*. 2003

²² Michael, Belaynesh, et al. *The Dictionary of Ethiopian Biography*. Vol. 1, "From Early Times to the End of the Zagwé Dynasty c. 1270 A.D.," Institute of Ethiopian Studies, 1975.

By the time of its ultimate demise, what the Aksumite Empire had done in terms of nation-building was to establish a strong basis for nationalism to exist within Ethiopia. Language traditions, religious traditions, cultural traditions, economic traditions, and other factors all played on the human desire to belong to something. Ethiopia, as a distinct nation with finite edges, had been created. The Kingdom was using the name 'Ethiopia' to describe itself, its coinage was encouraging subjects to appreciate the benefits of some sort of citizenship, and its religious institutions were promoting the idea that Ethiopia was a special place within the pantheon of the Christian world. By the end of the Aksum Dynasty, it is clear that an Ethiopian nation existed in the minds of Ethiopians and foreigners alike, and this distinct nation would serve as the prototypical basis of future nation-building efforts.

Following the fall of Aksum, a much-contracted empire was ruled first by Gudit and then two successors. The regime was then overthrown by Mara Takla Haymonot, who established the Zagwe Dynasty. This period lasted only until about 1270 A.D. and is noted as a peaceful and prosperous time. The Zagwe rulers used a light touch, preferring to focus on technical innovation and agricultural advancements. They were defeated in 1270 A.D. by Yekuno Amlak, who led a revolt against the Zagwe rulers. When he assumed the throne, he restored the Solomonic Dynasty's claim as the rightful rulers of the country, beginning an unbroken line of rulers which would last up until 1974. Coupled with the support of the church, this development restored two essential pieces to the historical Ethiopian nation. Over the course of the next five centuries, the Kingdom would wax and wane economically and politically. Some kings sought expansion, which meant conquest, while others were satisfied to be content with what the Empire had at its disposal.

Contacts with Europe increased as overtures made based on religious commonalities were replied to with interest. The Portuguese were sending missions to Ethiopia as early as the mid-15th Century and were also establishing trade relations with the Ethiopians. The Kingdom was also increasingly under seizure by Islamic armies coming from Egypt and Sudan. Local kingdoms from the south and west of Ethiopia were also clamoring threateningly, but somehow, the Empire managed to maintain control over its borders, though be it by gradually losing in terms of authority. A mass migration of Oromo people, coming up from the south, dealt a serious challenge to the authority of the Empire. This occurred during the first decade of the 18th Century and resulted in the Oromo people seizing lands from the Empire and taking up residence on their doorstep. It also signaled to other neighboring kingdoms that the Empire had become weak. This convergence of events as Belaynesh Michael asserts, led to an era known as the Zemene Mesafint, or ‘age of princes.’

During this time, from about the mid-18th Century to the mid-19th Century, the political situation in Ethiopia was a state of conflict. Several kingdoms had emerged which presented a challenge to the Solomonic rulers of the country. While officially still sitting kings, a series of Solomonic rulers were reduced to a figurehead status, as local kingdoms defied authority, and even elevated their own rulers to the position of Negus, or King of Kings, in direct defiance to the Solomonic Empire. It was an era marked by chaos, where the Empire had effectively lost all central authority outside of its capital at Gonder. The smaller, regional kingdoms, which were in most cases drawn sharply on ethnic lines, held sway in parts of the Empire which could no longer be defended, and at this point, Ethiopia more closely resembled a collection of neighboring, autonomous ‘nations’ than a greater Ethiopia. This era would come to a close with the rise of Tewadros II.

Tewadros and the Birth of Modern Ethiopia

Tewadros, born Kassa Hailu in 1818, was an unlikely candidate to accede to the throne. Though he was born into royalty, he and his mother found themselves ostracized and cut out financially after divorce. From a young age, Kassa developed a cutthroat instinct for survival. He formed a band of followers who became involved in banditry, and his penchant for leadership became apparent. He soon found himself at the helm of a formidable army, operating during the chaotic times of the era of princes. At some point, he focused his attention on restoring the authority of the Solomonic Dynasty, by then seeing himself as the elect of God. He set out on missions to subdue neighboring kingdoms, and he experienced success.

According to noted historian and author Donald Crummey, Tewadros' first order of business was to reign in the kingdom of Shewa, which had become formidable, and stood as the main obstacle to his designs. He succeeded in this, and went on to subdue several other, lesser kingdoms. In 1855, he declared himself Negus, the rightful monarch of all Ethiopia. His claim was accepted by the church and many of the kingdoms, and so he then assumed the role of King of Kings. In this role, and against constant opposition, he attempted to restore the Empire under a central authority, as a rightful heir to the throne, and with the blessing of the church. He was a modernizer and sought alliances with Europe to aid in maintaining his Christian Empire and protecting it from non-Christian threats. Initial contacts with the British were promising, but Kassa, who had taken the name Tewadros II upon his ascension to the throne, was left feeling betrayed, and took action against the British. He had several dozen British citizens, including an official envoy, arrested and detained. The British reacted by sending in a force to rescue their citizens. An arrangement made with Yohannes, a local ruler in a northern kingdom which controlled the Red

Sea coastline, allowed for the British to land an invasion force and quickly mobilize, catching Tewadros by surprise. At the culminating Battle of Magdala, Tewadros II took his own life, rather than be captured by the enemy, when it became clear that his forces could not withstand the onslaught of the British. While ultimately failing to realize the full restoration of the nation of Ethiopia, his attempts to reconstitute the Empire tightened the notion of Ethiopian nationalism by reestablishing customary practices which Ethiopians held as vital to their identity. His legacy is that of a reformer and a leader who saw the need to modernize in a rapidly changing world. Crummey, in assessing that legacy, concluded that “Tewadros is the father of modern Ethiopia in the sense that he conceived of the idea of a united, strong, and progressive Ethiopian state, the peer of any other state in the world.”²³

Tewadros II was succeeded by Yohannes as Emperor. Yohannes was the king of Tigray, and the most powerful of Tewadros’ vassal kingdoms. Yohannes, fitting all criteria, was elevated to the status of Negus in 1872. His ascension was ordained by the church and bolstered by his military advantage. This advantage over the two other most powerful vassal kingdoms, Shewa and Gojjam, was created as a part of the deal he had made with the British to allow them passage through his lands to attack Tewadros at Magdala. Biographer Kofi Darkwah recounted that after the British had completed their mission, they had agreed to leave immediately, and to leave a powerful arms supply behind when they left.²⁴ Yohannes received an impressive arsenal of cannons, mortars, and muskets from the British when they left, tipping the balance of power dramatically in his favor.

²³ Crummey, Donald. “Tewodros as Reformer and Modernizer.” *The Journal of African History*, vol. 10, no. 3, 1969, pp. 457–469. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/179677.

²⁴ Darkwah, R. H. Kofi. *Shewa, Menelik and the Ethiopian Empire: 1813-1889*. Heinemann. London. 1975 pg. 73

Like Tewadros, as MacCallum and Newton point out, Yohannes was intent on establishing cohesion within his empire, with the Orthodox church as a center point. But unlike Tewadros, who had attempted to do this in a stronghanded way, Yohannes attempted a more diplomatic approach. He sought alliances with the vassal kingdoms, recognizing that both Shewa and Gojjam were powerful in their own right, and believing that partnership and inclusion was the best way to mitigate the threat. He further advanced the Ethiopian unity, which Tewadros had begun, with religious appeals, and by elevating key figures within each vassal kingdom. In 1878, he accepted Menelik's submission, and crowned him King of Shewa, and did the same in 1881 with Tekle Haymonot of Gojjam and Kaffa. These actions brought the two most powerful vassals in the empire under the accepted rule of Yohannes, solidifying most of Christian Ethiopia under his rule. These were major events in terms of Ethiopian nationalism. It was, by and large, the realization of what Tewadros had dreamed of. Though conflicts and infighting would continue, the empire had been reconstituted as a nation. Ethiopia was whole again, with its Christian identity still intact, and a Solomonic leader on the throne. Domestically, this was Yohannes' greatest achievement.

While his internal successes were considerable, it was the external threats which would lead to the demise of his rule. Islamic invasions, first from Egypt, and then from Sudan, occupied much of Yohannes time and resources. Conflict with Ottoman Egypt began when Khedive Ishma'il Pasha sought to bring all of the Nile river under his control. A sizeable portion of the Nile flows through the northwest Ethiopia, and, as Darkwah highlights, the Khedive had his eye on it. The Egyptians, possibly with full British backing, invaded, sacking and occupying the important trading town of Harrar. Yohannes pleaded with the British and other European powers to use their influence to stop this aggression. When it became clear that Europe would not intervene, he sent his forces to confront the Khedive in 1875. The Egyptian forces, which included commanders from

both Britain and the United States, were outwitted and completely decimated at the Battle of Gundat, on November 16th, 1875. A year later, another Egyptian invasion force was sent, and were again defeated.

The conflict with Sudan came about as a result of an agreement between Yohannes and the British. The British colony of Sudan had revolted, which seriously imperiled several British forces stationed in the country. Ethiopia allowed for the British to cross their lands while fleeing the revolting Mahdists in Sudan. In exchange, Britain agreed to support Ethiopia's claims to vital Red Sea ports, namely Massawa, in modern-day Eritrea. This angered the Mahdi, who then sought revenge against his Ethiopian neighbors. The Mahdist army was defeated at the Battle of Kufit in 1885, but they were not completely vanquished, and continued fighting over the next several years.

To add to the challenges faced by Yohannes, the Italians, who had earlier established a minor presence on the Red Sea coast close to Massawa, seized the port and established a colonial presence in the surrounding areas. Yohannes attention was now drawn in two directions, with the Italians in the North, and the Mahdists to the West. He decided that he would first deal with the Mahdists, and then confront the Italians. By then, the Mahdists were weakened, and posed a far lesser threat than they had before. Their ability to conquer the powerful Ethiopians had been nullified, but small pockets of fighters remained. Perhaps because of this situation, Yohannes regarded them as more of an irritation than an actual threat. He approached their forces at will, believing that they were all but defeated. On March 10th, 1889, in a battle which the Ethiopians were overwhelmingly winning, Yohannes ventured a bit too close to enemy lines, and was mortally wounded by a bullet. On his deathbed, he proclaimed that one of his son's should succeed him as emperor. While the Ethiopians defeated the Mahdists, they lost their emperor, and this development would cause a power vacuum out of which the Shoan King, Menelik II, would realize

his greatest ambition. MacCallum and Newton summarize this shifting power dynamic thusly, “He (Menelik II) became emperor, or Negus Negasti, in 1889 upon the death of Johannes VI, who was killed in a battle with the Dervishes.”²⁵

Menelik II of Shoa

The rise of Menelik II, and his eventual victory at the Battle of Adwa, represent the transitional event for this thesis. Menelik’s ambition and guile would unite all of the peoples living within the current borders of Ethiopia under a single, centralized government. This was no small feat, as attempts to do so had failed many times before. The stages of national development culminated in a unified force defeating the would-be Italian colonizers, and this concept of unity was not lost on Menelik nor future governments. Menelik’s task was to solidify a nation out of a collection of competing kingdoms and various peoples, including conquered peoples. As the historical background shows, cohesion within the empire usually had not lasted long, but with each successive stage, the building blocks of a nation were being laid. The factors beyond ethnicity which a nation could be built upon included a dominant religion (Christian Orthodoxy) which played a large part in authenticating governments, an ancient monarchy with biblical significance, a history of successful empire, the development of complex languages and writing systems, and shared cultural practices. These elements all developed over time as the ethnically varied peoples of Ethiopia came to represent separate nations in their own regard. While ethnic nations existed

²⁵ MacCallum, Elizabeth Pauline., and Newton Diehl Baker. *Rivalries in Ethiopia*. World Peace Foundation. Boston, 1935. Pg. 7

and competed with each other, cultural and spiritual links which had developed and spread to different regions formed a basis around which Menelik could finally succeed in solidifying a vast Ethiopian nation which would go forth into the future as such. His vehicle, and that of future governments, was the victory at Adwa. It was the event which brought together all commonalities, and forged a proud nation built on a solid foundation. The notion of Ethiopia was never presented to the people as a new concept, but rather a natural convergence of the collective histories of the peoples who inhabit the lands within the borders of Ethiopia.

Menelik II was born on August 17th, 1844 in Shoa. His birth name was Sahle Maryam, and he was the son of Haile Meleket, the Shoan king. His early life was spent preparing for the eventual day on which he would ascend to the Shoan throne himself. The Shoan kingdom, a largely isolated kingdom located in the central plateau region of the interior, had managed to avoid being entangled in the geo-political struggles of the northern kingdoms for many centuries. While important trade links connected Shoa to other kingdoms, including the powerful Tigray kingdom, Shoa had maintained itself as an independent, autonomous kingdom populated mainly by the Amhara peoples. It was the ambitions of Tewadros which would challenge this sovereignty.

In his biography of the life of Menelik II, Kofi Darkwah relayed “Menelik was only about 11 years old when Shewa (Shoa) was conquered by Tewadros and he, together with other chiefs and leaders of the kingdom, was taken prisoner to Maqdala.”²⁶ While not much is known about Menelik’s imprisonment, what is known is that he appears to have been educated there, and he and Tewadros developed a strong fondness for each other during this time, so much so that Tewadros even offered Menelik one of his daughters in marriage. Additionally, “the policy which Menelik

²⁶ Darkwah, R. H. Kofi. *Shewa, Menelik and the Ethiopian Empire: 1813-1889*. Heinemann. London. 1975 pg. 51

was later to follow as King of Shoa, especially the use which he made of Europeans, appears to have had its roots in this period.”²⁷ In June of 1865, Menelik managed to escape Maqdala, and returned to Shoa to claim his throne. He was met with some resistance by the sitting Negus but was overwhelmingly supported by the Shoan people and the Shoan army, which viewed him as the rightful heir to the throne. With the support of the army, he rather easily took the throne, and went to work establishing his authority over the kingdom. Like Tewadros, Menelik was also an ambitious man, with aspiration on one day assuming the role of Emperor. After Tewadros’ death, he and his kingdom were considered potential candidates to replace his former captor and mentor. However, his military capabilities were far inferior to Yohannes, who had taken the mantle of leadership after Tewadros. It was during Yohannes reign, from 1871 to 1889, that Menelik would establish Shoa and himself as a powerful kingdom and potential successor to the position of emperor.

Menelik’s Shoan kingdom was a thorn in the side for Yohannes. They refused to submit until Yohannes marched an army down to Shoa, and even after submission, rarely complied in a satisfactory way to Yohannes expectations. Yohannes was being pulled in many directions by external threats, which gave Menelik opportunities to grow and strengthen his kingdom. As the distinguished historian, Richard Pankhurst detailed, Menelik welcomed Europeans into his court, keen on obtaining, above all else, firearms.²⁸ In 1872, Menelik sent for the first time an official envoy from Shoa to Italy on a diplomatic mission.²⁹ Through crafty diplomacy, he was able to procure an arsenal of modern weapons both from governments (Italy and France) and private arms

²⁷ Darkwah, R. H. Kofi. *Shewa, Menelik and the Ethiopian Empire: 1813-1889*. Heinemann. London. 1975 pg. 51

²⁸ Pankhurst, Richard. “Guns in Ethiopia.” *Transition*, no. 20, 1965, pg. 30. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/2934388.

²⁹ Darkwah, R. H. Kofi. *Shewa, Menelik and the Ethiopian Empire: 1813-1889*. Heinemann. London. 1975 pg. 65

dealers, and he was also able to establish unofficial diplomatic ties with several European nations. At the same time, he was leading conquests to conquer the areas surrounding his kingdom. Menelik made his imperial intentions clear with the conquer of Wallo, just north of Shoa. Darkwah described the conquest this way. “By July of 1876 he had conquered the Wallo as far north as, and including, the fortress of Maqdala; and in February 1977 invaded Gojjam.”³⁰ For Yohannes, this was unacceptable as Gojjam was both an important counter-balance to Menelik’s rising power, and an important foothold to the rich trade routes running to the southwest territories. Yohannes again attempted to subdue Menelik, and again the result was a tenuous peace agreement which left Menelik in a position of strength.

Yohannes was too busy with Islamic incursions in the west, and Italian encroachment in the north, to decisively deal with Menelik, and was satisfied that Menelik would not encroach on other vassal kingdoms within the empire. Menelik then turned his attention to conquering the Oromo people inhabiting the lands south of Gojjam. Gojjam also had an eye on these lands as well, both as a source of valuable commodities and a buffer between themselves and the Shoan kingdom. Author and Oromia rights activist Mohammad Hassen notes “The scramble for the conquest of Oromo territory which started in 1880 between Takla Haymonot of Gojjam and Menelik of Shewa culminated on June 6, 1882, at the Battle of Embabo, where the former was routed and dramatically knocked out of the contest by the latter.”³¹ This conquest, where the conquered Oromo people were absorbed into the Shoan empire, was the first act of expansion undertaken by Menelik. His success bolstered his confidence in the capabilities of his army and fueled his greater ambitions. Throughout the 1880’s, Menelik’s forces, armed with European firearms, would go on to conquer

³⁰ Darkwah, R. H. Kofi. *Shewa, Menelik and the Ethiopian Empire: 1813-1889*. Heinemann. London. 1975 pg. 76

³¹ Hassen, Mohammed. *The Oromo of Ethiopia: a History 1570-1860*. Red Sea Press. Trenton, NJ. 1994. pg. 198

the Macha regions to the west, the Gurage region in the south-west, the historically important kingdoms of Jimma and Kaffa, also west of Shoa, and the Harrar and Ogaden to the East. These conquests greatly expanded the Shoan empire, both in terms of territory and wealth. Darkwah describes this dramatic expansion, saying, “By 1889 when Menelik became Emperor, the area of Shewa which he inherited had been increased several times as a result of his conquests. In the 1840’s the area of Shewa was estimated at 150 miles in length by 90 miles in breadth and its total population at two-and-a half million people. About 1881 the area of the kingdom was put at 73,956 square kilometers (about 46,220 square miles), while in 1878 its population was reckoned at about five million inhabitants, Christians, Mohammedans, and heathens.”³² While some of the conquered peoples had willingly submitted and accepted absorption, most had been forcefully subjugated after being conquered. Menelik had established himself, as was his plan, as the most powerful of all the vassal kingdoms and a very serious contender to succeed Yohannes as the King of Kings of Ethiopia. But for those who had been conquered, especially the Oromo people, they had lost everything. Hassen lamented, “Oromo peasants were reduced to landless, rightless, second-class subjects who suffered much under the deadly weight of Menelik’s empire.”³³

Menelik’s relations with Italy had begun in the early 1870’s. He had sent letters to several European monarchies requesting firearms and trade relations. The Italians were interested in developing a port and commercial trade route in Massawa to take advantage of the recent opening of the Suez Canal. They had purchased a small foothold to the west of Massawa back in the 1830’s, but up until then, had little inclination to establish anything there. They were too preoccupied with their own unification, which had been completed in 1871. Now, as a unified, European nation,

³² Darkwah, R. H. Kofi. *Shewa, Menelik and the Ethiopian Empire: 1813-1889*. Heinemann. London. 1975 pg. 108

³³ Hassen, Mohammed. *The Oromo of Ethiopia: A History 1570-1860*. The Red Sea Press. Trenton, NJ. 1994 pg. 200

they sought prestige and glory. In the age of European Empire, this meant the possession of profitable colonies, and the scramble for Africa was already taking place. “Italy, which had only recently achieved national unity, was looking for some positive achievement to cement its unity.”³⁴ Then came Menelik’s letter, inviting them to establish relations based on trade and other areas. Europeans, and especially Italians, were received at Shoa with ceremony. Where Yohannes was mistrustful of outsiders, Menelik welcomed their presence in his kingdom, and the access he gained to new technologies and ideas. For the Italians, these relations with Menelik offered a possible way into the Ethiopian Empire. They deftly recognized the situation and wanted to take advantage of the division between Shoa and Yohannes. Menelik, however, could play this game as well. Each side used their relations with each other to bolster their positions viz-a-viz Yohannes. It was only after the build-up of Italian forces, and then their encroachment into the Ethiopian interior, that Menelik became distrustful, though he did continue to maintain ties with Italy. Kofi Darkwah touched on Menelik’s growing distrust, writing “Menelik became uneasy as to the real intentions of Italy, and Italo-Shoan relations became strained.”³⁵ The Italians, sensing that they were losing the confidence of Menelik, proposed a treaty of friendship to Menelik in 1889. This treaty, The Treaty of Wuchale, which would later lead to the first Italo-Ethiopian war, was signed in and named for the town of Wuchale, in northern Ethiopia. The treaty stipulated that Shoa would not oppose the annexation of a small piece of land on the Red Sea coast to establish the Italian colony of Eritrea. In exchange, Italy would provide military supplies and financial assistance to Shoa, as well as recognition of Shoa as the representative of the Ethiopian Empire. In effect, Menelik had given the Italians permission to establish their new colony on lands within the Empire,

³⁴ Darkwah, R. H. Kofi. *Shewa, Menelik and the Ethiopian Empire: 1813-1889*. Heinemann. London. 1975 pg. 66

³⁵ Darkwah, R. H. Kofi. *Shewa, Menelik and the Ethiopian Empire: 1813-1889*. Heinemann. London. 1975 pg. 72

and more specifically, territory which Tigray claimed dominion over. For Menelik, it was a masterstroke of diplomacy which ultimately strengthened his imperial ambitions.

The year 1889 witnessed a series of events which would alter Ethiopia's destiny. Emperor Yohannes, on March 10th, succumbed to injuries sustained in a skirmish with Mahdist forces. On his deathbed, he declared that his son should take his place on the throne. In the ensuing chaos, the Italians saw their chance to cement their presence in the Northern territories. The Treaty of Wuchale was signed by Menelik and the Italian representative in Ethiopia, Count Pietro Antonelli, on May 2nd. This treaty satiated the ambitions of both signing parties, as the Italians were then able to establish dominion over a small colony which they named Eritrea, and Menelik greatly enhanced his standing within Ethiopia as the strongest Kingdom, and most worthy successor to Yohannes.

Having already declared himself the rightful successor to the throne, Menelik then sought and gained the support of a majority of nobles and the Church. On November 3rd, as recounted by Berkeley, Menelik was crowned Emperor at the Church of Mary on Mount Entoto, his mountain fortress overlooking his new capital, Addis Ababa.³⁶ He was the first Emperor to come from Shoa. Upon his coronation, Menelik then sat on the throne of an Ethiopia of vast proportions, both in terms of land mass and variance of peoples. If he were to remain in this position, his task was to forge a singular nation out of a collection of disparate nations, or to be continuously occupied by rebellions. Though a difficult task, he preferred the former. What he needed, and would find on the battlefield at Adwa, was an event which would unify this collection of peoples willingly under one flag.

³⁶ Berkeley, G. F.-H. *The Campaign of Adowa and the Rise of Menelik*. Andesite Press, 2019.

Troubles with Italy began almost immediately. In less than one year after Menelik's coronation, the Italians began encroaching further inland. Paragraph III on the Treaty of Wuchale stipulated the borders which each side would respect. With Menelik busy solidifying his hold on his newly inherited Kingdom, the Italians quickly occupied several important towns on the Ethiopian side, and then declared these areas to be a part of their new colony. These actions again raised Menelik's suspicion about the intentions of Italy. However, Menelik maintained his trust in the treaty which he had signed, believing that the Italians would abide by their word. Paragraph XIX stated in both the Italian version and the Amharic version, in the event that issues arise surrounding translation and meaning, each version would each carry an equal weight. Pankhurst relays that the Amharic version states "This treaty will be accurately translated in Amharic and Italian and [both would] become a final authority in interpretation."³⁷ The Italian version specified "le due version concordando perfettamente fra loro" (the two versions being perfectly in concordance with each other).³⁸ It was this paragraph that gave Menelik assurances that this treaty would not expose him to Italian ambitions, and that his position in all matters relating to this treaty and the relations between the two nations would be on equal ground. It was perhaps his belief that this paragraph protected him that allowed him to disregard warnings about paragraph XVII, which would be the undoing of this treaty and the relationship between he and the Italians. Paragraph XVII, in spite of the assurances established in Paragraph XIX, was drafted with two subtle, but very different meanings in translation.

³⁷ Pankhurst, Richard, et al. *The Battle of Adwa: Reflections on Ethiopia's Historic Victory against European Colonialism*. Algora. New York. 2005. Pg. 44

³⁸ Conti Rosini. *Italia ed Etiopia dal Trattato di Ucciali alla Battaglia di Adua*, Rome, 1925, pp 67-68

The Amharic version read “His Majesty, the King of Kings of Ethiopia, may, if he so desires, avail himself of the Italian government for any negotiations he may enter into with other Powers and Governments.”³⁹ The Italian version contained a very subtle but crucial difference. “His Majesty, the King of Kings of Ethiopia, consents to avail himself of the government of his Majesty the King of Italy for all negotiations in affairs which he may have with other Powers or Governments.”⁴⁰ While seemingly a minor detail, especially considering paragraph XIX, the Italian view was that Ethiopia had acquiesced to becoming an Italian protectorate, and the Italian government wasted little time in informing European governments of Ethiopia’s new status as a protectorate of Italy.

There is evidence that Menelik had recognized the potential danger which the treaty exposed him to, but, wanting to bolster his arms supply, he allowed for Italy to provide him with as many weapons as he could obtain before lodging his objection to the treaty. “Menelik did not immediately denounce the Treaty of Ucciali (Wuchale). On the contrary, he continued to import arms and also insisted on obtaining further arms from Italy.”⁴¹

After unsuccessfully appealing to governments in Europe, Menelik then clarified his position directly to King Umberto of Italy in a letter written in 1882. “When I made that treaty of friendship with Italy, in order that our secrets be guarded, and our undertaking should not be spoiled, I said that because of friendship, our affairs in Europe might be carried on with the aid of

³⁹ Pankhurst, Richard, et al. *The Battle of Adwa: Reflections on Ethiopia’s Historic Victory against European Colonialism*. Algona, 2005. Pg. 46

⁴⁰ Pankhurst, Richard, et al. *The Battle of Adwa: Reflections on Ethiopia’s Historic Victory against European Colonialism*. Algona, 2005. Pg. 46

⁴¹ Pankhurst, Richard. “Guns in Ethiopia.” *Transition*, no. 20, 1965, pp. 26–33. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/2934388. Pg. 31.

the Sovereign of Italy, but I have not made any treaty which obliges me to do so, and today, I am not the man to accept it. That one independent power does not seek the aid of another to carry on its affairs, your majesty understands very well.”⁴² Adu Boahen recounts that with his position clarified, Menelik then, in 1893, declared the treaty null, stating “Ethiopia has need of on one; she stretches out her hands unto God.”⁴³ notifying King Umberto and the other European powers of this fact. In letters to European governments, he stated Italy was “trying, under the mask of friendship, to take possession of this country...My country is strong enough to maintain its independence, and it does not care for any protectorate.”⁴⁴ For Italy, this was an unacceptable position for the Ethiopians to take. They proposed a new treaty to Ethiopia which would have very explicitly subjugated Ethiopia to the status of a protectorate, which was also rejected. Menelik’s reply to a new treaty demanded that Italy withdraw from all Ethiopian territory. The Italian Prime Minister, Francesco Crespi, saw this as an opportunity. Italy was a newly unified nation and was dealing with its own insurrections and challenges to the ruling party. In the same way that Menelik needed to find a unifying event to build his nation around, Italy must have also viewed a possible war of conquest against the Ethiopians as a potential moment of national unity. Crespi instructed his governor of Eritrea, General Baratieri, to refuse Menelik’s demand and to inform the Ethiopians that they intended to commence to war. Of the response, Pankhurst writes, “On February 13th, 1896, Baratieri wrote to Menelik that it was ‘impossible to accept’ the terms set by the government of Ethiopia and that he ‘would not discuss the matter further.’ The General added:

⁴² A letter by Emperor Menelik to King Umberto of Italy, Nehassie, 19, 1882: Government of Italy, *Documenti Diplomatici*, 1890-1891, XVII pg. 10

⁴³ Boahen, A. Adu. *Africa under Colonial Domination, 1880-1935*. New Africa Education, 2003.

⁴⁴ Comite de l’Afrique Francais, *Buletin, No. de Julliet*, 1893, pg. 8

‘The negotiations must be considered ended and each of us remains free in his action.’”⁴⁵ With this, the relationship between the two was severed, and the stage was set for war.

With the diplomatic constraints removed, Italy began to work in earnest towards subduing and then expanding its colony into the Ethiopian interior. They had successfully taken the town of Adwa, in Tigray, and begun preparations for a southward campaign of conquer. With the veil of friendship removed, their intention was to bring the whole of Ethiopia under their dominion, establishing themselves as an imperialist power. Unbeknownst to Italy, however, is that Menelik had been preparing for this action for quite some time. Strains in the relationship had appeared, and Italy’s ambition had been recognized as a very serious potential threat. In 1894, Menelik quietly issued a call to arms throughout the empire to raise an army of overwhelming numbers, and to begin military training of new recruits. His call to arms, which Pankhurst noted went out even to the smallest hamlets and the most far flung corners of the empire, stated that “Enemies have now come upon us to ruin the country and to change our religion...Our enemies have begun the affair by advancing and digging into the country like moles. With the help of God I will not deliver up my country to them. Today, you who are strong, give me of your strength, and you who are weak, help me by prayer.”⁴⁶

By establishing a common enemy, and a common threat, Menelik succeeded in linking the many different peoples of Ethiopia to a common cause, a national cause. Whether intended or not, Menelik’s call to arms was an action towards nation-building. Thousands answered the call, and Menelik’s new national army swelled in size. When it was decided that the Italians must be

⁴⁵ Pankhurst, Richard, et al. *The Battle of Adwa: Reflections on Ethiopia’s Historic Victory against European Colonialism*. Algora, 2005. Pg. 50

⁴⁶ Pankhurst, Richard, et al. *The Battle of Adwa: Reflections on Ethiopia’s Historic Victory against European Colonialism*. Algora, 2005. Pg. 233

confronted in the north, the army which Menelik had at his disposal was massive. “The emperor had mobilized nearly 100,000 soldiers, composed of 80,000 riflemen, 8,600 cavalry, 42 artillery and machine gun batteries, and about 20,000 lancers, spearmen, and swordsmen, who were ready to take over the rifles of those who might fall in action. On the Italian side were 20,000 men, about half European troops, the rest Eritrean men (Askaris) armed with obsolescent rifles, machine guns, and artillery.”⁴⁷ The two armies met on March 1st, 1896, just outside of the town of Adwa.

The Battle of Adwa has been written on extensively, and there is no shortage of academic undertakings on the battle. For the purpose of this thesis, it will suffice to summarize the battle as a devastating defeat for the Italians.⁴⁸ Though the Italians did represent a worthy adversary, they were, in truth, overmatched in every way. They were vastly outnumbered, their arms were on the whole inferior to those of the Ethiopians, they lacked a deep understanding of the terrain, were unprepared for the treacherous conditions of the battlefield, and they were outstrategized. The battle lasted only two days and concluded with the Italian army’s almost total annihilation. At the battles’ end, Italy had lost about 6,000 soldiers, killed in battle, and another 1,500 wounded, as well as 3,000 taken prisoner. For Italy, it was a humiliation on an unimaginable scale. Though severely outnumbered, hubris and a sense of racial superiority had allowed them to engage a much larger army, assured of a destined outcome. Their defeat not only shocked them, but much of the western world as well. The New York Times reported the outcome as “Italy’s Terrible Defeat”⁴⁹ and also reported on the reverberations felt in Italy. Italy was itself just a burgeoning nation-state

⁴⁷ Pankhurst, Richard, et al. *The Battle of Adwa: Reflections on Ethiopia’s Historic Victory against European Colonialism*. Algora, 2005. Pg. 234

⁴⁸ See Jonas, Raymond for a well-researched, comprehensive accounting of the Battle of Adwa

⁴⁹ “Italy’s Terrible Defeat.” *New York Times* 4 March 1896, Web. <http://ethiopiaforums.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/Italys-terrible-deafeat-on-battle-of-Adwa.pdf>

and viewed imperialism in Africa as a way to unite its own disparate peoples and to seek prestige among its established and more powerful European counterparts. Not only had they been crushed, but by losing this battle, the widely held notion of racial superiority and Africa's future had been called into question. Prime Minister Crespi, who had been a strong proponent of Italian imperialist aims, was forced to resign, and the commanding officer General Baratieri was court marshalled and forced to resign after being acquitted of his charges.

In the immediate aftermath of the battle, the surviving Italian forces fled north, returning to their foothold in Eritrea. Menelik chose not to pursue them and took care that Italian prisoners of war were treated well. During the peace settlement negotiations, Menelik clarified his position on how Italian captives would be treated. "You [i.e. Italians] have come all the way here to beat us into submission. You claim that you are going to liberate people in Ethiopia from slavery. However, let alone the Ethiopian people, you are not even capable of saving your own wretched rascals self-imprisoned in the garrison. If my own moral fortitude were as wanting as yours, I should have let them all die of thirst. Tell that to (General) Batatieri. But holy angels in the heavens exhort us to love our enemies. I am a Christian and I am not a king of savage people. Consequently, I will not let these Christians [in the fortress] die...they can evacuate."⁵⁰ The Askari soldiers (mostly Eritrean and Libyan mercenaries), viewed by the Ethiopians as traitors, were not afforded the same kindnesses. A negotiated peace settlement was reached in October of 1896 with the signing of the Treaty of Addis Ababa. The treaty officially nullified the Treaty of Wuchale, forced Italy to recognize Ethiopia as a sovereign, independent state, established an indemnity of 10,000,000 liras to be paid to Ethiopia, and set the terms for the repatriation of Italian prisoners of

⁵⁰ Pankhurst, Richard, et al. *The Battle of Adwa: Reflections on Ethiopia's Historic Victory against European Colonialism*. Algora, 2005. Pg. 162

war. The agreement also allowed for Italy to keep its colony of Eritrea and sharply defined the border.⁵¹ This last point was a surprising concession and has been an enduring point of contention on the subject of Ethiopian nationalism since its signing. Internationally, the victory at Adwa and Ethiopia's strong position in negotiations for peace garnered respect, especially in Europe. Within the next year, Ethiopia would sign treaties with both France and Great Britain in which Ethiopia was negotiated with as an equal, and her absolute sovereignty recognized in both cases.

Domestically, the victory of the Battle of Adwa cemented Menelik's hold on power. He emerged as a hero, a brilliant tactician who had managed to unite the peoples of Ethiopia in the face of grave danger. He had done so by connecting the various peoples of Ethiopia to a cause greater than ethnicity. His army had been formed in an egalitarian fashion, bonding the people to a Greater Ethiopia, beyond regional boundaries, and the victory then belonged to the Ethiopian people. Pride in the outcome of the battle morphed into a collective pride in being Ethiopian, even in the environment of an emerging, yet age-old paradox surrounding Ethiopian nationalism.

Menelik was a reformer, and keen on establishing his Ethiopia as a modern nation-state equal to any other. In the years following the victory at the Battle of Adwa, Menelik introduced many modern advancements into Ethiopia, including the first national bank, electricity, plumbing, and other modernizations to his new capital Addis Ababa, a railway connecting Addis Ababa to Djibouti, a national postal system, telegraphs, and educational advancements. He also took steps to modernize his government, improving administration capabilities and adding cabinet ministers.

The paradox existed in the simultaneous Amharization of the state during this time of modernization. Shoa was historically populated by the Amhara people, and although Menelik

⁵¹ Perham, Margery Freda. *The Government of Ethiopia*. 2nd ed., Faber and Faber. London 1969 pg.175

himself was of a mixed background, he identified as Amhara, and he was intent on forging his new state around the customs and culture of the Amhara people. “Dominated by the Amhara of Shewa, the state continued to evolve along glimmers of modernity’s well-trodden absolutist path. With a standing army, taxation, bureaucracy, codified law and a nascent market system, the government significantly centralized the administration, marginalizing the economic, political and military bases of the feudal ethnic elites. The state’s administrative and academic institutional structures were not conducive to diversity; they favoured assimilation.”⁵² Amharic, the language of the Amhara people, became the lingua franca of the country, and the effects of the modernization of the country, particularly in the area of education and economic opportunity, were concentrated in and around Addis Ababa. Ricardo Laremont states, “In newly conquered territories the contrast between agents of the empire and local inhabitants was extremely sharp. Under Menelik, no effort was made to integrate subject peoples effectively into the expanded political system except to impose by force the culture and institutions of the dominant highlanders, and Amharas and Tigreans.”⁵³

As a master strategist, Menelik was acutely aware of the importance of ethnicity in Ethiopia, both historically and contemporarily. Even as he sought an Ethiopian hegemony around Amhara principles, he was careful to take very visible steps of inclusion, such as appointing ministers to his government of Tigrayan or Oromo background. He also developed a reputation as a kind, forgiving, and merciful leader, and a man with a vision for a great African nation. He publicly invited assimilation into his orbit and hoped to be an attractive force in the formation of

⁵² Abbay, Alemseged. “Diversity and State-Building in Ethiopia.” *African Affairs*, vol. 103, no. 413, Jan. 2004, pp. 593–614., doi:10.1093/afraf/adh043.

⁵³ Laremont, Ricardo René. *Borders, Nationalism, and the African State*. Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2005. Pg.91

his Ethiopia, even as this emerging paradox grew and persisted. At the time of his passing, on December 12th, 1913, he had realized his greatest ambition. He had managed to forge a modern, centralized nation-state and a greater identity for the people above ethnicity...Ethiopian. The impetus for this great transformation, undoubtedly, was his victory at the Battle of Adwa. The many peoples of Ethiopia were now connected to the state, though not equally. In a modern sense, Adwa made Oromos, Amharas, Tigrayans, and the many other peoples of Ethiopia, Ethiopians. During Italian unification, the Italian statesman, Massimo D'Azeglio remarked, "We have made Italy; now we must make Italians." In his victory over the Italians, and the subsequent centralization, Menelik had made Ethiopians.

[The Legend of Adwa Grows.](#)

Out of the ashes of Adwa, the narrative of Menelik's role in the battle began to develop. He was extolled as a savior, a statesman, a fighter for the rights of oppressed peoples, a powerful yet benevolent ruler whose primary concern was the wellbeing of his people, a visionary reformer, and a king who would carry the past glories of Ethiopia into the future. In the direct aftermath of the battle, these ideas came easily and organically. Taking into consideration the plight of all other African nations at the time of the battle, the result was a shock to the world and the birth of a new narrative on Ethiopia. In this view, the focus of the battle, and how it would be remembered, came from an external perspective, that this was a battle of one nation against another, and that the role Menelik had played was the central and indispensable role. The legends of his bravery and prowess, and of his saving Ethiopia from the fate of the rest of Africa, allowed for him to solidify his hold on power, and gave him much in the way of leeway in actions taken. The seed had been

planted in the collective psyche of Ethiopia regarding Menelik and Adwa, but it was future leaders who would nurture this seed and grow it into a vital collective memory.

Menelik himself did not actively promote or highlight his own role in the battle. He did, however, begin to commemorate the battle by employing religious iconography in crafting a national narrative. The Battle of Adwa had fallen on the same day that Ethiopian Orthodox Christians commemorated the Patron Saint George. Menelik vowed before the battle to build a grand church dedicated to Saint George in Addis Ababa if the Ethiopians prevailed.⁵⁴ True to his word, a church was built for Saint George after the battle, and this church would be central to the narrative surrounding Menelik and Adwa.

The first commemoration of Adwa was held in this church, seven years after the battle. It was both marked as a day of thanksgiving to Saint George, and also a show of political force. Menelik had ordered that all local regional lords march sizeable armies to the capital to take part in a military parade. Their presence displayed for the nation that he possessed the power to make the nation's elites acquiesce to his demands, and that a new Ethiopian nation existed. On the scale of the celebrations, Dagne Hailegebrel recounts that there was also a grand banquet held in Saint George Cathedral in which 8,000 cattle were slaughtered, and more than 60,000 people made their way to the church to feast and pay homage to the hero of Adwa.⁵⁵ It was during this feast that Menelik announced that going forward, Adwa would be celebrated in this way every year, as both a religious observance and a day of remembrance.⁵⁶ For the remainder of his rule, the victory at

⁵⁴ “Jonas, Raymond. *The Battle of Adwa: African Victory in the Age of Empire*. Harvard University Press. Cambridge, Massachusetts. 2011 Pg. 322

⁵⁵ Hailegebrel Dagne, “The Establishment of Churches in Addis Ababa” in Ahmed Zekaria, Bahru Zewde and Taddese Beyene (eds.) *Proceedings of the International Symposium on the Centenary of Addis Ababa*, (Addis Ababa: IES, 1987) pg. 65.

the battle of Adwa was celebrated this way in Addis Ababa on March 2nd, and there were also celebrations and commemorations in many other towns, including in the town of Adwa itself. Menelik had largely succeeded in creating a growing national narrative about Adwa, the divine role of Saint George, who was increasingly being viewed as the Patron Saint of Ethiopia, and his own role, not just in the battle, but also in the establishment of a new, modern Ethiopia. His legend has, in many parts of Ethiopia, taken on an almost saintly status within the collective memory of Ethiopia. The first commemorations of Adwa were the first uses of the memories of Adwa as a state-building tool, an identity feature which could pull citizens towards an Ethiopian identity, adding a new layer to the centuries-old development process of Ethiopian national identity.

The Last Emperor, Haile Selassie I

Upon the death of Menelik, a predictable struggle for power ensued. Ethnic divisions and old rivalries were reignited, highlighting the tenuous nature of Menelik's hold on power. Though he had managed to firmly establish himself as the unchallenged monarch of Ethiopia, abetted by the growing legend surrounding his role at Adwa, ancient rivalries and disparate royal ambitions persisted. Ethiopia was ruled for a brief period by Lij Iyasu, who had been designated as the next emperor, but was never crowned. His rule lasted from 1913 to 1916, when he was deposed for a variety of reasons. The next candidate in line for the throne was a very young Lij Tafari Makonnen, who was serving at the time as the Governor of Harar. Lij is a title bestowed upon a child of

⁵⁶ Biniam Zeray, "The History of St. George Church from Its Foundation up to 1974" (BA Thesis, AAU, Department of History, 1983) pg.4

nobility, and the young Tefari Makonnen was indeed part of a royal lineage which extended back to Menelik I and included Menelik II.

Due to his youth, it was decided that he should be designated as the Regent, and that until he was experienced enough to rule the country, an experienced member of the royal family should govern on his behalf. Tefari Makonnen was elevated to the status of Ras, or “head,” and Menelik’s daughter, Zewditu, was coronated as Empress of Ethiopia in 1917, with the express understanding that Tefari would eventually be elevated to the position of Emperor.⁵⁷ Zewditu remained on the throne until her death in 1930. Ras Tefari Makonnen was then installed on the throne at his coronation on November 2nd, 1930. Upon his coronation, he chose as his coronation name Haile Selassie, which translates to “power of the trinity.” His coronation was a glitzy affair held in the Cathedral of Saint George in Addis Ababa and was attended by dignitaries and official representatives from all over the world. It was a lavish event meant to announce to the world the position which Ethiopia sought to occupy in the international community of nations, and a part of this relationship-building was the dispersal of very ornate gifts to VIP attendees.⁵⁸ Haile Selassie had already established relations with many western governments, and with his coronation, Ethiopia had arrived on the world stage. Time Magazine put him on the cover for their November 18th, 1930 issue.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Rubinkowska, Hanna. “A New Structure of Power: The Message Revealed by the Coronation of Zawditu (1917).” *Annales DEthiopie*, vol. 28, no. 1, 2013, pp. 19–44., doi:10.3406/ethio.2013.1528.

⁵⁸ “ABYSSINIA’S GUESTS RECEIVE COSTLY GIFTS; Each American Delegate Gets Token of Africa--Minister Decorated by Emperor.” *The New York Times*, The New York Times, 12 Nov. 1930, www.nytimes.com/1930/11/12/archives/abyssinias-guests-receive-costly-gifts-each-american-delegate-gets.html?sq=selassie&scp=19&st=p.

⁵⁹ “ABYSSINIA: Coronation.” *Time*, Time Inc., 3 Nov. 1930, content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,882370,00.html.

Like Menelik, Haile Selassie was a reformer intent on taking a place for Ethiopia in the modern world. He introduced a new constitution in 1931 which included a bi-cameral legislature, but also contained a clause mandating that any future succession to the throne would be limited to members of Haile Selassie's lineage.⁶⁰ The kingdom he had inherited was vast, and included many different peoples and traditions, and he found himself in the same position as Menelik regarding how to go about keeping this multi-ethnic society together and functioning as a unitary state. He smartly recognized that Adwa, and the creation and mythization of a national narrative around Adwa which would bind the various peoples to the nation, even if this remained tenuous, would have a consolidating effect on his leadership.

Political legitimacy, as always, was a concern for Haile Selassie in the first years of his rule. Connecting himself to Menelik's legacy was a strategy which would gain him legitimacy in the eyes of the people and the nobility, and ultimately strengthen his throne. To achieve this, he held his first official ceremony on the eve of his coronation. At this ceremony, he unveiled a majestic statue of Menelik II on his horse.⁶¹ The statue had been commissioned by Zewditu, Menelik's daughter and Haile Selassie's predecessor, and was constructed by a German artist. Haile Selassie's speech during the unveiling focused on Menelik's legacy as a statesman, and his success in enlarging and then uniting the nation. He chose to avoid praising Menelik's by now legendary role at Adwa, and did not, in fact, mention the battle. While he wanted the legitimacy which came with ties to Menelik, he did not want to rule in his shadow, and he also did not want his political maneuverability to be stifled by lingering enmity with Italy, who still felt a certain level of humiliation over their loss at Adwa. It was also a calculated decision for his coronation to

⁶⁰ Nahum, Fasil. *Constitution for a Nation of Nations: The Ethiopian Prospect*. Red Sea Press. 1997 pg. 22

⁶¹ Bentwich, Norman. "Ethiopia Today." *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-)*, vol. 20, no. 4, 1944, pp. 509–518. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/3017131.

be held at the Cathedral of Saint George, further signifying the importance that Menelik, and by extension, Adwa, would have in Imperial politics in Ethiopia.

During the early years of his rule, Haile Selassie's government continued commemorating the Battle of Adwa in much the same way it had been commemorated in Menelik's and Zewditu's time. It was a day of religious observance and prayer, and then feasting in the evening. Haile Selassie did make attempts to play up the role that his own father had played during the war, but Menelik remained widely regarded as the hero of the battle. The day was reserved as an unofficial national holiday, so government offices, schools, and most businesses were closed, and the local press, barely out of its infancy, covered little if anything relating to the commemorations. The memories of Adwa, however, lingered over both the Ethiopians and the Italians. Events on the horizon would urgently lead Haile Selassie to employ imagery and to tap into the collective memory of Adwa.

After the Battle of Adwa, the Italians had been allowed to keep their colony in Eritrea as a part of the peace settlement with Ethiopia. Steps had been taken to normalize relations between Ethiopia and Italy. In 1928, the two nations signed the Italo-Ethiopian Treaty of Friendship and Arbitration. The Italians, while maintaining their colony of Eritrea, had also established another colony in part of what is today Somalia. Italian Somaliland and Eritrea, geographically, were separated by Ethiopia. Italy's ambitions would once again lead to conflict.

Italian aggression began with the Walwal incident in 1934.⁶² The Italians challenged the sovereignty of Ethiopia by building a fort in the Ogaden region, well over the border. The

⁶² Spencer, John H. "The Italian-Ethiopian Dispute and the League of Nations." *The American Journal of International Law*, vol. 31, no. 4, 1937, pp. 614–641. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/2190673. Accessed 11 Mar. 2020.

Ethiopians sent troops to confront the Italians, and a skirmish ensued taking the lives of soldiers on both sides. Although only a minor skirmish, the Walwal incident, and the League of Nations's response, or lack thereof, would lead to what is now known as the Abyssinian (Ethiopian) Crisis,⁶³ and then to the second Italo-Ethiopian war. As a member of the League of Nations, the collective-security predecessor organization to the United Nations, Ethiopia protested Italy's actions during the Walwal incident.⁶⁴ The Italians were mobilizing large forces on their borders with Ethiopia, and war seemed imminent. Haile Selassie pleaded his case to the League of Nations, asking for help from other League members in preventing a full-scale Italian invasion. The League responded by imposing sanctions, but those sanctions were weak, did little to come to the defense of Ethiopia, and were ultimately ignored by the Italians. As Baer details, the sanctions did not prohibit the sale of oil, and an arms embargo which was imposed on both Italy and Ethiopia had a much greater impact on Ethiopia because Ethiopia did not produce firearms or other modern weapons.⁶⁵

Politics in Europe also shaped the response, as the rise of Germany was dictating much of the political decision-making. Britain and France were still trying to make alliances with Italy against Germany, and Ethiopia was sacrificed to secure Italy's help in allying against the Germans. On October 3rd, 1935, the Italians invaded Ethiopia again, intent this time on making Ethiopia a colony.

In the lead up to the invasion, Haile Selassie recognized that a second war with Italy was coming. This time, however, the Italians would be far more prepared, better equipped, and intent

⁶³ Parker, R. A. C. "Great Britain, France and the Ethiopian Crisis 1935-1936." *The English Historical Review*, vol. 89, no. 351, 1974, pp. 293-332. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/565844.

⁶⁴ Selassie, Haile. "Appeal to the League of Nations." *Astro*. June 1936.

⁶⁵ Baer, G "Sanctions and Security: The League of Nations and the Italian-Ethiopian War, 1935-1936." *International Organization*, 27(2). 1973 Pp. 165-179. doi:10.1017/S0020818300003441

on avenging the loss at Adwa a generation before. As the threat of invasion heightened, Haile Selassie became desperate to mobilize a fighting force capable of maintaining the independence of the country. And he needed his country behind him. Harold Marcus notes that Selassie, in a speech to Parliament in July, 1935, compared Adwa to the coming war, and that like Adwa, an army would need to be mobilized on a national level, without regard for ethnicity, religion, or even gender.⁶⁶

Newspapers and political writers also began recounting the victory at the Battle of Adwa, encouraging the Ethiopians to prepare and to stand strong. One article, published in the weekly *Birhanina Selam* newspaper, proclaimed “Italians are no different; their heart is similar; only their gun is new.”⁶⁷ With war looming and the collective memory of Adwa and the heroes emboldening the hearts of the Ethiopians, an army of 500,000 was hastily mobilized. However, Haile Selassie, at this point, was no where near as capable a statesman or diplomat as Menelik had been when he mobilized his army. His draft order called for “all men and boys able to carry a spear to go to Addis Ababa. Every married man will bring his wife to cook and wash for him. Every unmarried man will bring any unmarried woman he can find to cook and wash for him. Women with babies, the blind, and those too aged and infirm to carry a spear are excused. Anyone found at home after receiving this order will be hanged.”⁶⁸

This appeal to the nation, as Pankhurst points out, even in the shadow of Adwa, did not result in the assembly of a formidable army. Although massive, only about twenty-five percent of the army had any training, there was a shortage of firearms, and those firearms which the army did

⁶⁶ Marcus, Harold G. *Haile Sellassie I: the Formative Years, 1892-1936*. Red Sea Press. Trenton, NJ. 1998. pg. 161

⁶⁷ *Birhaninā Salām*. Vol. 11, No. 46. Addis Ababa. Yakātīt 27, 1928.

⁶⁸ "Selassie's Guard Fights on UN Side". *Eugene Register-Guard*. 2 June 1951.

possess were now largely obsolete relics left over from Menelik's era.⁶⁹ Haile Selassie's army was huge, but woefully unprepared to face off against the Italians, who had assembled their own impressively sized army. It very quickly became apparent in the early portion of the campaign that the Ethiopians would not be a match for the Italians, and that the Battle of Adwa would not be repeated.

The Italians invaded with a ruthless ferocity. Harold Marcus recounts how their forces cut through the Ethiopian lines, and advanced at will. By the spring of 1936, they had managed to arrive on the outskirts of the capital city, Addis Ababa. Realizing that the city could not be defended, it was decided that the government should be relocated to Gore, a city in the south of the country. Haile Selassie and his family departed for Djibouti by railway on May 2nd, 1935, beginning the Emperor's exile. They were taken first to Jerusalem, and then on to England, where he would remain in exile until the war's end. The decision for him to go into exile was and still is to this day point of contention. The reasoning was that he could be most effective persuading Europe to come to his country's aid, and direct appeals to the League of Nations was their best hope against Italian aggression. For many, however, especially in the shadow of Adwa, it was unconscionable that the Monarch would leave his country in a time of such great peril. On May 5th, the Italians entered Addis Ababa, and Mussolini declared Ethiopia to be an Italian province, and King Victor Emmanuel of Italy the new Emperor of Ethiopia.

The memories of Adwa loomed large for both sides in this war. For the Italians, the defeat and conquer of Ethiopia washed away the shame and humiliation which the previous generation had endured. Ridding themselves of the negative association with the Battle of Adwa appears to

⁶⁹ Pankhurst, Richard. Keir, Pethick. *A Brief Note on the Economic History of Ethiopia from 1800 to 1935*. Haile Selassie I University. Addis Ababa, 1967. pp 605-608

have been a key objective. “Adwa had become a symbol of Italian failure which had thrown a shadow over the name of Italy at home and abroad. It was essential... that Italy should cancel this memory. It was essential that Abyssinia (Ethiopia) should cease to associate the name of Adwa with Italian defeat. Adwa was not a goal but a symbol.”⁷⁰ Italian efforts to erase the memories of their defeat began in October of 1936, when Benito Mussolini ordered that the great statue of Menelik II be removed from the square where Haile Selassie had unveiled it just a few short years before. After this was completed, the square was renamed from Menelik Square to Piazza de Impero, and streets named for Menelik, other heroes of Adwa, or any symbolism of Adwa, were renamed with Italian names. The Italians were not only keen of erasing their own memories of Adwa, they also wanted to erase Adwa from the hearts and minds of the Ethiopians. Biniam Weldegebriel says of Italian intentions, “The dictator of Italy, Mussolini, was personally interested in removing from the capital all memories of Ethiopia’s independence and gave his orders accordingly.”⁷¹

Churches also found themselves targets for looting. A great many treasures, relics, and other religiously significant objects were removed from the many churches in Addis Ababa. Additionally, the huge obelisk which had stood at Gonder since the Aksumite period also plundered, taken back to Italy in pieces.⁷² The most significant action by the Italians came in 1937, when they looted and then burned the Cathedral of Saint George, and then Bahata Church, which housed the mausoleum of Menelik. To both the Ethiopians and the Italians, the destruction of these

⁷⁰ Marcus, Harold G. *Haile Sellassie I: the Formative Years, 1892-1936*. Red Sea Press. Trenton, NJ. 1998, pg.167

⁷¹ Weldegebriel, Biniam. *Memories of the Victory of Adwa: A Focus on Its Commemoration (1941-1999)*. Diss. Addis Ababa University, 2004.

⁷² Pankhurst, Richard. “Ethiopia and The Loot of the Litalian Invasion: 1935-1936.” *Présence Africaine*, vol. 72, no. 4, 1969, p. 85., doi:10.3917/presa.072.0085. Pp. 85-95.

two churches carried significant symbolism, as each was intimately linked to Menelik and the memories of Adwa.

For the Ethiopians, the conquer and occupation was a national nightmare. The army, which had grown to around 800,000 soldiers⁷³, was thoroughly defeated. They did have a bit of success in the earliest stages of the war, but the Italians were at a huge advantage due to their vastly superior weaponry, including an air force which they used liberally. While both sides did commit atrocities during the war, the Italians' use of mustard gas was an egregious violation of the Geneva Protocols. Mustard gas attacks killed thousands of Ethiopians, soldiers and civilians alike. A Soviet report on chemical weapons attacks during the war estimated that "15,000 of the 50,000 Ethiopian casualties in the war were caused by chemical weapons"⁷⁴, and this estimate only includes soldiers. The number of civilian deaths has not yet been reliably determined, but in a address to the League of Nations after the war, Haile Selassie claimed that tens of thousands of Ethiopians had been killed as a result of Italy's chemical weapons attacks.⁷⁵

The Italian occupation of Ethiopia would last for five years, ending in 1941. The Italian hold on Ethiopia had been tenuous from the beginning. An organized resistance had formed from the remnants of Haile Selassie's army, and also included many citizens. The resistance was called *Arbegnoch*, the Amharic word for patriot. Prior to his departure into exile, Haile Selassie assigned leadership positions within the ranks of the resistance and gave them orders to continue pressuring Italy wherever and however they could. While they did succeed in many respects, their harassing,

⁷³ Grip, Lina, and John Hart. "The use of chemical weapons in the 1935–36 Italo-Ethiopian War." *SIPRI Arms Control and Non-proliferation Programme*. 2009. pg 1

⁷⁴ Grip, Lina, and John Hart. "The use of chemical weapons in the 1935–36 Italo-Ethiopian War." *SIPRI Arms Control and Non-proliferation Programme* (2009): pg 2

⁷⁵ Speech by Haile Selassie to the Assembly of the League of Nations

guerilla-style tactics were not enough to challenge Italy's position. Events in Europe would eventually lead to a shift in this power dynamic.

Italy declared war on Britain and France on June 10th, 1940, becoming a belligerent in World War II. While Italy was not in a strong position relative to the other European powers involved in the war, Mussolini saw an opportunity. By this time, Germany had invaded France, and the French government had fled Paris. Mussolini believed that the war would be over quickly, and that by aligning Italy with Germany, he would be in a position of strength during the peace negotiations. In a strategy meeting with his Army's Chief of Staff, Marshal Badoglio, he said "I only need a few thousand dead so that I can sit at the peace conference as a man who has fought."⁷⁶

A second and perhaps more valuable opportunity for Mussolini was that the war raging in Europe would draw the attention of Britain away from their colonial possessions in North and East Africa, opening the door for the Italians to expand their holdings in the region. From their colony of Eritrea, the Italians launched a campaign into British Somaliland, and succeeded in taking this for themselves. Their victory, however, was short-lived. The British were unwilling to give up their colony to a much weaker Italy, even if they were mired in a war on European soil. As the tide turned in Europe, the British attacked the Italians in Somaliland and in Eritrea and did so with the support of the Ethiopian resistance fighters. The Italians were quickly flushed out of their strongholds, and just as they prepared to make their stand in Ethiopia, Haile Selassie, flanked by British and Ethiopian guards, entered Ethiopia from the west, coming in from Khartoum. News of his arrival sent shockwaves throughout the country, and the morale of the Ethiopians, which had been at an all-time low since the initiation of the occupation, improved dramatically. The Italians

⁷⁶ Badoglio, Pietro. *L'Italia Nella Seconda Guerra Mondiale [Italy in the Second World War]* Mondadori. Milan. 1946. pg. 37

were now rapidly losing control of the country. Addis Ababa fell in April 1941 to South African forces under the command of the British, and on May 5th, the exiled Emperor, Haile Selassie, triumphantly re-entered the city he loved so dearly. Italy's defeat was by now a foregone conclusion. They made their last stand in the north of Ethiopia, close to Gonder.

Post-Occupation and Post-WWII Rule

Haile Selassie now had his throne back, and Ethiopia was again an independent, sovereign nation. But there was much which needed to be done. The damage caused by the occupation was immense. Whatever Ethiopian notions of collective identity which had existed before the occupation had been severely challenged, particularly the notion that a unified Ethiopia could fend off any powerful invader, as had been the case at Adwa. The psyche of the nation had been shaken to its core. Restoring his own prestige and the honor of the citizenry would be a primary focus of the Emperor in the years directly succeeding the ousting of the Italians. In this endeavor too, Haile Selassie needed to navigate a delicate path between Ethiopia's collective memory, and his own position of leadership and royal continuity. Adwa, again, was employed as a theme meant to connect people to the state, though be it with a newly created caveat.

May 5th, 1942 marked the one-year anniversary of the end of Italian occupation. The Emperor chose this day to unveil, for the second time, the statue of Menelik which the Italians had removed. This was again a grand event attended by a great many Ethiopians, many who had travelled great distances to be there, as well as quite a few foreign dignitaries. It was a spectacular event. Newspapers had primed for the event by publishing accounts of the second victory over the Italians, along with reiterations of Adwa which drew parallels between the two victories. This

seems to have been a calculated strategy on behalf of the Emperor, placing him within the historic timeline of Ethiopian leaders, while at the same time carving out his own place. To cement this duality of legacy through imagery, he then established by law that the Adwa Victory Day (March 2nd) and the Patriots Victory Day (May 5th) both be observed as national holidays. Prior celebrations of the victory of Adwa had been observed but had not been codified by law.⁷⁷ Additionally, streets and squares which had been renamed by the Italians were then renamed to honor important Ethiopian figures of Adwa, and also Patriots of the second victory. In this way, Haile Selassie could again put his stamp on a national holiday which connected to Adwa. In the early years after the occupation, emphasis was placed on the second victory, while paying homage to Adwa.

Throughout his reign, Adwa Victory Day, as the holiday would come to be known officially, was observed in much the same way as it had been before the occupation and became a feature of the yearly calendar. The remainder of his era was a time of relative tranquility, and the Emperor was happy to have the observances of the two victories somewhat muted. It was a time of peace and prosperity for the nation, so emphatic use of Adwa as a unifying feature was not needed in large part because an acceptable level of cohesion had been achieved. Haile Selassie had realized a dream in Ethiopia which had been sought after since early times. He sat on the throne of a kingdom which, for the most part, happily and peacefully respected his rule, and he ruled over a citizenry which had achieved contentment and felt a collective pride in their nation. But of course, nothing lasts forever, and this includes the rule of kings.

⁷⁷ Fuller, Linda K. *National Days/National Ways: Historical, Political, and Religious Celebrations around the World*. Praeger Publishers, 2004. Pp. 96-98

On September 12, 1974, Emperor Haile Selassie was deposed. It was the finale to a bubbling turmoil which had been brewing for about a year prior. “Haile Selassie's troubles began in 1973 with disquiet in the countryside and in the peasant-based army over Government attempts to hush up a drought that eventually took 100,000 lives in two northern provinces. The unrest was compounded in February, 1974, when mutinies broke out in the military over low pay and a secessionist guerrilla war in Eritrea complicated the Emperor's problems.”⁷⁸ On his final day as Emperor, a group of 10 military officers representing a powerful junta which had adopted the name Derg, the Amharic word for Committee, arrived at his palace, informed him that he was being deposed, and arrested him. He would die under mysterious circumstances less than a year later, on August 27th of 1975. The Derg did attempt to claim that he died from health complications, but it is now known and accepted that he was assassinated by strangulation in the small apartment in which he was being held captive. His death marked the end of a nearly 3,000- year old dynasty and brought the imperial era of Ethiopia to a close.

For this thesis, his death also closes out the foundational era of Ethiopian nationalism and nation-building processes. The state, as it exists today, owes in large part much of what transpired up to his passing. Ethiopia, and the collective identity of its people, would not exist as it does now in the absence of this vast imperial era, and that is why so much of this thesis has been devoted to this era. The imperial era lays the foundations which the nation rests on today, and it is essential to understand this era as a part of the progression of Ethiopian nation-building and nationalism. If the Battle of Adwa has a special role in the development of Ethiopian nationalism and the construction of the state, the context is as integral as the event itself. So the thesis has arrived at

⁷⁸ Whitman, Alden. “Haile Selassie of Ethiopia Dies at 83.” *New York Times*. 28 August 1975. Pg 1
<https://www.nytimes.com/1975/08/28/archives/haile-selassie-of-ethiopia-dies-at-83-deposed-emperor-ruled-ancient.html>

this point now, with a linear progression of nation-building in line with the theories of both Reinhardt Bendix and Benedict Anderson, while also buttressed by Lisa Wedeen's theory that dramatic events have a major impacts on the shape and development of nationalism within a given nation.

The Imperial Era Synopsis

The historical background shows how, from its origins in antiquity, the Ethiopian nation has developed. In the process of nation-building, which could be said to be an on-going process in Ethiopia, the Battle of Adwa has proved to be a useful tool. Early commemorations under the eye of Menelik and then his daughter Zewditu played up the religious meanings of the victory, as well as the courage and bravery of Ethiopia's 'founding father', Menelik, and other leaders who had had significant roles in the battle. Even in a very ethnically diverse setting such as Ethiopia was at that time, Adwa provided a commonality amongst the diverse citizenry, as it became known as a collective victory against a common enemy. For the fledgling state operating in very dangerous times, Adwa provided a tent-pole of sorts, under which all of the many groups within Ethiopia could take cover from the storms and be a part of something bigger than ethnicity.

Haile Selassie also saw the value in keeping the collective memory of Adwa alive, even if he needed or wanted parts of this memory to fade. Prior to the second Italian invasion, he was careful to connect himself to the imperial legacy in ways which allow for the memory of Adwa to bind the people to the state, but in ways which also allowed for his own legacy to begin to take root. He was also trying to mend the relationship with the Italians, so he was careful not to upset their sensibilities as they had been greatly humiliated in the battle. During the occupation, his

willingness to play up the glory of Adwa, and what it meant to his people, increased dramatically. While still aware of his own legacy, he became much less hesitant to recall the collective victory which had been achieved, and to acknowledge the role of Menelik. His aim during this period was to galvanize the resistance, and to offer comfort to the citizenry, which was in a state of shock over the invasion and occupation. For Haile Selassie, it was vital that the country stay unified, even in the most harrowing of times. After the Italians were defeated for a second time, Haile Selassie was happy to let Adwa sink back into the collective memories of the people. It provided a commonality, an almost holy shrine to the nation, and for the rest of his reign, it required very little maintenance. It was, by then, a part of the bedrock upon which the nation stood.

Evidence. The Derg Era

Mengistu, The Revolution, and Terror

The military coup which had been undertaken during the popular revolution brought the Derg regime into power. The Committee, as it was known, was guided by Marxist-Leninist ideologies, and a desire to modernize Ethiopia at a much faster rate than the Imperial government was willing to do. They started out as a small group of low-level army officers who mutinied against their commanders and then rapidly gained the support of many of the army's soldiers. After seizing power in 1974, the Derg then named itself the Provisional Military Administrative Council and appointed General Aman Andom as its first Chairman and head of state. He proved to be too conservative in the eyes of more radical elements within the party, and he was removed from office and executed in November of 1974. Andom was replaced by another General, Tefari Benti. It was becoming increasingly clear, however, that one member of the party was accumulating and wielding power disproportionately to the rest of the leadership. A low-level colonel named Mengistu Haile Mariam had already risen through the ranks, and he had the backing of the army. He bided his time, and when the opportunity presented itself, he consolidated the political power of the leadership committee into one man, himself. This was done by brutal measures, including the assassination of political rivals, and by February of 1977, Col. Mengistu Haile Mariam positioned himself as the head of the government.

Mengistu Haile Mariam was the leader of Ethiopia from 1977 until 1991. During this time, he would face many challenges to his rule both internally and externally. He had embraced a Marxist/Leninist form of socialism and implemented many controversial policies in accordance to

the new political philosophy of the leadership. Among the core principles of the new Derg government was the unity of the people. The revolution which had brought Mengistu to power would also bring about radical changes to the social and economic systems within Ethiopia. However, before any policies could be implemented or enforced, Mengistu needed to tighten his grip on power and establish his authority.

Not surprisingly, there was quite a bit of internal resistance to his rule. The revolution and move towards socialism upended centuries of tradition, as well as the economic realities of the country. The Orthodox Church lost its privileged position with the state, and much of the aristocracy of the country was now threatened. Student groups also clashed with the new ideologies being imposed on the country. Among the student groups, The Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party (EPRP) stood out as a threat and serious agitator to Mengistu's government.

The EPRP had been formed in 1972, with the goal of overthrowing the monarchy and establishing Ethiopia as a democratic republic. They had initially supported Mengistu when his group succeeded in their coup but soured on the idea of installing a Marxist-style government led by Mengistu. In 1977, the Derg launched a campaign called Qey Shibir, or the Red Terror, a period of political repression noted for its extreme violence. This period, which lasted until 1978, was a battle for dominance between political parties, and the Derg was able to assert itself as the most powerful among them. The campaign carried out by the Derg was particularly brutal. Thousands lost their lives, many of them on suspicion alone that they might not fully support the government. Their bodies were ordered to be left in the streets as a visual warning to those who might oppose Mengistu's rule. He was later tried in absentia in Ethiopia on charges of genocide and related crimes for his role in the Red Terror. Relating to the trial, the Anuak Justice Council noted, "The biggest problem with prosecuting Mengistu for genocide is that his actions did not necessarily

target a particular group. They were directed against anybody who was opposing his government, and they were generally much more political than based on any ethnic targeting.”⁷⁹ The scale of human loss, in what was technically peacetime, is hard to fathom. Estimates range from 500,000 dead to upwards of 2,000,000 people having lost their lives during this campaign. Human Rights Watch said of the Red Terror, it was “one of the most systematic uses of mass murder by a state ever witnessed in Africa.”⁸⁰

Externally, challenges were also testing Mengistu’s ability to lead. He had aligned Ethiopia with the Soviet Union, making them a player in cold war politics. The Soviets were giving military assistance, along with arms, ammunition, and food aid. The Somalis, sensing an opportunity, invaded Ethiopia during Mengistu’s Red Terror, believing that Mengistu was too pre-occupied with domestic affairs to stop them from claiming a part of the Ogaden desert. They did have early successes, but the Soviets intervened on Ethiopia’s behalf, sending troops, and supplies to the front lines. With Soviet support, Ethiopia was very quickly able to beat the Somalis back, and Mengistu fully realized the value of his relationship with the Soviet Union.

In the north, both Eritrea and the Tigray people of Ethiopia were openly challenging Mengistu’s rule. Again, with Soviet support, Mengistu was able to keep these two groups in check, though he was never able to fully subdue them. By the late 1970’s, largely with Soviet backing, Mengistu was firmly in power, and had at his disposal the second largest army in Africa, and near-dictatorial powers. His fortunes, however, would change throughout the course of the next decade.

⁷⁹ *The Irony of the Anuak Massacre and Zenawi's Genocide Verdict over Mengistu*, Anuak Justice Council, 22 Dec. 2006, www.ethiomeia.com/addfile/genocide_and_meles_zenawi.html.

⁸⁰ Neuhaus, Les. “Ethiopian Dictator Sentenced to Prison” *The Associated Press*. 11 Jan. 2007

In 1984, Mengistu established a new political party as the ruling party of Ethiopia. In line with the Marxist/Leninist ideals which he followed; he named the party the Worker's Party of Ethiopia (WPE). In addition, a new constitution was adopted which essentially gave him largely unchecked powers. While he was consolidating power and aligning Ethiopia with socialist movements worldwide, a great famine struck Ethiopia, killing more than a million people in the northern provinces. The famine of 1983-85 was the worst that Ethiopia had experienced in more than 100 years, and it brought a lot of international attention to the crisis and its causes.⁸¹ Many blamed bureaucratic bungling and inefficiencies, as well as the centralized plan of the government in dealing with emergencies. Opposition to Mengistu was again growing, especially in the northern parts of the country.

In 1989, the Ethiopian government again found itself fighting secessionist movements in both Eritrea and Tigray. Two devastating defeats against the Eritrean People's Liberation Front left the military severely weakened.⁸² The Soviets, having to contend with their own concerning troubles at home, and a growing disillusionment over the future of Ethiopia, ceased to provide the aid and military assistance which had been so vital to Mengistu's regime. It was the beginning of the end for Mengistu's rule. In an attempt to save his regime, he renounced communism in 1990, and attempted to establish free markets for both domestic and international trade, although "these measures were seen as acts of desperation rather than conviction."⁸³ It was too little, too late though, and he was forced to flee the country in 1991 when the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary

⁸¹ Drèze Jean, and Amartya Kumar Sen. *The Political Economy of Hunger*. Vol. 2, Clarendon Press, 1999. Pgs. 189-213

⁸² Berhane Woldemichael. "Ethiopian Military in Disarray." *Review of African Political Economy*, no. 44, 1989, pp. 60-63. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/4005837.

⁸³ Abraham, Kinfe. *Ethiopia, from Bullets to the Ballot Box: The Bumpy Road to Democracy and the Political Economy of Transition*. Red Sea Press. Trenton, NJ 1994. Pg. 2

Democratic Front (EPRDF) advanced its troops towards Addis Ababa and surrounded the city. The EPRDF was an offshoot of the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), which had been fighting along side the Eritreans in their bid for independence. As they began to grow their base of support, they realized that a larger prize than their own independence was possible. By building up both the support of the local peoples, as well as international support for their cause, it might be possible to overthrow the government and claim leadership over the whole of Ethiopia. In the end, this is exactly what happened. When Mengistu fled to Zimbabwe with his family, he left the government and the country to fend for themselves. The EPRDF, led by Meles Zenawi, quickly moved into the capital and assumed power.

Adwa and Nation-Building Under the Derg

For the Derg regime, the Battle of Adwa represented a sort of conflict of interests. On the one hand, the revolution which brought them to power was the turning away from the past. They were critical of the imperial era, viewing it as a time of feudalism and exploitative practices towards the periphery groups, and so were keen on replacing pride in the monarchy with a collective pride in a revolutionary new society which recognized the connectedness of a worldwide worker class. Adwa, however, with its unique connotations to unity and Ethiopian pride, had to be preserved. One of the Derg's earliest actions once in power was to dissolve all public holidays except for Adwa Day and Victory Day, and then to add a third holiday which marked the deposition of the Emperor. They also renamed many of the streets, squares, hospitals, and schools, after Adwa or well-known heroes of the battle, in most cases replacing names which had imperial connections. Haileselassie I Avenue was changed to Adwa Avenue and Sahay Haileselassie Avenue (Haile

Selassie's father) was renamed after a well-known hero of Adwa, Balcha Abanafso.⁸⁴ These steps in the early days of Derg leadership were a clear attempt to harness the collective national pride in Adwa while simultaneously removing the imperial legacy connected to the battle. Aside from downplaying or denigrating the role of the Imperial government, the Derg also sought to memorialize Adwa in a secular fashion by eliminating the church's role in the celebration. Since the very first commemorations, the Cathedral of Saint George had always been the place where the commemorations had taken place. Under the Derg, commemorations, beginning in 1975, were held at Menelik Square, and no officials from the government attended the prayers at Saint George. This was a major departure from the past, and it was a clear message that the church had been dislocated from the government.⁸⁵

In the early years of the Derg regime, many changes came to Ethiopia, and it was a shocking time for Ethiopians. Institutions which had become ingrained into the national psyche had been dismantled and replaced, and opposition to this new vision for the country was being met with horrific violence. In this environment, the Derg needed something to hold the country together, and it was Adwa, or rather an interpreted view of Adwa, which would help to serve this purpose. From 1975 to 1982, commemorations were changed from somber affairs and prayer services into colorful, styled events meant to show the governments' admiration for Adwa. A wreath laying ceremony, which had formerly been something which was done at the church by a high-ranking member of the clergy, was transformed into the centerpiece of the official state commemoration, and the wreath was then laid by Mengistu himself. In addition to the wreath

⁸⁴ *Addis Zaman*. Vol. 36, No. 870. Addis Ababa. Maskaram 1, 1968 (Ethiopian Calendar)

⁸⁵ Eyayu Lulseged, "Why do the Orthodox Christians in Ethiopia Identify Their Faith with Their Nations?" in Richard Pankhrust, Ahmed Zekaria and Taddess Beyene Proceedings of the First National Conference of Ethiopian Studies, (Addis Ababa April 11-12, 1990) pg. 5

laying ceremony, gallant parades were held, which included military processions and re-enactments of the battle by the National Theater, as well as brass bands and a 21-gun salute.

The commemorations were grand affairs, where thousands turned out. At the commemoration of 1975, the *Addis Zaman* reported that 600,000 people were in attendance.⁸⁶ After the wreath laying and the parade, there would be speeches made by government officials, with the highlight being Mengistu's speech. These speeches gave the Derg the opportunity to lay out their interpreted view of Adwa, and to mobilize the people around their message and view for the country. At the time of the 1978 commemoration, the Sudanese had offered help to secessionist groups in Eritrea and Tigray. In his speech during the commemoration, Mengistu employed the imagery of Adwa to warn the people that trouble with Sudan, or other external forces, may be imminent. "Just as the broad masses of Ethiopia won the historic Victory of Adwa which heralded a ray of freedom for the whole of Africa, the time is fast approaching when this generation will be performing a startling show against the enemies of the country and its Revolution by re-enacting Adwa through the crushing blow."⁸⁷ In 1979, his speech focused on how Adwa had influenced liberation movements all over Africa, and in 1980, he extended out the pride and meaning of Adwa to a greater vision of the world, saying "The Victory of Adwa, which was a great witness to and historical proof of the fact that dictators and imperialists cannot withstand the united might of the oppressed working class, should not be regarded as a triumph for Ethiopian heroes alone... it is shared by all peace loving and militant people of the world because it demonstrated that oppressed

⁸⁶ *Addis Zaman*. Vol. 36, No. 753. Addis Ababa. Yakātīt 24, 1967 (Ethiopian Calendar)

⁸⁷ *Tomār*. Vol. 3, No. 28. Addis Ababa. Yakātīt 7, 1988 and *Tobiā*. Vol. 3, No.11. Addis Ababa. Yakātīt 7, 1988 (Ethiopian Calendar)

working peoples with lofty goals and united will are capable of making expansionists and dictators taste the bitter choice of defeat.”⁸⁸

In the 1981 address, Mengistu declared that the youth of the country bore a special responsibility to protect the sovereignty of the nation against external threats, as it had been at the Battle of Adwa.⁸⁹ Secretary General Fikrasilassie Wagdaras, in his 1982 speech, built upon Mengistu’s theme from a year earlier by declaring that the youth would have to reignite the heroism and patriotism of Adwa by uniting behind socialist patriotism. “Ours is not a tradition of enslavement, but a tradition of freedom.”⁹⁰

The Derg Era Synopsis

During the early years of the Derg regime, it is clear that they viewed Adwa as a tool which they could use to serve several purposes. The revolution and eventual coup which brought them to power drastically changed many things about Ethiopian society, and it was a shock to the national identity of the nation. The three-thousand-year-old monarchy had been replaced by a military government, which then imposed a dramatically different economic and political system on the country. These were great changes, and the new government needed to gain the confidence and acceptance of the people. While they were brutally repressive towards challengers, they, as a government, needed to establish their legitimacy, and Adwa provided the perfect tool for this task. Speeches, grand parades, and a much-heightened sense of pomp sent the message out that Ethiopia

⁸⁸ *Ethiopian Herald*. Vol. XXXIV, No. 145 Addis Ababa. 4 March 1980.

⁸⁹ *Addis Zaman*. Vol.39, No.146. Addis Ababa. Yakātit 24, 1973 (Ethiopian Calendar)

⁹⁰ *Addis Zaman*. Vol. 40, No.136. Addis Ababa Yakātit 25, 1974 (Ethiopian Calendar)

was still the Ethiopia which saved itself at Adwa, and that this new government recognized the primacy of this event in the collective memory of the people. Those memories of Adwa also provided opportunity to the Derg to discredit and denigrate the Emperor and imperial past. The early years were also marked by many threats, both externally and internally, so pronounced, over the top celebrations of Adwa were intended to mobilize the people under the new government, which was now the custodian of the Adwa legacy. It allowed the Derg to establish sides, to gauge, internally, who were their supporters and who were their detractors.

After 1982, the commemorations were scaled back quite a bit, as the need had diminished. By then, the Derg had resolved their external issues, and their internal enemies had been mostly subdued. They had managed to get an iron grip on the country and were now looking to focus their attention on building the economy. For this too, Adwa would be reinterpreted and employed. Newspapers like the *Addis Zaman* printed editorials around the theme of political freedoms gained through Adwa never being guaranteed in the absence of economic development, and that the Battle of Adwa needed to be repeated in the economic forum.⁹¹ Adwa was also used as a justification for campaigns which the Derg initiated, such as when it announced its national service campaign, requiring men of military age be trained and available for service if needed. The defense of the country was every citizen's job, and Adwa provided the perfect example.

Under the Derg regime, Adwa was recognized as a valuable tool as useable history. The battle rested in the national psyche, and the Derg were able to manipulate this and use it to achieve certain ends. Their interpretations and re-interpretations gained them a degree of legitimacy, allowed them to mobilize against threats, eased the concerns of a shaken public, and justified many

⁹¹ *Addis Zaman*. Vol. 41, No. 141. Addis Ababa. Yakātit 22, 1975 (Ethiopian Calendar)

of their actions and campaigns. It was often used as a tool of compliance, a patriotic measuring stick. By claiming the role which they did in commemorating Adwa, they put themselves in the position of carrying the legacy forward. Opposition to the government situated dissidents as opposing Ethiopia's greatest pride, their collective pride in defending their freedom.

When Mengistu Hailemariam fled Addis Ababa in 1991, he left the country without a functioning government. The forces which he fled, EPRDF fighters, arrived in Addis Ababa six days later, and they immediately set out to establish control. It was a stunning victory, and an equally stunning turn of events. A ragtag band of revolutionaries stirred on by ethno-nationalist sentiments and a sense of their own individual history had managed to build an army large enough and powerful enough to challenge and defeat the Ethiopian army, a vastly superior force, and were now in a position to claim themselves the legitimate government of Ethiopia. Among them, a leader had emerged who had shown to be as strategically genius as he was fierce and courageous. His name was Meles Zenawi, and in the months following the EPRDF's takeover, he would be installed as the President of a new interim government.

Evidence. The EPRDF Era.

Secessionist Rebellion and the Rise of Meles Zenawi

The rise of the TPLF, and Meles Zenawi, did not occur in a vacuum. They were one of many groups in Tigray and Eritrea resisting first Haile Selassie and then later Mengistu. Tigray, as noted earlier, was once the seat of the empire, and much of cultural and traditional practices and institutions on which the state was originally built on came from Tigray. Their decline over the centuries was exacerbated by neglect on the part of the Shoan/Amhara rulers, especially under Menelik. Even though the region was located in a geographically advantageous part of the country, Tigray regressed into a state of despair. Many of the peasant farmers, which was most of the Tigrayan population, lived in hopeless poverty, while famine was becoming a regular occurrence. Because Tigray had been a political rival to Menelik, and Menelik a vassal to Tigray under Emperor Yohannes, there is no doubt that the treatment they received under Menelik's rule was reflective of the political tension between the two regions. Menelik's disregard for the state of Tigray was devastating for the Tigrayan population, and they suffered greatly. Towards the end of Menelik's reign, a noted political economist, Gabrehiwet Baykedagne, remarked that "...there are hardly any Tigrayan youth left in their birthplace, Tigray. Like a swarm of bees without their queen, they are aimlessly scattered in four corners of the earth. Some people ridiculed their widespread poverty. Unfortunately, whilst other people live in tranquility, Tigray has never been free from wars, let alone outlaws and bandits."⁹²

⁹² Baykedagne, Gabrehiwet. "Emperor Menelik and Ethiopia" (Swedish Mission, Asmara, 1912) pg. 12

Conditions had not improved under Haile Selassie. Aregawi Berhe noted how famine, fighting, and disregard for the region continued to exact a heavy toll on the region. Discontent grew easily in this climate, and by the 1940s, desperation drove Tigrayans in central and south Tigray to rebel. Haile Selassie's response was harsh. He first, with the assistance of the British Royal Air Force, bombed Mekelle, the capital of Tigray. The campaign lasted for over a month, and "thousands of defenseless civilians lost their lives as a result of the aerial bombardment."⁹³ Heavy taxes were then imposed as a punishment, and many of the regional leaders were replaced with loyalists. The Tigray language was also outlawed in schools, courts, and other public forums. If Tigray had known misery before, they never knew it like this. In this moment of utter despair, calls for self-determination began to be whispered, and soon, ethno-nationalist groups were forming.

Discontent and disillusionment with the government was not only brewing in Tigray. Eritrea, prodded on by the British⁹⁴, were also clamoring for self-rule. The former colony of Italy had been occupied by the British during WWII, who then administered the country as a United Nations trust territory until 1952, when the General Assembly voted to make Eritrea a part of Ethiopia in a deal which guaranteed semi-autonomous rule. Resistance to any rule by Ethiopia quickly began, and resistance groups started to form, including the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF). This group would prove the most radical, and the most vocal in rallying the people around their ethno-nationalist, self-determination message. In 1962, Ethiopia outright annexed Eritrea,

⁹³ Berhe, Aregawi. "The Origins of the Tigray People's Liberation Front." *African Affairs*, vol. 103, no. 413, 2004, pg. 572. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/3518491.

⁹⁴ Berhe, Aregawi. "The Origins of the Tigray People's Liberation Front." *African Affairs*, vol. 103, no. 413, 2004, pg. 572. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/3518491.

removing all guarantees about semi-autonomous rule. Ethiopia was pressing its ancient claim to the region, and rebel activity exploded as a result.

By the 1960's and into the early 1970's, Tigray was ripe for rebellion. The impoverished region had been suffering for decades under Amhara rule, and its people had grown weary. The youth, many of whom had been obliged to complete their education outside the region due to a lack of adequate schools, were coming back radicalized, and desperate for change. Their neighbors, the Eritreans, had already begun their armed resistance, and the many resistance groups which had been formed began to grow more radical. Secession was being talked about and debated, with the more radical groups favoring this possibility. They were not only watching what was happening in Eritrea closely, they were also watching and learning from independence movements all over the continent.

There was a growing current which saw secession as the only alternative. In 1974, a small group of young, highly educated Tigrayans formed the Tigrayan National Organization (TNO). This group was set up as a preparatory group established to assess the situation and prepare for armed struggle. They set about raising a fighting force from the local populations, and made important contacts with the leadership of the ELF, and the more radical splinter group, the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF), both of whom were now actively engaging in a wide variety of anti-government activities, including armed clashes. Sharing a common enemy, the two groups made mutual assistance agreements, and the EPLF offered to train contingents of fighters from Tigray, and the TNO would offer whatever support it could to the EPLF's struggle. Both groups were guided by Marxist/Leninist ideology, and both were being guided by the most radical elements from each side in pushing for ethno-nationalism and secession. "Because of geographic proximity and language similarity, it was not difficult for Tigrayans to trace and contact EPLF

fighters.”⁹⁵ The first batch of fighters sent to be trained by the EPLF included a young recruit named Legesse Zenawi. He had adopted the name “Meles” to honor a Tigrayan university student named Meles Tekle, who had been executed by the Derg and had become a martyr to many of the revolutionaries. In February of 1975, the TNO quietly assembled their troops in the town of Dedit and undertook their final preparations for battle⁹⁶. At this point, in this little town, the campaign which the TNO had been preparing for would begin. To reflect this new phase in their operations, they changed their name to the Tigray People’s Liberation Front (TPLF). They were now in the fray, one part of a growing collection of groups which would wage a civil war against the Amhara dominated government. Their enemy, however, would change rather quickly. When Haile Selassie was deposed and the Derg military regime took power, it quickly became clear that their struggle for self-determination was far from over.

The revolution which resulted in Haile Selassie’s ouster and brought Mengistu to power was an anxious time for Tigray. The Derg shared similar ideological leanings with many of the resistance groups in the north, and many of the groups, including the TNO, supported the Derg against their common enemy. The highest goal for all of these groups was self-determination and an end to imperial governance in Ethiopia. To this end, the Derg received a lot of support when their coup succeeded. Where their ideologies did not align was with regard to military orientation, and the Derg controlled and indeed was the military. It quickly became clear, however, that Mengistu, with his “Ethiopia first” policy and demand for unquestioned unity, would not bring about the change they were so desperate for. “The military regime of Colonel Mengistu Haile

⁹⁵ Berhe, Aregawi. “The Origins of the Tigray People’s Liberation Front.” *African Affairs*, vol. 103, no. 413, 2004, pp. 585. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/3518491.

⁹⁶ Berhe, Aregawi. “The Origins of the Tigray People’s Liberation Front.” *African Affairs*, vol. 103, no. 413, 2004, pp. 588. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/3518491.

Mariam wasted no time in proving to be the worst enemy to Tigrayan aspirations.”⁹⁷It was a disappointing realization, but the TPLF and other groups saw no other option but to refocus their efforts on a new enemy. The TPLF would spend the next 15 years fighting against government forces in what would become an all-out civil war, only ending when Mengistu fled Addis Ababa.

During the civil war, Meles Zenawi was making a name for himself both as a fighter and a thinker. While fully committed to the ideals of the cause and to Marxism/Leninism, he was also a very pragmatic man who possessed unique talents. He was one of the earliest members of the group, and his voice carried considerable weight. He rose through the ranks of leadership until he was in the top position, becoming the chairman of the TPLF in 1989. He implemented something which was very controversial at the time. Wanting to grow his base of support, he changed the name of TPLF to the Ethiopian Peoples Revolutionary Democratic Front and invited groups and members from other ethnicities to join. This allowed for him to grow his base of support and expand his army’s capabilities, as well as legitimizing the campaign of the TPLF to a broader audience. When the newly formed EPRDF forces entered Addis Ababa in May, 1991, the remaining members of the Ethiopian government met with a US led team of negotiators who urged them to relinquish control of the government to the rebel forces, and to leave the capital. Their forces should surrender, and they were assured that they would be treated well.⁹⁸ They balked at first but realized that they had been defeated. With the city surrounded and occupied, the remaining government of Ethiopia accepted the terms of the deal, and the EPRDF officially took power.

⁹⁷ Berhe, Aregawi. “The Origins of the Tigray People's Liberation Front.” *African Affairs*, vol. 103, no. 413, 2004, pp. 575. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/3518491.

⁹⁸ Krauss, Clifford. “Ethiopian Rebels Storm the Capital and Seize Control”. *New York Times*. 28 May 1991. Pg. 1 <https://www.nytimes.com/1991/05/28/world/ethiopian-rebels-storm-the-capital-and-seize-control.html>

Meles Zenawi was named President of the new transitional government, and a new era in Ethiopia had begun.

In Eritrea, the EPLF had a similar success in their struggle. Also in 1991, they managed to capture the capital, Asmara and establish a new transitional government there as well. The era of Mengistu, and of the Derg, had come to an end. The two allies, both victorious in their separate but shared struggles for self-determination, had managed the overthrow of the government which held dominion over both. What started out as a struggle for freedom had resulted in the EPRDF seizing control of the government in Ethiopia, and the EPLF controlling the capital of Eritrea, and having an ally in power in Ethiopia. For those who opposed the Mengistu regime, it was an unbelievable success. But the cozy situation between the two would not last.

Meles Zenawi proved to be a reformer, like many of the great Ethiopian leaders of the past. Improving the economy, modernizing, and expanding human rights were focuses of his administration. He had come to power with the backing of several western countries, none more instrumental than the United States. So, it is not surprising that ties between his government and western powers strengthened. Many viewed his commitment to valuing the diversity of the country as a positive sign, and a signal that democracy had arrived in Ethiopia. His respect for individual communities was a vast departure from the previous regime.

Eritrea, which was technically still a part of Ethiopia, held a referendum in 1993 asking its citizens if they would prefer to remain a part of Ethiopia or to declare their independence. Meles, not wanting to give up his last bit of coastal access, hoped that the Eritreans would vote to remain a part of Ethiopia. The results of the referendum, however, were widely in favor of independence. Meles stuck to his ideals, and the friendship which he had with Eritrea going back his early days in the TPLF, and granted the country independence, angering many in Ethiopia. Considering the

value to Ethiopia of having a coastal port, it was remarkable that in that era he would abide by the wishes of the Eritreans and grant their independence.

In 1995, the first election was held. Meles Zenawi won in a landslide. While some opposition groups claimed voter fraud, this first election was seen internationally as legitimate, and successful. Meles took the position of Prime Minister, and almost immediately ratified a new constitution for Ethiopia. This new constitution, which declared Ethiopia a federal republic, divided the country into nine departments based on ethnicity, giving each representation in the government. It also guaranteed protections for languages and cultural practices, as well as declaring that human rights would be observed in accordance with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Relations between Ethiopia and Eritrea had begun to deteriorate as Ethiopia's relations with the United States tightened. Eritrea was wary of the power which the US possessed and did not want a similar influence over themselves. They came to mistrust the Ethiopians, viewing them as puppets of the US government. In 1998, they crossed over the border into Ethiopian territory, and occupied a small village called Badme. The village seemingly has no strategic or economic value, but Eritrea had always considered it a part of their country. The Ethiopians responded with force, kicking off the Ethiopian-Eritrean War. The war lasted two years, and both sides suffered tremendous casualties. By the time fighting stopped, Ethiopia had driven deep into Eritrean lands, occupying much of the southern part of the country. At the end of the war, the UN established the Eritrea- Ethiopia Boundary Commission to sort out the new boundaries under international law. The borders established by the commission were not very different from the pre-war borders, except that the town of Badme was given to Eritrea. Ethiopia failed to comply with this slight change to the borders and occupied the contested land up until 2018. The costs and loss of life to

both countries were terrible, and many blamed Meles for engaging in a very avoidable conflict between two of the poorest countries on earth.

Meles Zenawi would remain in office until his death in 2012, winning three more highly contested elections. His regime, which had championed ideals of inclusivity and diversity, had slowly but surely taken an autocratic turn. The Tigray ethnic group, a small group which makes up about 6% of the total population of Ethiopia, had come to dominate the government and the military command. Much of the economy was also controlled by Tigrayans, in schemes which required government loyalty by Tigrayans and non-Tigrayans alike to access functions of the economy, particularly bank loans. As their wealth and power became more obvious, tensions mounted. Protests by student groups were violently suppressed, and government censorship became rampant. Many came to view the ethnic federalism which they had implemented as a divide and conquer tactic, allowing for a small minority to accumulate vast wealth and power. To achieve this position, to go from a band of rebel fighters seeking autonomy to then seizing control of the government, required great strategic skill, which Meles certainly possessed. An invaluable tool in his arsenal, which he used liberally, was to play on the emotions surrounding Adwa. His re-imagining of the battle, and its meanings, were like a glue which held his aims together.

[The EPRDF and the Paradox of Adwa](#)

Regarding the Battle of Adwa, and its usefulness in nation-building to past regimes, the EPRDF found itself in a paradoxical dilemma. On the one hand, they were now holding the highest leadership positions within the government which they had taken by force. They were only a small minority in a country with more than 80 million people, many of whom remained loyal to

past regimes. On the other hand, they had begun as an ethnic-based movement seeking to separate itself from Ethiopia. In those early days of the TNO and then the TPLF, it could hardly have been imagined that they would succeed to the degree which they did. Instead of just securing their own independence, they had managed to take control over the whole of the country. In this situation, it could be expected that they might hold different views on the history of Ethiopia, and particularly on the Battle of Adwa.

Meles Zenawi was at the forefront of this challenge to the national narrative, including how Adwa should be taken into perspective. Historian John Young noted that when Meles was a student at Addis Ababa University, he argued that it was the Tigray people who had felt the pain of sacrifice greatest, and that without their sacrifice, the victory would not have been possible.⁹⁹ On Eritrea, Meles also argued that since they had been wrongfully sacrificed to the Italians by Menelik in exchange for support and arms, their struggle for independence was a legitimate struggle, and that Ethiopia had ceded all rights to claim Eritrea as a part of Ethiopia.¹⁰⁰

Even the duration of the existence of the country was debated. Here, there were two schools of thought. The traditional view, passed down for centuries, was that Ethiopia had a 3,000-year unbroken history of nationhood, and that Adwa was the key event which secured this dynasty in Ethiopia's moment of greatest peril. The opposing view, which many members of the TPLF/EPRDF held, was that Ethiopia, with its then present-day borders (those borders have changed very little since this time), had only existed for about 100 years. This view of Ethiopia was as a colonizing force in Africa, and that the population of Ethiopia had grown by expansion,

⁹⁹ Young, John. *Peasant Revolution in Ethiopia: The Tigray People Liberation Front (1975- 1991)*. Cambridge. Cambridge University Press. 1995 pg.46.

¹⁰⁰ Young, John. *Peasant Revolution in Ethiopia: The Tigray People Liberation Front (1975- 1991)*. Cambridge. Cambridge University Press. 1995 pg. 89.

adding millions of people to the empire who would not have been seen as Ethiopian before Menelik's time. The last leaders of what was truly Ethiopia, in this view, were Yohannes and Tewadros, both of whom controlled the north and central parts of what is now Ethiopia. The customs, practices, and norms which had come to form the foundation of a national identity were then imposed upon the conquered peoples, leaving them living as subjects under a foreign king since Menelik's expansion of the empire. While rebelling against the government, the TPLF openly despised much of the foundational elements of Ethiopian society. When they were the government, their views needed to be masked to a degree, because much of what they hated about Ethiopia was loved by the Ethiopians, the very people under their control now. For the EPRDF leadership, it was quite the juxtaposition.

Many of the country's ethnic minority groups began to take sides in this debate. Emboldened by the rhetoric of the government, many of the groups started to look at the country from their own ethnic vantage points, questioning the national narrative which they had heard their whole lives. The Oromo, in particular, felt that this was their moment to press for rights which they believed they had been denied, and to organize as an ethnic minority, even though they are the largest ethnic group in Ethiopia. Like the view that the EPRDF held, the Oromo viewed Menelik as a colonizer who had conquered them, folding them into his empire, and leaving them impoverished and scraping out an existence on the periphery of a state which did not fully accept them as citizens. There were other ethnic groups making similar claims, but the Oromo group represented a huge portion of the population and had to be accounted for. In December of 1991, an EPRDF offshoot called the Oromo People's Democratic Organization (OPDO) organized a demonstration which demanded the removal and demolition of the statue of Menelik at Menelik

Square. About 50,000 demonstrators converged on the square, veiled the statue in black sheets, and then called on the government to remove the offensive statue.

A counter demonstration had also been organized two days later, where supporters of Menelik, and the old regimes, publicly extolled the virtues of Menelik and petitioned the transitional government that the statue should not be removed. It was reported that 500,000 people were in attendance, and that their representatives met with government officials who assured them that the statue would not be demolished.¹⁰¹ While the statue would remain unharmed, it was clear that deep societal divisions were appearing. For the part of the EPRDF, their ambivalence towards the country and its history included also ambivalence about the meanings of Adwa to Ethiopia's vast and diverse citizenry. Ambivalence aside, they must have taken note of the inflamed passions surrounding Menelik and the Battle of Adwa, and this had to inform future decisions.

The dilemma which the EPRDF faced concerning how to appropriately commemorate Adwa, while maintaining their own messaging about the battle and about Ethiopia's history, was addressed in the first commemoration under their rule in 1992. Under Mengistu and the Derg, Adwa Day had been celebrated as a grand affair. Especially in the early years, the Derg were highly public about the meanings which they assigned to the battle. As noted, a regular feature of the day's events were speeches which allowed for Derg leaders to interpret those meanings in ways which were useful to them. The EPRDF, and Meles, took a very different approach. While they were more than willing to let the people celebrate, and even continued with some of the traditions of Adwa Day, they did not actively take part in those celebrations. Their messaging was in their ambivalence and lack of public spectacle around the event. While Mengistu had made himself the

¹⁰¹ *Addis Zaman*. Vol. 50, No. 192. Addis Ababa. Tähsās ,15 1984. (Ethiopian Calendar)

centerpiece of the commemorations, Meles and other EPRDF leaders stayed out of the public celebrations and did not have official roles in the events. Their messaging came through actions aimed at undermining the collective meanings associated with Adwa. Subtle changes occurred, such as the 21-gun salute at the dawn of Adwa Day, a tradition which had been continued since the time of Menelik, was reduced to a 12-gun salute.¹⁰² Additionally, prior to the celebration, Meles had remarked that the Ethiopian flag was a relic of the past, and a representation of a colonizing state. On the day of the commemoration, hardly any Ethiopian flags were waved by the people in attendance, which was another break with tradition.¹⁰³

The commemoration which took place in 1996 was the one-hundred-year anniversary of Adwa. Because of the magnitude, and not wanting to miss the opportunity to further their messaging about Adwa, the EPRDF got involved in the planning process of the commemoration. They set up three separate committees tasked with designing the events for the day. One of the groups was a Tigray-oriented group, while the other two were ethnically diverse, and based in Addis Ababa. This arrangement, intentional or not, produced mixed messaging which led to disputes and conflict. The Tigrayan group proposed that the official ceremony should take place in the town of Adwa, in the Tigray region. The other two groups were appalled by this proposition. The commemoration had always taken place in Addis Ababa, and Addis Ababa was Menelik's capital. To hold the event elsewhere undermined Menelik's role in the collective mindset of the country.

Many in Addis Ababa viewed this as an attack against their traditional values, and against their Ethiopian identities. What the other two groups wanted to focus on was the meaning of unity

¹⁰² *Addis Zaman*. Vol. 56, No.253. Addis Ababa. Yakātit 24, 1984. (Ethiopian Calendar)

¹⁰³ *Addis Zaman*. Vol. 56, No.253. Addis Ababa. Yakātit 24, 1984. (Ethiopian Calendar)

in the story of Adwa. They wanted to move away from the canonization of military leaders involved in the battle and focus on the people who collectively came together in the nations' greatest time of need. Finally, the three committees agreed to hold the commemoration in both places, but that the official ceremony would be held in Addis Ababa. However, it was also agreed upon, and exuberantly accepted by the EPRDF, that the wreath laying ceremony should not be done in front of Menelik's statue at Menelik Square. Instead, a new park was built called the Adwa Africa Victory Park, where the ceremony would be moved to. This decision was a compromise meant to appease both sides. Those who viewed Menelik as a hero and the father of modern Ethiopia would be happy because the ceremony would still take place in Menelik's capital, in much the same way as it had always been done. For those who saw Menelik as a colonizer and an oppressor, it was a victory of sorts to have the ceremony moved away from the place where Menelik was honored, undermining his role in the battle, the commemoration, and Ethiopia's history. It was exactly the type of under the radar diplomacy which Meles became famous for. In a remark made during a speech about the Adwa commemoration, Meles said "Although the expansionist campaigns carried out in our midst by Emperor Menelik, which resulted in the suppression and annihilation of the various peoples, not to mention the spread of national oppression and humiliation, was the identifying feature of the Emperor's rule, the role he played in organizing and leading the people in the defensive war against the invading Italian army that cannot be left unmentioned."¹⁰⁴This quote perfectly crystalizes the disparity in viewpoints about Menelik and Adwa, as well as Meles' situation as the Prime Minister of the country.

Throughout the remainder of Meles' rule, the commemorations would be held in this fashion. Meles was highly intelligent, and he knew that Adwa was something which most

¹⁰⁴ *Addis Zaman*. Vol.55, No 262. Addis Ababa. Yakātit 23, 1988 (Ethiopian Calendar)

Ethiopians held a tremendous pride in, even if he did not share this view. His technique was subtlety, messaging without overt gestures or speeches. He was happy to let others say what he wanted to say but could not because he was the leader of the country of which he was so critical. It has even been observed that he would not say the name 'Ethiopia' in public, preferring to refer to Ethiopia as "this country" when speaking of her. As Weldegebrel notes, he made no bones about his disdain for the country's history, even if that history played a major role in the creation of a national identity.¹⁰⁵ For most of his time in office, with the exception of the one-hundred-year anniversary, the commemorations were mostly undertaken by citizens.

Meles knew that it was important to the people, even if he himself did not care to take part. In the environment which he created with his "ethnicity first" leadership style, the commemorations would, in the later years of his time in office, turn very political, with various ethnic groups choosing to use the commemoration ceremony as an opportunity to demonstrate. This was especially the case in his last years, as Oromo groups began to organize huge protests against the government. When Meles Zenawi died on August 21st, 2012¹⁰⁶, Ethiopia found itself in a strange position. Under Meles, Ethiopia had developed into one of the fastest growing economies in the world and was being heralded as a success story in Africa. However, at the same time, the promises of semi-autonomous governance and respect for Ethiopia's diversity had not

¹⁰⁵ Weldegebrel, Biniam. *Memories of the Victory of Adwa: A Focus on Its Commemoration (1941-1999)*. Diss. Addis Ababa University, 2004.

¹⁰⁶ Copnall, James. "Ethiopian PM Meles Zenawi Dies after Illness." *BBC News*, BBC, 21 Aug. 2012, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-19328356>.

been fulfilled. Huge protests were happening, and harsh government responses, as well as vicious suppression of the press, led many to question his record on human rights.¹⁰⁷

Meles' leadership position was filled by Deputy Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn, a man whom Meles had personally groomed for the position. Desalegn was a distinguished member of the EPRDF, and a career politician who had been closely aligned with Meles throughout his tenure, and a man that Meles trusted deeply to carry on his vision for the country. He would not, however, prove to be as shrewd as his mentor. The unrest in the country was continuing to grow as ethnic-based groups ramped up their protest activities. In an effort to quell the burgeoning protests, Desalegn stepped down from office in April of 2018, and was replaced by Dr. Abiy Ahmed, who is now the current Prime Minister.

The EPRDF Era Synopsis

The EPRDF swept into Addis Ababa in 1991, taking control over a government with which they had initially only sought independence from. It was a success of epic proportions. But once they found themselves in the seat of power, they were faced with a peculiar dilemma. How do you establish legitimacy as a government over a country whose cultural bedrock you despise? As a student, Meles Zenawi sharpened his radical ideology, and as a TPLF fighter, he took up arms against the Ethiopian government. When the rebellion succeeded in toppling the Derg government, Meles Zenawi would take those experiences and ideologies with him to the office. The conflict which he felt over his new position and the expectations of the people was enormous. Adwa, and

¹⁰⁷ United Nations. "Suppressing Dissent: Human Rights Abuses and Political Repression in Ethiopia's Oromia Region." *Refworld*, <https://www.refworld.org/docid/42c3bd090.html>.

the national commemoration, encapsulated this conflict. Above all else, Meles was a pragmatic man, and he realized that subtlety was his best approach. Under Zenawi, the EPRDF quietly changed details of the events, and dramatically pulled back the official presence at the commemorations. With the exception of the 100 year anniversary commemoration, the events celebrating Adwa were left to be conducted by private groups and the church, with very little involvement from the government. This was their approach, to relay messaging through action or non-action. Their disdain was not a secret, and they knew that their actions would be observed and scrutinized. For the sitting government to take such an ambivalent posture towards the national legacy of Adwa was indeed sharp signaling.

Meles Zenawi's time in office has been both praised and criticized. To some, he was a champion of human rights and the rights of the oppressed. To others, he injected poison into the veins of the country with his brand of ethnic federalism. Either way, his time was obviously a time when the societal fissures which had always existed cracked open, threatening both the historic nation of Ethiopia, and the modern nation-state of Ethiopia. He was clearly conflicted about Ethiopia's past, and what that past meant to the people living in that country today. He must have been utterly astounded on the day that he realized that he now sat atop the government which he spent most of his youth fighting against. It's hard to tell what his true feelings about Ethiopia were, but his usage of Adwa as a nation-building tool gives clues. While his methods were very different than his predecessors, it is certain that messaging about Adwa was employed to advance his vision and legitimate his rule, just like his predecessors had done.

Conclusions

In the field of research on nationalism and nation-building, Ethiopia represents a unique and valuable case study. It is a country which is paradoxically both ancient and relatively young, and it is in this paradox that the country's nationalist sentiment can be found. The evolution of nationalism there follows the evolution of the nation, from its earliest origins up to the present day.

The argument that I am making is two-fold. Firstly, the nature of how Ethiopia has been cobbled together by conquest over the years, joining distinct groups together under a single flag, has created a society with deep social divisions among the people. This situation has been exasperated by the fact that citizenship and the rights of Ethiopian citizens have not always been extended to the same degree to all of its citizens. Ethnic loyalties, historically, have taken precedence over loyalties to the state. What Ethiopia needed, and found in Adwa, was an event of national significance which would collectively pull the population towards the state. The Battle of Adwa has served the Ethiopian state as an essential tool in establishing and maintaining a collective identity among the multi-ethnic population, and has since been further used by administrations to advance their agendas, control dissent, rally supporters, and reimagine the past. It has become a piece of living history, a malleable part of the collective psyche of the nation. Above all else though, the Battle of Adwa has provided a source of cohesion to the state, an integral component of being 'Ethiopian' which has rested above ethnicity for the most part.

The second part of my argument is that resistance to the national government, in which ever form the government may have had, has always existed in varying degrees in Ethiopia. The Battle of Adwa has never had harmonious meanings to all of Ethiopia's peoples. Menelik II succeeded in bringing all of Ethiopia, including the lands and peoples which he conquered, under

the command of a central authority, and this massive consolidation and concentration of power could only have occurred with broad support. After the victory at the Battle of Adwa, Menelik had the support of much of the nobility and the clergy as his legend grew. The national narrative which emerged had Menelik as the hero who saved Ethiopia from European colonial domination. For the periphery groups, like the Oromos or the various tribes in the south of Ethiopia, this era was a nightmare which saw them lose not only land and wealth, but also their own identities, cultural practices, and autonomy. To these groups, who saw Menelik and his Ethiopian government themselves as colonizers, resentment and resistance were also attached meaning to the Battle of Adwa. While all of the periphery groups sent soldiers to answer Menelik's call to arms, the fruits of victory were never distributed equitably, leaving many to question the value of Ethiopian citizenship.

The development of nationalism in Ethiopia is a complex history which seemingly follows the evolutionary development of the country. As a distinct nation of people, 'Ethiopia' has existed for thousands of years. For this thesis, I chose the Kingdom of D'mt as a starting point for two reasons. The story of the Queen of Sheba comes from this era, as does the development of the Ge'ez language. Fact or fable, the story of the Queen of Sheba is the genesis of the Solomonic Dynasty in Ethiopia, and this era, the Imperial Era, is a cornerstone of Ethiopia as a nation and a nation-state. The Ge'ez language, which is no longer a spoke language, is still used as the liturgical language of the Orthodox Church, and it is also the language from which most languages spoken in Ethiopia today have derived from. In examining the development of nationalism, these are immeasurable contributions.

The evolution of the nation then continued as the Aksum Empire emerged. It was during this era that the foundations for the nation of Ethiopia were solidified. Aksum grew into a mighty

kingdom, developing trade routes which stretched from Rome to India, and occupying vast territories around the Red Sea. They recognized themselves as a nation, and took steps to declare that, such as coinage and the use of the term 'Ethiopian' to describe the inhabitants of Aksum. Perhaps most important to the development of Ethiopian nationalism during this era was the conversion of the Empire to Christianity. It would be difficult to overstate the significance of this action to the collective psyche of the nation, even to those who follow other religions. Life in Ethiopia has revolved around the religious calendar for centuries, and the Orthodox Church's centuries-long relationship with the state has established the Church as a pillar of society, for followers and non-followers alike. Aksum stood for close to 1,000 years as a nation, developing cultural practices, language traditions, religious practices, political systems, and phenotypic traits. At its height, it is clear that Aksum saw itself as a distinct nation, and that other nations outside its borders also viewed Aksum as that. Much of what the Ethiopian nation and state would be built upon was established during the Aksumite period.

The rise of Tewadros, in 1855, marked the starting point for Ethiopia's gradual transition towards modernity. Under his reign, the first steps were taken to unite the provinces under a central authority, bringing an end to a chaotic era of competing kingdoms. While he ultimately did not succeed in bringing the whole of the country under his power, he did succeed in bringing this vision for a modern government to Ethiopia. His successors, Yohannes and then Menelik, would bring this vision to bear, while at the same time altering the essential nature of Ethiopia, and its future. This is especially true with regards to Menelik, whose expansion of the Shoan Empire had begun many years before he was crowned Emperor. This massive expansion of Shoa made Menelik's kingdom wealthy and powerful, and positioned Menelik as a key political figure of the era. When Yohannes was killed in battle, Menelik saw his opportunity.

Menelik was coronated Emperor in 1889, beginning an era which would forever change the notion of nationalism in Ethiopia. Menelik had brought with him into the Ethiopian Empire the conquered peoples from his expansions, and his relations with Italy had led to the Italians establishing a colony on the coast of the Red Sea. These two actions have impacted debate on Ethiopian nationalism since then. By the time the Battle of Adwa occurred in 1896, Menelik was already well under way in his plan to consolidate all power and resources to his new capital, Addis Ababa. After the victory, nothing stood in his way. All opposition had been silenced, guarded by a façade of patriotism and a growing legend about Menelik's role in saving the country from the fate of the rest of Africa. It was in this environment that another phenomenon appeared which challenged the assumptions of a historical Ethiopian nation. Shoa was a kingdom located far south of the historical territory of Ethiopia. Up until Menelik, the Ethiopian Empire occupied lands in the north of the country and had its capital in Gondar. Shifting the capital south to Shoa was a major change in and of itself, but there also began to be a shift in the ethnic makeup of the government. Historically, Ethiopia had been ruled by Tigrayans, with the Amharas being the dominant minority group. Under Menelik, the government saw a shift towards an Amhara-centric system, spreading Amhara cultures and customs to other regions, and presenting this as the true culture of Ethiopia.

After the Battle of Adwa, Menelik enjoyed an almost God-like position. He was being extolled as the savior of the nation, and efforts were underway to commemorate his role in the battle. As a master strategist, Menelik seems to have been more than happy to let others proclaim his greatness, preferring for himself a humbler, more pious remembrance. While he was still alive, Adwa was commemorated as a religious thanksgiving and feast, and these were somber events. Although Menelik did not miss his chance to flex his political muscles a bit during these

commemorations, but his true aims were clear. Right from the outset, Menelik wanted the commemorations of Adwa to highlight the unity of the country in its darkest time, and to lay the groundwork for an Ethiopian identity which would supersede ethnic or regional identities. It was the first uses of the memories of Adwa as a nation-building tool, and the earliest origins of a national narrative surrounding the battle. When he died, his daughter, Zewditu, who served as a regent until her death in 1930, continued commemorating Adwa in much the same way as her father had done. It was during the next Emperor's reign, that of Haile Selassie, that the use of Adwa as a tool for nation-building and crisis management would be first employed strategically.

From the beginning of his reign, Haile Selassie understood the importance of Adwa, and Menelik, to the people of Ethiopia. He chose to have his coronation held at the Cathedral of Saint George, and his very first event as the Emperor was a grand unveiling of a commissioned statue of Menelik. These two decisions highlight how important Adwa was to the people, and that Haile Selassie understood that being connected to that legacy would do much to legitimize his new position. He was conflicted, however, and did not intend to rule in the shadow of Menelik forever. In his speeches made yearly during the commemoration, he praised Menelik often for all he had done for the country, but rarely praised him for his role at Adwa. It was only after Ethiopia had been occupied by the Italians that Haile Selassie began to really call on the collective memories of Adwa to rally support and boost morale. During this time, he liberally used imagery of Adwa in his addresses to the nation. This usage continued right through to the end of the occupation and the years following. Adwa was a theme employed over and over during the recovery years, but it began to fade as the country stabilized. Throughout the remainder of his reign, Adwa was marked yearly, as a national holiday, but the need to use Adwa as a tool of nation-building had subsided.

The nation, for the most part, was functioning cohesively, the economy was good, and the people were content.

Colonel Mengistu Hailemariam's Derg regime also had to contend with a conflicted view of Adwa. By the time they took power in 1974, Adwa was an integral part of the national narrative. It was the connective tissue of the nation, and it belonged to the people. Mengistu knew that, and he believed fully in the nationalist sentiment surrounding Adwa. He just wanted to remove the imperial connections to the narrative. The Derg, after the Red Terror, needed a way beyond horrific violence to instill unity and loyalty to the state. Ethiopians were again in a state of shock as this Marxist regime replaced so many foundational elements of Ethiopian society. And again, Adwa would serve that purpose beautifully. Commemorations were transformed from somber, religious affairs into glitzy, stylized events meant to play up the patriotism of the battle. Imperial and religious aspects were erased from the celebrations, and Mengistu and other leaders took center stage. In this role, Derg officials, including Mengistu, were able to employ Adwa as a means to lay out new policies, and as a way of justifying unpopular policies. Speeches by Derg officials at the commemorations became very similar to US Presidents' State of the Union Addresses, where officials would speak about the successes and challenges of the past year, and lay out agendas for the coming year. As these speeches were given on the day commemorating Adwa, they almost always revolved around some theme relating to Adwa. The victory at the Battle of Adwa was the nations' greatest pride, and its' greatest collective memory. By taking such a central role for itself, the Derg effectively attached itself to the memory of the battle in such a way that they were inseparable. Those who loved Ethiopia, those who felt incredible pride in the victory at Adwa, also tended to feel a loyalty to the state. The Derg had succeeded in hijacking this collective memory and attaching themselves to it. In terms of nation-building, it was strategically genius.

As head of the EPRDF government, Meles Zenawi's political ideologies were a vast departure from the Derg government. Having assumed power after forcing Mengistu out, they then had to reckon with the extreme disparity in historical viewpoints of the nation. Much of what the historical nation of Ethiopia was built upon was despised by the new government, and instilling a new vision of the country would be a costly and time-consuming task. Their greatest asset towards this end was using and re-framing the Battle of Adwa. Their style in employing Adwa as a nation-building tool was in great contrast to previous regimes. Where Mengistu had transformed the commemorations into spectacular affairs, the EPRDF, at Zenawi's direction, used a much more subtle approach to get its message out. Changes to the official programs, the withdraw of government officials, and sly challenges to the national narrative surrounding Adwa were primary tactics. The complexity of their usage of Adwa was unmatched. While acknowledging the collective importance of Adwa to the various peoples of Ethiopia, they were simultaneously using Adwa to de-construct the historic narrative around Adwa, and the country itself. And in doing so, the societal fissures which had always existed below the surface exploded. It has been the unravelling of the dream of a strong, unified Ethiopia started by Tewadros and completed by Menelik. Ethnicity as an identity is rapidly replacing a national, 'Ethiopian' identity. While previous regimes had used Adwa as a nation-building tool to unite the country under their leadership, Meles Zenawi and the EPRDF insidiously used Adwa as a cudgel against the country, and against the collective pride in their history.

As a tool of nation-building, the Battle of Adwa has proved invaluable to the ruling governments since the battle. Each government recognized that Adwa, as a collective, living memory, is a direct link to the hearts and minds of the people. Adwa exists in the soul of Ethiopia, it is an elemental core of Ethiopian nationalism. And as such, it has been a tool used both to unite

and divide, and it has carried quite varied ideologies on its back. In the broader context of nationalism and nation-building, the case of Ethiopia and Adwa adds an interesting caveat to the field of study. As shown in the evidence section, the nation of Ethiopia, and its corresponding nationalism, have developed over thousands of years. The processes which have led to the development of this distinct nation have unfolded in a linear fashion, as both Reinhardt Bendix and Benedict Anderson proposed in their works. However, and closer to what Lisa Wedeen asserts, dramatic events can have major impacts of the processes of the development of nationalism. What this thesis adds to the study is the idea that an event of major impact and significance to a developing nation can be used as a tool in nation-building over and over again. As the Ethiopian case shows, an event like Adwa where collective pride can be established can provide a magnetic-like pull mechanism to a nation. It is not just a reaction to an event by the people, but rather the willful use of that event to coerce behaviors or loyalty. Identities are complex, and as a ruling entity, having some ability to promote a collective identity to its citizenry can be very useful, as has been the case with Ethiopia

Epilogue

For Ethiopia in 2020, the conflicts facing the country beg the question, is Adwa, and even the nation itself, history, or is it a vital part of the future. The current Prime Minister, Dr. Abiy Ahmed, must grapple with this question. While his leadership brought a wave of optimism initially, the deep divisions, stoked by three decades of EPRDF leadership, have eroded that optimism. Ethno-nationalist demonstrations and demands are a common occurrence. Ethnic violence has raged, and the number in Internally Displaced Peoples has swelled to more than 2 million in 2019.¹⁰⁸ For a great many in Ethiopia, ethnicity has replaced nationality. The situation looks bleak.

It is not all gloom and doom, though. There have been some very positive developments under Dr. Abiy. For his work on ending the decades-old hostilities with Eritrea, he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2019. And in the face of virulent opposition, he has stayed true to his ideals of unity and Ethiopian nationalism. He describes his political philosophy as ‘medemer,’ the Amharic word meaning addition or to come together.¹⁰⁹ This philosophy which guides him values unity and togetherness over ethnic identities, but seeks to do so in a way which respects and promotes diversity. With this as his guiding principle, Dr. Abiy has shown his commitment to encouraging unity over ethnicity. He has stressed this in many of his speeches, and in a shocking move, he dissolved the EPRDF party and created a broad-based body for his new party, the Prosperity Party.¹¹⁰ Just as past leaders had found, Dr. Abiy is facing harsh opposition to his new

¹⁰⁸ “How Ethiopia Is Dealing with Unprecedented IDP Crisis.” *Addis Standard*. July 15, 2019. <http://addisstandard.com/feature-how-ethiopia-is-dealing-with-unprecedented-idp-crisis/>

¹⁰⁹ “Ethiopia's Abiy Ahmed: Inside the Mind of This Year's Nobel Peace Prize Winner.” *BBC News*, BBC, 10 Dec. 2019, www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-50690548.

¹¹⁰ Gebreluel, Goitom. “Analysis | Ethiopia's Prime Minister Wants to Change the Ruling Coalition. Who's Getting Left out?” *The Washington Post*, WP Company, 23 Dec. 2019, www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2019/12/23/ethiopias-president-wants-change-ruling-coalition-whos-getting-left-out/.

vision from for the nation. It is hard to foresee what Ethiopia's future might look like, but ethnicity, identity, and debates about Ethiopia's history will certainly play an instrumental role. If Dr. Abiy is successful in his quest to minimize the relevance of ethnicity in Ethiopia, it will be a victory for the people of Ethiopia, and an awakening of Adwa. If he fails, it may very well lead to the disintegration of the nation as it stands today. My hope is that Dr. Abiy's message of medemer will be the Adwa of the next generation.

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